

NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF EFL PRE-SERVICE TEACHER INTO TEACHER'S IDENTITY DURING THE TEACHING PRACTICUM PROGRAM

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Abstract

Penelitian Education plays a pivotal role in shaping teachers' professional identities and fostering the growth of future educators through hands-on teaching experiences. This study explores the journey of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) pre-service teachers in Indonesia, specifically focusing on their experiences and identity development during a teaching practicum program at a junior high school. Using a qualitative narrative inquiry approach, the research investigates how teaching practicum influences the participants' understanding of their roles as teachers, including their challenges and strategies to overcome them. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews with three pre-service teachers, allowing an in-depth view of their narratives and the influence of cultural and situational factors on their professional growth. The findings reveal that the practicum enhances teaching skills and classroom management and fosters a deeper professional identity, with participants reporting significant insights into classroom engagement, ethical teaching practices, and resilience. This study highlights the transformative power of teaching practicum programs in identity formation, offering valuable insights into the development of future educators within the Indonesian context.

Keyword: EFL, pre-service teacher, teacher identity, teaching practicum, narrative inquiry, professional development.

INTRODUCTION

Sektor In education, a teacher's role is teaching, character building, and professional identity, which determines how they interact with students and the school environment. Teacher identity is essential to a teacher's professional development, especially in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching (Beijaard et al., 2004). This identity is not formed instantly but through a continuous process involving the incorporation of personal beliefs, values, and teaching experiences gained from actual practice in the field (Varghese et al., 2005).

According to Olsen (2012), teacher identity is closely related to how a teacher understands himself as a professional when facing various challenges in teaching and learning. This is particularly important in foreign language teaching, as an EFL teacher must often balance local values and the global demands of

teaching a language that is not the student's mother tongue (Olsen, 2012). The teaching practicum experience is considered one of the crucial elements in shaping the professional identity of prospective EFL teachers, providing them with the opportunity to test and develop their pedagogical skills in real-life situations (Lawson et al., 2015).

The teaching practicum allows prospective teachers to understand the real educational challenges, especially in teaching English to students with diverse cultural backgrounds and abilities (Barton et al., 2015). In this context, a teacher's identity determines how they handle differences and barriers to learning and how they adapt their teaching methods to meet the needs of diverse students (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009).

Various studies have widely discussed the importance of teachers' professional identity. For example, research by Beijaard et al. (2004) showed that a strong identity is closely related to good mental health and high teaching quality and has a significant influence on how a teacher builds relationships with students, manages the classroom, and creates a positive learning environment (Beijaard et al., 2004). In addition, a solid professional identity is also thought to increase teachers' commitment to the profession and confidence in their ability to deal with classroom dynamics (Rots et al., 2010).

Teacher identity also includes personal values, experiences, and professional characteristics that shape their approach to education and their interactions with students (Bullough & Baughman, 1997). In the EFL context, this is further complicated by the need to understand and appreciate cultural differences while facing the challenges of teaching a foreign language in an environment where the primary language is not English (Ghiasvand et al., 2023). Developing this professional identity requires continuous reflection and adjustment of teaching methods and strategies as teachers gain experience (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002).

According to Ghiasvand et al. (2023), factors such as cultural background, personal experiences, and social environment play an essential role in shaping EFL teachers' identities. For example, teachers who work in schools with students with

diverse cultural backgrounds and ability levels are more likely to develop inclusive and student needs-oriented approaches, strengthening their professional identity (Ghiasvand et al., 2023). In this regard, a narrative inquiry approach is essential to understand how EFL teacher candidates shape their identities through practicum teaching experiences (Creswell, 2013).

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative research method that provides deep insights into how individuals construct and communicate their lived experiences (Juliandini & Sari, 2023). This approach allows researchers to delve deeply into participants' experiences, thereby revealing the underlying themes of a teacher's identity formation process (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Using this method, the researcher analyzed how prospective EFL teachers in Indonesia, particularly those who participated in the teaching practicum program, developed their professional identities and faced challenges in the teaching process.

The teaching practicum program is an essential element in forming prospective teachers' professional identity. Through this hands-on experience, prospective teachers can develop classroom management skills, build pedagogical skills, and strengthen their beliefs as educators (Astuti, 2016). In the context of EFL teaching, the program also allows prospective teachers to identify effective strategies for teaching students with different levels of language proficiency, thus preparing them for the complex realities of teaching (Ulla & Winitkun, 2018).

However, teaching practicum programs are also open to challenges. Many prospective teachers have to deal with limited facilities, differences in students' learning styles, and a lack of support from the surrounding environment, which can become obstacles to developing their professional identity (Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009). Therefore, strategies to overcome these challenges, such as collaboration with other teachers and utilization of existing resources, are essential to support this program's success and ensure prospective teachers can optimize their learning experience (Clarke et al., 2023).

