

A Narrative Inquiry Of English For Young Learners Teachers Professional Identity Construction

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki proses pembentukan identitas profesional guru Bahasa Inggris untuk anak (EYL) di sekolah dasar, Indonesia. Penelitian ini juga dilakukan untuk mengetahui bagaimana guru EYL merefleksikan identitas profesionalnya ke dalam praktik mengajar di kelas. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan naratif, penelitian ini berfokus pada narasi dua guru pemula (*novice* teachers) tentang bagaimana identitas profesional mereka terbentuk pada awal karir mereka sebagai guru Bahasa Inggris di Sekolah Dasar. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui wawancara, analisis dokumen guru (*photovoice*) dan observasi kelas. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa identitas profesional guru terbentuk oleh beberapa peristiwa penting dalam kehidupan, pengalaman belajar, dan interaksi dengan siswa. Penelitian ini juga membuktikan bahwa program konstruksi identitas profesional guru EYL memiliki peran penting dalam membentuk persepsi guru terhadap pengajaran Bahasa Inggris bagi anak. Implikasi pedagogi penelitian akan dipaparkan dalam artikel penelitian ini.

Kata kunci: Pengajaran Bahasa Inggris untuk Anak/*English For Young Learners (EYL)*, Identitas Guru, Identitas Profesional Guru/*Teacher Professional Identity (TPI)*, *Narrative Inquiry*.

ABSTRACT

This study aims at investigating the process of shaping teacher professional identity of English for Young Learners (EYL) teachers in elementary schools in Indonesia. This study also conducted to find out how the teachers reflect on their professional identity into their teaching practice. Employing narrative approach, this study focused on the narration of two participants' stories, a male and a female novice teacher, on how their professional identity was constructed in the beginning of their career as EYL teachers. Semi-structured online interviews, photovoice and online classroom observation were administered to the participants in order to collect the data. The results suggest that participants' teacher professional identity (TPI) was shaped by their significant life events, experiences in education, and interactions with students. Furthermore, this study has demonstrated a strong relationship between how teachers develop their professional identity and their belief about teaching EYL. Pedagogical implications of this study are also presented in this article.

Keywords: *English for Young Learners (EYL), Teacher Identity, Teacher Professional Identity (TPI), Narrative Inquiry.*

Pendahuluan

Introduction

The successful of teaching and learning process can be determined by a number of factors including the one who teaches in the classroom; that is a teacher. A teacher is considered as the most significant factor influencing students' achievement. As a human being, a teacher carries many different roles outside the school. The concept of teacher professional identity (TPI), thus, emerged in the light of understanding teachers' roles in different contexts that influence their attitudes behaviors and beliefs in teaching (Beijaard et al., 2004). The issue of teacher professional identity (TPI) has currently attracted widespread attention of educator researchers which influences several areas. The first area of studies focuses on the characteristics of teachers professional identity (Rus et al., 2013; Sachs, 2001). The second one emphasized on the professional role of teacher identity (Farrell, 2011; Kayi-Aydar, 2019; Sutherland & Markauskaite, 2012). Then, relevant studies also exposed the challenges that teachers encounter in constructing their professional identity (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Ruohotie-

Lyhty, 2013). Those studies mainly revealed that teachers perceive professional role and characteristics in performing their identity as a teacher.

Teachers' identity is considered as the core of teaching professionalism. It describes how teachers understand themselves in their practice of teaching. In playing their role, they need to understand who they are as a teacher. Coldron and Smith (1999) stated that teacher identity reflects the dynamic interaction between social and individual contexts. In addition, Sachs (2005) argued that teacher identity helps novice teachers to construct their own ideas of how they should behave in society through experience and make meaning of that experience.

In the light of studying teacher professional identity, narrative inquiry has been seen as an approach that allows the participant to reflect on their experience through telling stories (Leigh, 2019). Participants' narrative is considered as an effective tool to capture people's actions, experiences, and identities. There are three-dimensional inquiry space to understand experience: the temporal, the social, and the spatial (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). These spaces include the participants'

reflection on the past, present and future experience; the thought and emotion of the participants and other; and the place of the participants live. I used narrative inquiry to illustrate teachers' stories. These include how they feel, and how they act as a teacher in the classroom. This study also tried to find out how the teachers view themselves as a teacher and how they construct their teacher professional identity.

