

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVE INQUIRY: ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHER IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

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Abstract

This study uses teacher identity as an analytic lens to explore how post-graduate English teacher professional identity developed during the learning of English (from first encounter to the post-graduate program) and to examine what factors promote the development of teacher identity during the learning of English. Guided by the teacher's personal interpretative framework Kelchtermans (1993) and utilizing a narrative inquiry research design, this study employed interviews to elicit data from two post graduate students of English education program in Indonesia. The findings revealed that the student-teacher identity was constructed through multiple dimensions, which changed at different points in time. It include motivations, self-image, self-esteem, job motivation, task perception and future perspective which resulted in the change of subjective educational theory (from simplistic to real). The development of teacher identity is also affected by the significant other such as from teacher educators and teacher education programs (internship, and subject matter). Besides, the cultural and psychological aspects were also associated.

Keywords: *narrative inquiry, teacher identity, English language teaching*

Sari

Penelitian ini menggunakan identitas guru sebagai kerangka analisis untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana identitas profesional guru bahasa Inggris pascasarjana berkembang selama proses pembelajaran bahasa Inggris (dari pertemuan pertama hingga program pascasarjana) dan untuk mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor yang mempromosikan perkembangan identitas guru selama proses pembelajaran bahasa Inggris. Dipandu oleh kerangka interpretatif pribadi guru Kelchtermans (1993) dan menggunakan desain penelitian naratif, penelitian ini menggunakan wawancara untuk mengumpulkan data dari dua mahasiswa program pendidikan bahasa Inggris pascasarjana di Indonesia. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa identitas guru-siswa dibangun melalui dimensi-dimensi yang beragam, yang berubah pada titik-titik waktu yang berbeda. Dimensi-dimensi tersebut meliputi motivasi, citra diri, harga diri, motivasi kerja, persepsi tugas, dan perspektif masa depan, yang mengakibatkan perubahan teori pendidikan subjektif (dari sederhana menjadi nyata). Pengembangan identitas guru juga dipengaruhi oleh pihak lain yang signifikan, seperti pendidik guru dan program

pendidikan guru (magang, dan materi pelajaran). Selain itu, aspek budaya dan psikologis juga terkait.

Kata kunci: *penelitian naratif, identitas guru, pengajaran bahasa Inggris*

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Introduction

Teacher identity has recently become an analytic lens for studying teacher professional development and the process of learning to become a teacher (Anspal, Eisenschmidt, and Löfström 2012; Hong 2017; Lamote and Engels 2010; Lee and Schallert 2016). It is believed that teacher identity development can be developed through teacher education. Previous researchers have attempted to investigate teacher identity development in teacher education (Anspal, Eisenschmidt, and Löfström 2012; Hong et al. 2017; Lamote and Engels 2010; Lee and Schallert 2016). Even though these studies used research methodology differently, they pointed out consistent results showing that teacher identity has shifted during teacher education experience. For example, through a large-scale survey study, Lamote and Engels (2010) pointed out that the experiences in teacher education changed four aspects of teacher identity: commitment to teaching, professional orientation, task orientation, and self-efficacy. Lee and Schallert (2016) found that the conception of the teaching profession has changed over time. In the analysis of students' written narratives, Anspal, Eisenschmidt, and Löfström (2012) pointed out that student teachers go through three stages during teacher education: idealism (first year), reality (second and third years), and consolidation (fourth and fifth years). The first-year students typically have an idealized meaning of being a teacher. The second-year and third-year students shift to focus on acquiring knowledge. The fourth-year and fifth-year students are in the process of consolidating their idealized sense of teachers into reality. Hong et al., (2017) conducted a longitudinal study and showed that teacher identity changed, either slightly or radically, during the course of this study.

Besides teacher education, the social factor is also attributed to the development of teacher identity. It includes the significant other (Daud, 2021). It is supported by

Motallebzadeh & Kazemi (2018) that Teacher professional identity is defined as a feeling of self-derived from a variety of experiences, education, environment, and personal qualities. Prior researchers (Mingyue (Michelle) and Benson 2015; Gholami 2021; Yazan 2017) have attempted to trace the development of teacher identity to the specific aspects of teacher education. For example, Mingyue (Michelle) and Benson (2015) pointed out that course materials, interpersonal communication, and teaching practicum are the aspects of teacher education that promote the development of teacher identity. Yazan (2017) added that online and face-to-face discussions, assignments, activities, and interaction with teacher educators promote the development of teacher identity. Gholami et al. (2021), the study found that the teaching practicum changes the teacher identity from an ambiguous to an emancipating epistemic orientation.