In this study, the professional identity of prospective EFL teachers in Indonesia was analyzed through a narrative perspective, focusing on the experiences, challenges, and strategies used during the teaching practicum

program. This study aims to fill the gap in the literature regarding how EFL teachers' professional identities are formed in the context of education in Indonesia, as well as how practicum programs can support the development of prospective teachers' pedagogical competencies in today's global era.

This study provides valuable insights for teacher education programs by understanding the development of teachers' professional identities through teaching practicum programs. It is particularly useful in designing curricula that can support teacher candidates in developing the professional skills and attitudes required in a dynamic and multicultural educational environment (Schmidt et al., 2009).

Overall, this study seeks to contribute to the development of theory and practice in teacher education and provide recommendations that can be used to improve the quality of teacher education programs in Indonesia, particularly in the context of EFL teaching. In doing so, this study not only focuses on the technical aspects of teaching but also pays attention to the aspects of professional identity that are important for a teacher's success in carrying out his or her duties as a professional and dedicated educator.

RESEARCH QUESTION

1. What positive experiences did the trainee teachers have during the teaching practicum program?
2. What obstacles did the trainee teachers face during the program?
3. How did the EFL teacher candidates overcome difficulties during the teaching practicum program?
4. What are the EFL teacher candidates' hopes and plans for developing their identity as teachers after completing the teaching practicum?

METHOD

Research Design

This study used a qualitative approach with a *narrative inquiry* design. This method was chosen to deeply understand EFL teacher candidates' experiences, perceptions, and identity formation during the teaching practicum program. The narrative approach allowed participants to recount their experiences, enabling the

researcher to explore deeper meanings regarding professional identity change in an educational context. Using *narrative inquiry*, this study focused on personal stories and direct experiences that participants had in their daily interactions during the practicum program.

Participant

The participants in this study were three prospective English teachers in their seventh semester in the English Education department at a private university in Malang, East Java. The participants were selected based on specific criteria: prospective teachers who participated in the teaching practicum program at junior high schools. The *convenience sampling* method was used to recruit participants, considering the participants' involvement in the same practicum group as the researcher. The three participants had never had formal teaching experience before, so the teaching experience in this program was their first direct experience in the classroom with various challenges.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured, in-depth *interviews*. The interviews were designed to guide participants in sharing their experiences, challenges and identity formation process during the practicum. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and used Bahasa Indonesia to allow participants to feel more free and comfortable expressing their experiences. The interviews were recorded to ensure the accuracy of the data and assist in the analysis process. In addition, the researcher also conducted direct classroom observations to get a more comprehensive picture of the participants' interactions with students and the challenges they faced in classroom management.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted through several stages: interview transcription, repeated reading to understand the context in-depth, and *coding* based on emerging themes. This process began with transcribing the interviews and reading them several times to gain a deep understanding of the data. After that, the researcher coded the main themes by formulating the problem, such as positive

experiences, challenges, strategies to overcome obstacles and professional identity development. A thematic approach was used to categorize the data, enabling the researcher to conclude the dynamics influencing EFL teacher candidates' professional identity during practicum.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, this study employed several strategies that enhance *trustworthiness*. First, *member checking* was conducted by sending the transcriptions of the interviews to the participants to ensure that the researcher's interpretations matched their intended experiences. In addition, data triangulation was applied by comparing the results of interviews and observations to get a more complete picture of the participants' experiences. The researcher also conducted self-reflection (*reflexivity*) to avoid subjective data analysis and interpretation bias. All these steps were designed to maintain the accuracy of the research results and ensure that the research findings accurately reflect the participants' experiences and perceptions.

FINDING AND DISCUSSIONS

This study provides an in-depth insight into the experiences of prospective EFL teachers during the teaching practicum program, particularly in the context of their professional identity formation. The main findings show that the teaching practicum program improved participants' teaching skills and honed their ability to manage the classroom and develop interpersonal skills. Participants felt that classroom management skills are one of the most essential elements in ensuring effective learning. Classroom management allows them to manage diverse student behaviours, keep students focused on the material and create a conducive learning atmosphere. This reinforces the essential skills indispensable for a teacher in a dynamic classroom setting (Barton et al., 2015).

This practicum experience also allows prospective teachers to practice more diverse teaching techniques and strategies. They realized the importance of using interactive and student-centred learning methods, such as group discussions, simulations, and role-playing activities, which can increase student engagement in

the learning process. Participants found that when students are more active, the classroom atmosphere becomes more dynamic, and learning occurs more effectively. This student engagement-focused approach helps participants build more positive interactions with students and encourages them to be more interested in the subject. The ability to design and implement these learning techniques plays a significant role in developing future teachers' professionalism (Lawson et al., 2015).

In addition to technical skills in teaching, this practicum program also helps prospective teachers hone their emotional control skills. In various situations in the classroom, participants were faced with students who were uncooperative or exhibited challenging behaviour. Through this experience, participants learned the importance of maintaining calmness, being patient, and not being quickly provoked. This emotional resilience not only supports successful learning in the classroom but also reflects their professional maturity. The ability to manage emotions is an essential aspect of the teaching profession, as teachers are expected to act as role models for students and create a positive environment for student development.