While the issue of teacher professional identity has been a research focus in educational research, professional identity among English for Young Learners (EYL) teachers is however understudied. Through this study, I investigated the construction process of teacher professional identity (TPI) of EYL teachers. It is important to be investigated because teachers in EYL tend to perceive different roles in teaching compare to teaching adult learners as children have unique characteristics that need to be developed by the help of their teachers. Understanding of themselves to reflect upon their experience in becoming a teacher, thus, is considered significant. Therefore, to fill the gap with the previous studies, this study was conducted to explore the process of shaping EYL teacher professional identity and to investigate the extent to which EYL teachers reflect on

their journey which affect their future as professional EYL teachers.

Metode

Method

To gain a deeper perspective and insight into teachers' professional identity, this present study employed a narrative inquiry. The nature of narrative inquiry approach is to understand and inquire into experiences through "a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieu" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). Thus, I employed this method to delve into participants' experiences in constructing their professional identity. In regard with the method, Barkhuizen et al., (2014) argued that the narrative inquiry is considered being a powerful research tool that provides deeper information related to someone's act, feelings and emotions.

The study involved two EYL teachers (Harry and Suzy, pseudonyms) who were actively teaching at two different elementary schools in Bandung. The main reason of selecting the participants was because they were assigned as specialist English teachers (see Zein, 2017) who teach children grade one to six. Furthermore, these two participants were considered as

novice teachers since they have little teaching experience (Atay, 2008). Harry was an EYL teacher with four-year experience, while Suzy had been teaching elementary school students for two years. Both of the participants and I graduated from the same teaching training institution majoring English education. During their study, they took four-credit course in teaching EYL. Table 1 presents the participants' demographic information.

Table 1
Participants' Demographic Information

| | Teacher | Gender | Age | Highest Level of Education | Number of Years Teaching | Grade Level Teaching |
|---|---------|--------|-----|--|--------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 | Harry | Male | 27 | Bachelors' degree in English Education | 4 | 6 th |
| 2 | Suzy | Female | 26 | Bachelors' degree in English Education | 2 | 1 st -6 th |

Despite teaching English, Harry was assigned to teach other subjects such as: Science, Math and Civics Education.

Hasil dan Pembahasan

Results And Discussion

The findings are presented in a form of teachers' narratives about their experience as they relate to their beliefs about teaching EYL and the meanings they make of their experiences as they are related to the formation process of their professional identity. The findings will be framed in two narratives. There are three sections for each narrative: (1) a brief demographic profile of the participant, (2) an examination of the participant's experiences as related to their beliefs about EYL teaching and (3) a descriptive analysis of the participant's experiences as they are connected to their perceived individual teacher professional identity.

Harry:

Harry was 27 years old with a bachelor's degree in English Education and had been teaching for four years in one of private primary school in Bandung. At the time this study was conducted, he taught English to grade six students. Apart from teaching English, he also had to teach other subjects such as Math, Science, and *Iqra* (Reciting Quran).

He started to learn English when he was in grade four of elementary school. There was only one English teacher at his school and the teacher was frequently being

absent to the class. This situation made him a little bit upset and he felt that he did not get much exposure to English since in early age. Up until he was a senior high school student, his self-esteem in using English was not improving, so he decided to take science major in the hope of becoming an engineer. As a science student, he often participated in Physic and Astronomy Olympics. Seeing his potential, his teacher, sometimes, asked him to train his juniors who were going to participate in the Olympics. He also got reward from tutoring his juniors. That experience, thus, sparked his interest in teaching.

However, when he graduated from senior high school, rather than pursuing his career as a teacher, he decided to pursue his dream to become an engineer. Therefore, he took an admission test to chemical engineering major. Unfortunately, he was not accepted in any state universities for that major, so he decided to take a year gap while taking an English course. A year after, he met his Guidance and Counseling teacher who gave him advice to become a teacher. She said that he could earn some pocket money while studying at university. As he said that his family could not fully afford his tuition fee, he took the advice and became a student in English Education department. He took EYL concentration as

a part of his study so this drove him to pursue his career as an EYL teacher.