Although research frameworks vary from study to study, there are several common and recurring features of teacher identity development, including first, identity is neither solely determined by the internal and psychological process nor entirely controlled by social and cultural context. Identity is something established and maintained—teacher identity development; dialogical self-theory, pre-service, and in-service teacher training; a longitudinal study. Through the interaction between contextual factors and individual teachers' inner landscape, and second, identity is not fixed or static, rather identity changes and develops through the interpretation and re-interpretation of social interactions, which evolve over time. Therefore this study aims to investigate the construction of teacher identity that combines internal and social interaction by addressing the following research questions “How is the student-teacher identity constructed during the learning of English?” and “What factors do contribute to the teacher identity development during the learning of English?”

Methods

Research Design

This paper focuses on answering two questions: How has English learning shaped the teacher identity of two Indonesian postgraduate students of English? This paper was conducted using the narrative inquiry method under the qualitative research paradigm. Connelly and Clandinin first introduced this qualitative research method (1990), then was further developed by Clandinin and Huber (2010). The narrative

research design focuses on the narrative of the life of an individual. The basic principle of narrative inquiry is that humans are storytelling organisms individually or socially living within their own stories. Therefore, according to Connelly & Clandinin (1990), the study of narrative is a study on how humans drive their lives in the world. In educational research, this general concept is refined into the view that education and academic research construct and reconstruct stories from one individual and a group of people socially. Thus, learners, teachers, and researchers are storytellers and characters in their accounts or tell other people's stories.

Research Participants

The participants were postgraduate teachers in an English major who were purposefully selected. The criteria to choose the participants were those who maximized an understanding of teacher identity development, who was easy to get to, amenable to this inquiry, and who were willing to participate (Stake 1995). In addition, two participants were selected that comes from different reputable universities in Indonesia.

Data Collection Technique

I adopted a qualitative approach to research in conducting the study. As a methodological tool, it employs narrative inquiry (see Clandinin & Connelly, 2012). The data from this study is taken from the collection of personal narratives. These autobiographical narratives were constructed based on the teacher's interpretative framework (Kelchtermans 1993). The framework addressed questions focused on reasons for entering teacher education, attitudes toward the teaching profession, self-concept as a teacher, and activities participated in throughout teacher education. These points revolved around our significant moments as we interacted with English in shaping our teachers' identity.

Data Analysis Technique

The data analysis was performed by using an iterative process, alternating between reading the transcripts, coding, categorizing codes into themes, and consulting the themes with existing literature (Tracy 2013). First, the data were analyzed horizontally by coding the data through reading and rereading the autobiographical narrative of two postgraduates students. After that, the data were analyzed vertically; the codes from individual students were categorized into themes and later compared and

contrasted across each year. Then, the data were analyzed retrospectively; the themes from each year were compared across the other years with attempts to identify the changes in teacher identity development. When the changes in teacher identity development were found, attempts were made to trace the changes with the features of teacher education. Additionally, the emergent themes, across individuals and the time, were later consulted with the teacher's personal interpretative framework (Kelchtermans 1993).

Results and Discussion

Motivations to enter teacher education: The role of significant other

Prior to entering teacher education, it was found that one student expressed a strong passion to become a teacher, while others negotiated their self-interest with reasons that English major gives the students dual benefit. Two frequent themes emerge from the narrative: the love of English and the dual benefits of majoring in English.

One theme that emerges from the narrative is the love of English. The fact that both students loved studying English when they were in high school drove them to study teacher education. The underlying reasons for the love of English were that they enjoyed learning English, the influence of the western culture, the will be like the native speaker, and had inspirational English teachers.

"Even though I did not understand English, I was happy to hear the foreigners' odd-words and unique language. Suddenly I wondered how cool it would be if I could speak English. The desire to speak English got stronger when the foreigner greeted us in English. Neither of us could answer it. We just smiled and did not know what to say. However, after meeting these foreigners, I dreamed of how cool I would be to speak English."

The narrative from Ilma shows that the motivations being as close to the native speakers by meeting the foreigner have influenced her to be an English teacher. The same theme emerges from Weny's narrative, which emphasizes the influence of western culture and the attractive teacher that drives her to be an English teacher.

"I love English, the western culture such as movie and music has a big influence on my interest in learning English. I thought that everything that comes from the

western especially from those English-speaking countries is a good thing. So that learning its language is important for me. In addition, my English teacher was attractive and gave assignments in every meeting in secondary school. As a result, it forces me to learn more English in a week rather than the other subjects."

Ilma's meeting with the foreigners, Weny's influence on the western culture, and her English teacher, although brief, might be categorized indirectly as *a significant* variable in the course of our story as a teacher, especially an English teacher. The term *significant others* refer to certain individuals who directly or indirectly influence a person to develop into a certain person or in making important decisions in his life (Daud, 2021). They can be teachers, parents, or certain characters who interact with someone in becoming a teacher.