However, this study also found significant challenges in the teaching practicum program. The first challenge the participants faced was the students' diverse learning styles and the different levels of English comprehension. This condition made participants feel the need to adjust their teaching strategies to meet students' varied needs. Some students require more visual explanations, while others are more responsive to verbal approaches. These adjustments require prospective teachers to have high flexibility and adaptive skills in dealing with diversity in the classroom. This challenge emphasizes the importance of prospective EFL teachers understanding inclusive teaching methods well (Beijaard et al., 2004).

In addition to differences in students' learning styles, limited facilities in some schools were also a barrier for participants. The lack of teaching aids such as projectors and audio-visual devices limited participants' ability to use more creative teaching methods. However, this condition triggers prospective teachers to

develop innovations in their teaching methods. Some participants used simple tools, such as pictures and educational games, that could attract students' interest without the need for sophisticated tools. This experience shows that despite the limitations, participants can still create an interactive and fun learning atmosphere through creativity and utilizing existing resources (Ubaidillah et al., 2023).

In facing these challenges, participants used various strategies to overcome the existing obstacles. They emphasized the importance of implementing classroom management that is flexible and responsive to the situation. To increase student participation, prospective teachers create a relaxed yet structured atmosphere by incorporating group activities and games relevant to the material. In addition, they also collaborate with other teachers in designing teaching methods that suit students' needs and receive feedback from supervisors as a basis for improving their teaching techniques. This collaboration provided moral support for participants and helped them understand how to manage the classroom effectively (Astuti, 2016).

Participants also used self-reflection as a tool to evaluate their teaching experience. After each teaching session, they conducted a personal evaluation to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the approach used. Through this reflection, prospective teachers can recognize areas that need improvement and develop better methods in the future. Self-reflection is a means of evaluation and enriches their understanding of their identity as teachers. With regular reflection, they become more sensitive to students' needs and can adapt to various classroom situations. This reflection process also strengthens participants' ability to continue to develop themselves professionally (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

This practicum program plays a significant role in forming EFL teacher candidates' professional identities. Their interactions with students, co-teachers, and supervisors provided first-hand experience of the complexities and responsibilities of the teaching profession. Participants realized that the role of a teacher is not only to teach but also to guide, inspire, and shape students' characters. They experienced the role of an educator with great social responsibility, including helping students reach their full potential. This experience

gives teacher candidates a more mature perspective on their profession and affirms the professional values they must have in their future endeavours (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009).

Through this program, teacher candidates also better understand professional ethics in teaching. They learn to act with integrity, respect students and colleagues, and maintain positive relationships with the school community. This awareness of professional ethics supports the formation of their identity as dedicated teachers. Participants realized that building positive and respectful relationships with students is essential for success in teaching and student development. They also learned that being a teacher means acting as a role model and assuming moral responsibility in furthering students' education (Bullough & Baughman, 1997).

This study also highlighted that the teaching practicum experience directly impacted the development of EFL teacher candidates' professional identity. They felt more confident in facing challenges in the classroom and more prepared to deal with unexpected situations. Through guidance from supervisors and peer support, participants gained more in-depth knowledge on overcoming classroom obstacles. This experience provides prospective teachers with a solid foundation to deal with various learning situations in the future and shapes them into individuals who are ready for the teaching profession.

Overall, the practicum program provides a solid foundation for prospective teachers to develop their technical skills, social skills and professional identity. They gain valuable teaching experience and understand the importance of empathy, patience, and commitment towards students. With these experiences, EFL teacher candidates are better prepared for the demands and responsibilities of the teaching profession and have a higher awareness of the values of professionalism.

The results of this study make an essential contribution to understanding how teaching practicum programs can shape prospective teachers' professional identity. The findings suggest that appropriate support from colleagues and supervisors and a supportive learning environment enhance teacher candidates'

competence and confidence. This practicum experience gives them a solid foundation to enter the profession with dedication, commitment and a positive attitude in facing educational challenges.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This study shows that the teaching practicum program significantly influences the forming of prospective EFL teachers' professional identity, primarily through improving their classroom management, communication, and emotional control skills. Participants not only gained positive experiences that supported their success in managing classroom dynamics and developing inclusive pedagogical approaches but also faced challenges such as differences in student learning styles and limited facilities. However, they overcame these challenges through collaboration with fellow teachers, applying creative methods, and self-reflection, which helped them recognize their strengths and areas for improvement. Overall, this practicum program plays a vital role in preparing prospective teachers for the complexities and responsibilities of the teaching profession in the future.

Based on the results of this study, it is recommended that educational institutions continue to improve practicum programs by providing adequate support, including more complete teaching facilities and comprehensive classroom management training to help prospective teachers develop pedagogical skills optimally. Prospective teachers are also expected to actively self-reflect during practicum to improve teaching effectiveness and develop more responsive strategies for students' needs. Further research could examine the long-term impact of this practicum program on teacher candidates' future careers and teaching practices.

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