Beliefs about Teaching EYL and Influential Experiences. Growing up in an unfortunate family, Harry did not get a chance to learn English from the beginning. He did not feel confidence to use English even when he entered English Education. He felt inferior to his peers as many of them were already fluent using English. Based on that experience, he believed that “the earlier the better” (Line numbers of the interview transcript [Line] 154-155). In his opinion, this is also applied in terms of perpetuating good values to the students since the very beginning of learning. This belief was derived from his lecturer, textbooks he had read, and the four-year experience of teaching young learners. From his observation, he could see children improvement is way better when the learners were instilled good values and lesson since they were in younger ages.

Professional Identity and Experiences. In regards with his professional identity as an EYL teacher, he claimed that “I’m far from being professional” (Line 172). First, he claimed that he is easy to get angry to his students, “I often lack of self-control while learning offline. When I am angry, I often show that I am angry” (Line 172-173). Second, even

though graduating from English Education, he was still struggling with speaking English. Due to his speech delay, he needed the urge to practice more in speaking English. His self-esteem was also low especially when it comes to teach other subjects that he has not mastered yet. This also related to his administrative issue that he had not met the requirement for elementary teacher since elementary school teachers need to hold Elementary Education certificate.

To address the issues, he tried to develop his professional identity through participating in various teacher professional developments held inside and outside the school he was teaching. Fortunately, the school often held teacher training once in a semester to broaden teachers' learning and enhance their practice. If there is a time, he also participated in many seminars or webinars outside the school with his own money. He often invested his salary in teacher trainings and textbooks related to teaching English for Young Learners. While his professionalism is still being questioned in Indonesian context, but he was certified as professional EYL teacher by Cambridge (Figure 1). He took the certification test by himself and got the highest band for the test. His needed this certificate because of his passion, "Because

I feel it is my passion (teaching EYL), so I pursued the certification" (Line 207-208). Holding that certificate,



Figure 2. Harry's TKT Cambridge certificate

he said that he is able to teach EYL in other countries which use English as a Second Language.

Suzy:

Suzy had been teaching EYL for two years since she graduated from her bachelor degree. Suzy also graduated from the same university like me and Harry. Both of them were my juniors in English Education. She teaches English to all levels at the school she was currently teaching when I gathered the data. Apart from being an English teacher, she was responsible for conducting English Club for student every Thursday at the school.

Her exposure to English began when she was in elementary school. At that

time, she was not really interested learning English since she taught learning English was difficult. Even until she was a senior high school student, she did not like to learn English. However, when she was in grade twelve, she found an English teacher who was good enough and made the learning process interesting. When I asked her about how the fun teacher she mentioned liked, she responded “The teacher was never got angry if we couldn’t understand. He was not a killer teacher” (Line 38-39). Since he likes the process of learning English, she decided to take an English course to improve her English.

Similar to Harry’s story, Suzy initially was not interested in becoming a teacher, English teacher in particular. Back when she was in senior high school, she was not quite sure about what major she was going to take after finishing her senior year. Coming from science major in her senior high school, she thought of becoming a scientist while she was not certain about that choice as well. Therefore, she heard a friend who got accepted in English Education department in one of universities in Bandung. Hearing that news, she was also interested to choose English Education. Her intention was supported by her mother who wanted to have a teacher in her family and her former students when she taught

religious study. Her former students said that “I did well when I was teaching them” (Line 68). With the support from her mother and former students, she learned in a hard way to become a teacher.

Graduating from university, she got swayed by a lot of career options. Surrounded by friends who started their own business got Suzy interested to selling things too instead of teaching. But the business did not run well until a friend of her needed a substitute English teacher in a junior high school for a maternity leave. That experience got her realized that teaching is an ideal job for her. After she ended the contract as a substitute teacher, she got another offer to teach at an elementary school. At the time she got the offer, she felt confused since she wondered if she had to teach other subjects like Math or Thematic. Fortunately, the vacancy was for English teacher only.

