

Professional Identity Construction: An Inquiry into the Narratives of Indonesian Teachers of English for Young Learners

Hanifia Arlinda ^{a*}, Safrina Noorman ^a, Yanty Wirza ^a

^a Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia

Article Info

Article history

Submission Date: 5 February 2024
Acceptance Date: 20 March 2024

Keywords:

English for Young Learners (EYL),
narrative inquiry, teacher identity,
teacher professional identity

*Corresponding author:

hanifia.arlinda@upi.edu

Abstract

Teacher professional identity has emerged as a central topic in educational research since the 1990s in light of the increasing understanding of teachers' roles in different contexts that influence their attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs in teaching (Beijaard, 2019). The identity construction process of English for Young Learners (EYL) teachers in Indonesia needs to be studied more. Employing the narrative inquiry method (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), this study investigated the process of teacher professional identity construction of four EYL teachers in four different elementary schools in Bandung, Indonesia, and the extent to which the journey affects their beliefs and practice in teaching EYL. I collected the data using semi-structured online interviews, photovoice, and classroom observation. The results suggest that participants' teacher professional identity (TPI) was shaped by experiencing critical events, participating in professional development programs, involving themselves in a community of practice, experiencing teaching practicum, supporting school culture and environment, and teachers' interest in teaching English to young learners itself. This study has also demonstrated how the participants' construction journey impacts the change of their beliefs and practices in teaching EYL. This study sheds light on the significance of the support from EYL stakeholders in affording opportunities for teachers' learning and professional development.

© 2024 JELS and the Authors - Published by JELS.

INTRODUCTION

In the teaching world, a teacher is one of the determining factors of successful teaching and learning. Not only does a teacher transmit knowledge of a particular discipline in his/her teaching, but a teacher also shares values and beliefs acquired from his/her experience and a series of events that have ever happened in

his/her personal or professional life. To this point, the teacher's engagement to identity, the way the teacher understands who he/she is, is also considered a vital factor in improving the teacher's quality. Martin (2018) also argued that it is important for teachers in every subject at school to not only focus on their pedagogical aspects of their teaching, but also identify themselves as teachers. This proposition, thus, led me to scrutinize the role of identity in shaping teachers in the context of teaching and learning.

Within educational research, teacher professional identity has emerged as a central topic since the 1990s in light of the increasing understanding of teachers' roles in different contexts that influence their attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs in teaching contexts (Beijaard, 2019). In general literature, the concept of identity is defined in various ways that professional identity might also be defined in different ways in the field of teacher. Several studies revealed that teacher professional identity is correlated with teachers' concepts of images or self (Knowles, 1992). Meanwhile, Beijaard et al. (2004) argued that teacher professional identity refers to an ongoing process of each individual to perform his/her identity as a teacher. Thus, teacher professional identity can be defined as the concepts or images constructed by the teachers that strongly determine how they teach, their professional development, and their attitudes toward educational shift.

In developing teachers' professional identity, several factors come into play namely historical, sociological, psychological, and cultural background, are generally reported to influence the construction of a teacher's professional identity (Goodson & Cole, 1999; Caihong, 2012). Beside external factors, teachers' professional identity development can be affected by internal factors such as one's emotions and external factors such as one's job and life experiences (Kayi-Aydar, 2019). It is argued that professional identity construction might be experienced by those who have chosen teaching careers. It more likely happens to both novice and experienced teachers.

The issue of teacher professional identity has attracted the widespread attention of educator researchers, which influences several areas. Beijaard et al. (2019) consider a teacher's professional identity as an ongoing integration of the 'personal' and the 'professional' sides of becoming and being a teacher. It suggests that teachers' landscapes and narratives account for developing their professional identity. Avidov-Ungar and Forkosh-Baruch (2018) further argued that the notion of

teacher identity highlights the individual characteristics of the teacher and how these are integrated with the possibilities and potentials provided in the institutional identity of the teacher and the content and methods of a specific field, as these are realized in specific contexts of teaching. This indicates that the teaching arena of the teachers play an important role in shaping teachers' professional identity.