Self-image: from students to student teachers/teachers

Self-image is the perception of oneself as a teacher; it is a personal act of identifying oneself. Both participants in this study see themselves as teachers. They mentioned that they had absorbed the personality of a teacher in teacher education and because of the teaching experiences they have until the present.

"When I was in the undergraduate school, I see myself as a teacher but not fully. It was because I had little experience in teaching. However, my undergraduate program gave me valuable teaching experience during two months in the practice of the teaching program. Entering to the postgraduate program equips me fully with the theory of teaching and research on the educational field that I have only a little experience in my bachelor degree."

"I consider myself now as a teacher even though I realize I still need an improvement to be a professional teacher. My teaching experience while taking an informal course, my part-time job, other related extracurricular activities in the area of teaching, and my internship program has affected me to define myself as a teacher."

The findings suggest that the teaching experience is an important aspect in shaping teacher identity, one of which is through an internship program. Teaching experience provides the space for the students to transfer theory into practice and to exercise their

teacher identity (Trent 2013). It is in line with that teaching practicum changes the teacher identity from an ambiguous to an emancipating epistemic orientation. Even in this study, the teaching is more in the real-life teaching experience rather than in the practicum class. It is evident that there were stages of self-image development in student teachers. Their self-image shifted from student to student teachers or teachers. In conclusion, there were stages of self-image development in student teachers. Their self-image shifted from student to student teachers or teachers.

Self-esteem: from not confident to more confident

Self-esteem is confidence in one's teaching ability. Based on the data, it is not surprising that the first-year to the fourth-year students did not feel like a teacher. The fact that they were English-language learners did not make them confident about their teaching ability. Similar to self-image, the students relied on their repertoire of knowledge in English in order to feel like a teacher.

"I remember my first teaching experience in my internship program that I could not sleep the whole night, and I was too afraid to practice teaching in front of my lecturer and friends."

"During five years of taking English education as my major, I see many differences in my teaching. I feel the difference in my knowledge competence and teaching competence. For now, I also feel more well-developed to solve the problem in my teaching."

In trying to understand this shift of self-esteem from not confident to gradually confident, I found that the English major of the undergraduate and postgraduate program, besides the tutoring program that helps us become more confident. It was stated that the learning of English in the graduate program enhances their confidence in building knowledge. In contrast, the postgraduate program enhances reflective teaching through research to increase the student teachers' self-esteem.

These findings confirm the study conducted by Motallebzadeh & Kazemi (2018), that a teacher's professional identity is defined as a feeling of self derived from a variety of aspects including experience, education, environment, and personal traits. The findings revealed that all five sub-constructs of self-esteem positively and

significantly predicted professional identity. In this study, self-esteem and teacher identity is shaped through the education that students are involved in. Lamote and Engels (2010) pointed out that the experiences in teacher education changed self-efficacy.

Job motivation: from definitely choose to reluctant to choose teaching

Job motivation is the desire to choose, stay, move, or leave the teaching profession. The excerpt from Weny shows the changing intentions in the field of teaching. At first, she shows reluctant to be an English teacher, however as she goes further in the field of teaching, her motivation to continue in this job is to increase

"Even though I have quiet interest in the English language, I did not intend to take English education as my major....As I go further in my study, I was falling in love in teaching...." (Weny)

The reason for continuing teacher profession was also chained with the respect that she got from the society.

"Once I remember the time where I taught in the rural area, where becomes a teacher is much respected by the society. I feel that becomes a teacher gave me another satisfaction. For me, acceptance and respect are rewards that cannot be valued in money or financial."

As Ilma has a strong passion for teaching from an early age when it comes to her postgraduate program, It has no difference in her job motivation. Lee and Schallert (2016) found that the conception of the teaching profession has changed over time.

"Since then, I started to focus on starting my career as an English teacher. I lived with the joy and sorrow of teaching students of many backgrounds and ages..... Then, I focused on pursuing this profession...."

While the excerpts from Weny relate the motivation to the cultural aspect (respect), Ilma associates it with the psychological aspect.

"I understand that being a teacher is more than just an ordinary profession; there is a psychological satisfaction when I finished standing in front of the class,

guiding students to achieve learning targets. In addition, it is a delight to see students understand what I am teaching."

Regardless of having a strong passion or not so strong a passion for becoming an English teacher in the initial year of choosing English education as a major, the students state that students expressed the desire to choose the teaching profession definitely. The cultural and psychological reasons we associated with our identity as teachers and job motivation indicate that teaching is not merely about getting a high salary and transmitting knowledge. This result confirms the study conducted by Triaty & Beng (2016). It states that cultural and psychological satisfaction are some of the reasons why many teachers persist and remain happy through Indonesia's teaching process even though the reward system is excellent beforehand (see Tiatri & Tji Beng, 2016).