Beliefs about Teaching EYL and Influential Experiences. She believed that EYL teacher should always be in a good mood when teaching. She remarked:

Based on my experience, we shouldn’t look like we have a lot of burdens or problems. Because sometimes when we are in the bad mood, it will be felt by the students. We have to be cheerful right from the beginning of the lesson. So the students will be happy and excited to learn. **(Lines 109-111)**

She got this belief from her EYL lecturer when she was a student in university. The lecturer inspired her a lot in terms of teaching young learners. She claimed that the lecturer often acted out as a real EYL teacher when delivering her materials. Her way of teaching inspired Suzy in creating fun learning experience. Beside the lecturer, she got that belief after having direct experience with students in the classroom. She once found her students were fighting just before the class started. Looking at that situation, she scolded those students and the class did not run well since both teacher and students were not in a good mood of learning.

Apart from having cheerful characteristics, another belief of teaching children is a teacher should become a friend for his/her students. Since Suzy claimed that she has a childish or cheerful character, she always enjoyed working with children. she said that students could be more open and expressive when they feel comfortable with her as she positioned herself as their friends.

Professional Identity and Experiences. Since she just started her teaching career, she could not come out with the idea of being a professional EYL teacher. Suzy proclaimed that she was still

lacking of knowledge in many aspects of teaching. One of the aspects was classroom management skill. She stated that “I am still looking for ways to overcome the students who keep fighting in class” (Line 127-129). However, in terms of being professional, she believes that her cheerful characteristics enabled her to bring back good atmosphere to the class. As a teacher herself, she admitted that she cannot get mad at her students. Addressing that issue, she articulated “I always be careful because I am worried that my students would feel uncomfortable in class” (Line 162-163). She also claimed that her former English teacher influenced her to be more relax teacher as she always felt anxious when a teacher got mad at her as a student. When I asked her about the way she disciplines her students she answered “I always instill character building to them in learning that they have to respect each other, including teachers” (Line 163-164).

Her professional identity was mostly shaped by her participation in various kinds of teaching workshops. She said that attending teaching workshops gives her positive impact in terms of teaching English and classroom management. Suzy presented a photograph (Figure 2) when she was attending an extensive reading workshop. She said that

that workshop was beneficial as she could apply the knowledge directly to the students. She initiated the extensive reading program at school to promote students' learning through literacy.



Figure 2. Suzy's photograph attending an Extensive Reading workshop

As a novice teacher, she articulated that her way of teaching was heavily influenced by various kinds of teaching platforms that she found through internet. Unfixed curriculum of English has made her to be more creative in developing her own materials. Therefore, internet was really a big help for her as the only one English teacher who covered all classes at school.

The process of shaping teacher professional identity for the participants derived partly from their significant life events, teachers' experiences at school context, and EYL curriculum. Through this study, I found that the teachers were able to interrelate various discourses and draw on their interactions with administrators, colleagues, and students that considered

influential. Thus, the formation of their identity was closely related to communities they are working (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Caihong, 2012; Farrell, 2011).

Aforementioned elaboration emphasizes on the interpretations of "being a teacher" are influenced by reflective framework and irrefutably contributed to the meaning that the teachers made of their individual experiences. In the light of the active process of identity construction, TPI is a combination of values, beliefs, attitudes, interactions, and language that has evolved within individual life history, family, and community.

Kesimpulan dan Saran

Conclusion and Suggestion

This study has investigated the process of professional identity shaping of four elementary English teachers in Indonesia. Drawing upon narrative approach by Connelly & Clandinin (1990), this study has unfolded teachers' live experiences that have contributed to the burgeoning of their professional identity in teaching English to young learners in the context of school. From the data that I gained from each participant, it can be concluded that teacher professional identity (TPI) is influenced by their significant life events such as their previous education,

their teaching experience, their involvement in community of practice, and their family influence.

Furthermore, this study has demonstrated a strong relationship between how teachers develop their professional identity and their belief about teaching EYL. Common thread among the teachers' professional identity and their beliefs about teaching EYL were related to the relationships and interactions between teacher and students. These findings suggest that apart from teaching subject matter, EYL teachers perceived caring and nurturing as other important aspects of their identity. Therefore, there are two dimensions of teaching EYL perceived by EYL teachers: pedagogy and emotional dispositions. Establishing caring teacher-student relationships was part of their pedagogical practice. The positive emotional disposition of caring defined their nurturing interactions with students

Daftar Rujukan

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