Furthermore, several studies (Solari & Ortega, 2020; Chu, 2020; Flores, 2020) pointed out that teacher identity is a dynamic process constructed and negotiated by the teacher over time. The findings of the studies have proven that a teacher's professional identity needs to be fixed and stable. The study also showed that the negotiation process significantly improves one's identity. The negotiation process can only occur if a teacher has raised an awareness of some changes that might happen in the teaching context. Therefore, the study contributes a suggestion for a teacher education program to become the ideal starting point for raising not only the awareness of developing an identity but also a strong sense of the ongoing shifts that will occur during the process of teacher identity construction. To this point, the recent study investigated how a teacher reflects on his/her experience negotiating to shape a teacher's professional identity. In the negotiation process, Ruohotie-Lyhty (2013), in his study, further found that the negotiation process is influenced by many factors involving the tension between agency (the personal dimension in teaching) and structure (the social given). It is assumed that the interplay between personal and professional plays a crucial role in shaping and reshaping teacher identity.

Olsen (2016) added that a teacher's professional identity can be a product (a result of influences on the teacher) and a process (a form of ongoing interaction within teacher development). Olsen's propositions suggest that identity is viewed as a label for collecting products and processes. This means there are issues about the prior construct of the self, social positioning of the self, and meaning systems of the self. Thus, the product and the process are intertwined in teachers' activities since working as a teacher will require one to react and negotiate in any given context.

In the Indonesian context, Gandana & Parr (2013) employed a qualitative case study that focused on teacher educator's beliefs about and understanding of the English language and culture in higher education institutions. The study was conducted to discover the teachers' perspectives on Intercultural Communication that are being constructed through teaching and learning in that subject. The results suggest some challenges found in the teaching, such as hierarchical institutional

culture, curriculum demands, and limited resources. This study reveals that tensions and contradictions are part of the teacher's identity, such as their belief, values, and experiences. However, they restrain the potential for significant real change in student learning even though the visible change in the curriculum is being implemented. This study strongly recommends that curriculum planners and policy-makers engage more with teachers' voices. Furthermore, in Indonesia, several scholars have researched teacher professional identity, and it is shown that the negotiation process plays a vital role in helping teachers overcome their tension when constructing professional identity (Ahmad & Samad, 2018; Ke et al., 2020).

While the professional identity of language teachers has been a research focus in several studies, the construction of EYL (English for Young Learners) teacher professional identity and how it relates to teachers' beliefs still needs to be explored. This proposition was led from the urgency of equipping English for learners since the early years. Several reasons are identified as the driving forces to conduct English instruction for young learners. First, English is considered necessary for broader employment opportunities therefore better preparation is begun since the very beginning that learners enter the primary education (Zein, 2017). Another reason was derived from the result of most secondary students' English proficiency could have been more satisfactory (Hawanti, 2014). Considering the survey results, the low English proficiency of secondary school students has resulted from the absence of a robust foundation of English that could have been provided at the primary level. This assumption suggested that children should be taught English to provide more robust preparation before entering secondary school.

Thus, this study attempted to investigate the construction process of teachers' professional identity in English for young learners. It is essential to investigate the context of TEYL (Teaching English to Young Learners) to help EYL teachers reflect upon their experience in becoming a teacher. Therefore, to fill the gap with the previous studies, this study was conducted to explore the process of shaping EYL teacher's professional identity and investigate how EYL teachers reflect on their journey, which affects their future as professional EYL teachers. Thus, the following research questions were formulated and addressed to discover the professional identity construction of EYL teachers.

1. How do the EYL teachers construct their professional identity?

2. How does their professional identity construction journey affect their beliefs and practices in teaching EYL?

METHOD

This study employed narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry was opted as the study design as it allows researchers to delve deeply into the personal experiences, stories, and reflections of teachers. Professional identity is highly personal and shaped by individual experiences, beliefs, values, and interactions. Narrative inquiry enables researchers to capture the complexity and richness of teachers' professional identities by exploring their lived experiences and personal narratives (Clandinin & Caine, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2004; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2001) to understand an individual's lived realities and his/her social settings in which their identity is constructed. This design allows the present study to closely explore the participants' identity construction through their lived experiences teaching English to young learners. Four English teachers participated in this study. Two novice teachers and two experienced teachers were purposefully chosen to narrate their experience in constructing their identity and reflect on their trajectory as EYL teachers. The participants were chosen purposefully to gain this study's richness as the selected participants contributed to this study by providing different perspectives and experiences in constructing their professional identity.