Task perception: from simplistic to understanding the teaching profession

Task perception is the students' perception of the teaching profession. The narrative inquiry shows how task perception is differently defined when entering an English education major.

"How I define teacher in my initial year of taking English education is merely I can speak English, I know grammar and how to pronounce it well,"

In the initial year, the excerpt shows how students define the role of the teacher is in line with Anspal, Eisenschmidt, and Löfström (2012) who states that the first-year students typically have an idealized meaning of being a teacher. However, it changes as the following excerpt

"As I go through, I realize that teaching is a holistic matter of transmitting knowledge and understanding the subject of education that is students. Having subject of pedagogic in my postgraduate program develop myself as a teacher, I learn a lot of students development, the religious aspect, the community the psychological," (Weny)

"Even though my passion for being a teacher has emerged during my childhood, I thought that teaching is how we give new knowledge to our students. However, it

is not simply as I taught the students huruf hijaiyah when I was in the mosque."
(Ilma)

The above excerpts show how the view of task perception is changing during the learning of English. The changing view is associated with their subject matter, particularly in their bachelor and postgraduate program. This study confirmed Lamote and Engels (2010), who pointed out that the experiences in teacher education changed task orientation.

"Having enrolled in the postgraduate program, the task of being a teacher is more complex. The research that we have to conduct is one big matter for me. "

"The course in my bachelor and postgraduate degree such as teaching method, lesson plan, research project, teaching listening, teaching reading, opens my mind that becoming a teacher is not easy, it's complex, but I have enjoyed it. "

The above responses are examples of a consolidated understanding of the teaching profession that the student teachers developed while taking the English major. It should be noted that this understanding is still ongoing; the students reported that they learned something new about the teaching profession every day. However, as they already have had a profession as an English teacher, they begin to understand the complexities of the teaching profession. This study supports the finding by Ticknor (2014), who claims that the complexities of the teaching profession will remain cloudy until one becomes a teacher.

Subjective educational theory: from simplistic to real

Subjective educational theory is a personal interpretative system used to make sense of the teaching profession. The following excerpts from students show how their view of the teaching profession. The excerpts are taken from the task perception development theme.

"How I define teacher in my initial year of taking English education is merely I can speak English, I know grammar and how to pronounce it well, as I go through I realize that teaching is a holistic matter of not only transmitting knowledge but understanding the subject of education that is students. Having subject of

pedagogic in my postgraduate program develop myself as a teacher, I learn a lot of students development, the religious aspect, the community the psychological,"
(Weny)

"Even though my passion for being a teacher has emerged during my childhood, I thought that teaching is how we give new knowledge to our students. However, it is not simply as I taught the students huruf hijaiyah when I was in the mosque."
(Ilma)

The data revealed that the students reported having a simplistic view of the teaching profession when they were in the initial year of enrolling in English education program, shifted to highly valuing the teaching profession when they were in the middle of their undergraduate study, and made their subjective educational theory conform with reality when they have put it into teaching practice. This research confirmed Prabjandee's (2020) study. His study states that the real view of the teaching profession appears in the 5th year of pre-service teachers in their teacher education program. And Anspal, Eisenschmidt, and Löfström (2012) pointed out that student he first-year students typically have an idealized meaning of being a teacher. This study was conducted on postgraduate students, and they have already taught in real life, which has become part of their profession. Their view of the teaching profession is already real.

Conclusion & recommendation

The findings revealed that the student-teacher identity was constructed through multiple dimensions, which changed at different points in time. Motivations change from low motivated to highly motivated. Self-image develops from not fully teacher to more competent teacher, and so does self-esteem change from not confident to more confident—job motivation changes from reluctant to definitely to choose to teach. Task perception and future perspective also develop from simplistic to understanding the teaching profession and from knowledge of the subject matter to the teaching profession to the researcher, which resulted in the change of subjective educational theory (from simplistic to real). The development of teacher identity is affected by the significant other such as from teacher educators and teacher education programs (internship, and subject matter). Besides, the cultural and psychological aspects were also associated.

It should be noted that this study does not attempt to generalize the findings to claim that every English program could promote the development of teacher identity. The finding of this study argued that the learning of English from school and in the teacher education program, such as the one in this study, does promote teacher identity development. However, it should be connected to the influence of the inner motivation and the significant other. As this study only investigates the two students from similar backgrounds, the data revealed was not too contrast. The subsequent research may conduct similar research on teacher identity by involving more research participants from different backgrounds.

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