Respondents

The two novice teachers were graduate students with a teaching certification in English who majored in English education. The term novice teacher is commonly used to describe student teachers in training or teachers with little or no teaching experience (Atay, 2008). Two experienced teachers, Andi and Yuli (pseudonyms), were also chosen to provide data from different perspectives about how their identity as professional EYL teachers is constructed and enacted in the teaching context. They were considered qualified as experienced teachers, as they all had more than ten years of teaching experience. During that time, not only did the teachers gain much exposure on teaching inside classrooms but also had participated in several teachers' professional development programs of which the outcome of their participation mostly contributed to their professionalism as EYL teachers (Gatbonton, 2008). I assigned each participant a pseudonym to uphold

the commitment to their confidential participation in this study (Heru, Susi, Andi, and Yuli). The participants' demographic profile is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographics of teacher participants

No	Teacher	Gender	Age	Highest Level of Education	Number of Years Teaching	Grade Level Teaching	Category of Teacher
1	Heru	Male	27	Bachelor's degree in English Education	4	6 th	Novice
2	Susi	Female	26	Bachelor's degree in English Education	2	1 st -6 th	Novice
3	Andi	Male	38	Bachelor's degree in English Education	13	4 th -6 th	Experienced
4	Yuli	Female	49	Bachelor's degree in French Education	23	1 st -6 th	Experienced

Note: All participant names are pseudonyms assigned by the researcher and are listed in order based on teacher category

Instruments

This study employed semi-structured online interviews with each participant to understand teachers' lived experiences relating to constructing teachers' professional identities as the primary data sources. Semi-structured interviews were administered since they allowed me to focus on the topic of interest and teacher professional identity construction while giving the researcher or participants the autonomy to explore relevant ideas that might come up during the interviews. These are also used to collect new data and explore participants' thoughts and beliefs about their experiences constructing a teacher's professional identity. The main interview sessions were conducted once for each participant. However, I contacted the participants through private messages on WhatsApp to ask for their clarification until the data was saturated. I triangulated the data using the photovoice technique and researcher reflexive journal from online classroom observation to enrich the data. Photovoice allowed participants to take and select photographs that could be reflected upon and explore participants' reasons, emotions, and experiences that guided their chosen images.

Procedures

The interview session focused on eliciting participants' stories of their lived experiences throughout their career as EYL teachers, which included significant people, places, and events that construct their professional teacher identity, as well as to find out how they understand themselves in the future as professional EYL teachers. The interview sessions were conducted using *video-calling* (Zoom) as it closely resembled the natural back and forth of face-to-face communication, including verbal and nonverbal signals (Salmons, 2011). Open-ended questions were asked of the participants using semi-structured interview formats. Each session lasted approximately 60 minutes, followed by the next technique in collecting data, *photovoice*. The language used for the interview was *Bahasa Indonesia* and English. Three participants (Heru, Susi, and Yuli) preferred using *Bahasa Indonesia* during the interview, while Andi felt more confident using English.

Photovoice was employed to incorporate photographs related to their life as EYL teachers during the interview. In this study, the participants were allowed to show how they envision themselves personally and professionally as EYL teachers through photographs. This technique has been proven powerful apart from essential interviews as it allows participants to tap into their "visual" voices to access memories and thoughts they might not recall in other ways (Wang & Burris, 1997). Before the interview, I informed the participants to capture at least 20 photographs representing their world as EYL teachers. I then scheduled a time and date for a formal online interview two weeks later. Two days before the interview session, I e-mailed the participants to remind them about the interview. I also prompted the teachers to choose only the ten most essential paragraphs. The forced shrinking of the photographs right before the interview enabled the teachers to reflect deeply and engage directly with their chosen photographs (Chao, 2014).

Data Analysis

Since this study focused on interviews and classroom observations, I followed the recommendations from Emerson et al. (2011) for the process involving a line-by-line data analysis of observation field notes and interview transcripts. Accordingly, I revisited the observation data several times to make sense of the interactions I witnessed. As soon as I returned from each online classroom visit, I wrote my field observations and reflections in a readable form. I then read the field notes closely and composed in-process memos to identify what I saw in the classroom. The data

from the photovoice interviews was also analyzed similarly to those from the primary interviews.

Next, I coded the notes using two different methods: open and focused coding. I read the notes line by line during open coding to identify ideas, themes, and issues. During focused coding, I reanalyzed each line for evidence of topics identified during open coding. As Emerson et al. (2011) suggested, field notes should be treated as a data set through which the researcher goes back and forth, reviewing and re-examining what has been written down while consciously seeking themes, patterns, and variations within the record. All participant interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for emerging themes. I read the transcripts closely and grouped them under similar labels and categories, following Saldaña's (2015) method of employing several coding cycles and a constant comparative method (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

The validity of this study was enhanced through triangulation, member checking, and prolonged engagement with the data. This study used multiple data sources (interviews, observations, photovoice) and methods to corroborate findings and ensure that the interpretations are grounded in the participants' experiences. Member checking involves sharing preliminary findings with participants to validate interpretations and ensure they resonate with their lived experiences. As for the reliability of the analysis, this study ensures consistency in interpretations across different stages of the data analysis process by adhering to the research questions, theoretical frameworks, and analytic procedures outlined in the study protocol.

RESULT

The process in the shaping of professional identity of EYL teachers

The first question related to the process that has shaped the participants' teacher professional identity. Through the process, six themes emerged and were elaborated on below.

Critical events

From the interview sessions with the participants, I discovered that the participants' professional identities were marked by some critical events they experienced long before deciding to become EYL teachers. The first participant, Heru, stated

I had never expected to become a teacher in the first place. Initially, I wanted to become an engineer. Unfortunately, I did not pass the state university entrance

test. Long story short, my school counselor advised him to take the admission test to the education department. My counselor believed that I had great potential in teaching since I used to teach my juniors to participate in science competitions. **(Heru, Lines 50-55)**

Like Heru's experience, the second participant, Susi, did not expect to become a teacher.

My decision to take the English Education department was influenced by my mother. She wanted her daughter to become a teacher since she considered teaching the most suitable job for women. **(Susi, Lines 70-73)**

In terms of the learning experience, a positive experience in learning how to teach EYL can also contribute to shaping a teacher's professional identity. The study found that Heru and Susi share similar stories of EYL lecturers heavily influencing their ways of teaching in higher education.

In contrast with the novice teachers, the experienced teachers, Andi and Yuli, were exposed to the teaching profession long before they entered teacher training institutions. Andi revealed that his interest in teaching began when he observed his father, who was also an English teacher. Similar to Andi, the reason Yuli revealed that their decision to become a teacher derived from their parent's desire for their daughters to pursue a teaching career. Yuli shared the following story during the interview:

My parents have nine children. The girls are all teachers. My mother thinks becoming a teacher is good because we can go home at 11 am and do household chores for the rest of the day. **(Yuli, Lines 63-65)**

Based on the interview, a teaching career is conducive to family life as teachers have flexible working hours compared to other jobs. The extract above shows how Yuli imagined her job as a teacher, as suggested by her mother. This shows that their different side of identities are interrelated. This finding resonates with (Beijaard, 2019 Kayi-Aydar, 2019 Moloney 2010a), whose study explained the significance of family background or members in constructing a teacher's professional identity. From this point, significant persons could influence teachers' professional identity development. Thus, teacher education programs must pay more attention to raising awareness of developing teachers' professional identities.

Professional development

One way to construct the participants' teacher identity based on open-ended interviews and photovoice results is their participation in various professional development programs. Some reflected that they developed their professional

development by participating in teaching workshops, enriching their teaching knowledge, and joining teaching conferences as participants or presenters.

Heru revealed his professional identity developed through participating in various teacher professional developments. Furthermore, he often invested his salary in signing up for teacher training programs and purchasing textbooks for teaching English to Young Learners. To gain an advanced career in the field of EYL, he took the Cambridge Assessment Test for EYL teachers to certify himself as a professional EYL teacher. Upon completing the test, he gained the highest band for the test. He revealed that he intentionally pursued his more significant change in teaching EYL internationally.

"Because I feel it is my passion (teaching EYL), so I pursued the certification" (**Heru, Line 207-208**).

Holding that certificate, he said he can teach EYL in other countries that use English as a Second Language.

Susi also added that participating in various teaching workshops mainly shaped her professional identity. She proclaimed that attending teaching workshops gives her a positive impact in terms of teaching English and classroom management. Susi presented a photograph when attending an extensive reading workshop. She said the workshop was beneficial because she could apply the knowledge directly. As a result, she initiated an extensive reading program at school to promote students' learning through literacy.

Reflecting on her experience, the most challenging aspect of her teaching practice was when the students were difficult to handle. From the excerpt above, it is reported that Susi claimed low self-efficacy (Timošćuk & Ugaste, 2012) in teaching, primarily regarding classroom management. This situation most likely occurs due to her lack of experience handling children in the classroom. According to Kelchtermans & Ballet (2002), a novice teacher, when entering professional life, might experience something that he/she had never imagined before, or it is called praxis shock. Susi found this an obstacle in teaching and was still figuring out how to overcome such a problem. Therefore, she would join any teaching workshops mainly focusing on classroom management. This aligns with Ruohotie-Lyhty (2013), who found that participating in teacher training, which focuses on specific issues that teachers still lack, would strengthen one's professional identity. This finding suggests

teachers' voices and needs are necessary before designing suitable professional development programs.

On the other hand, two experienced teachers in this study (Andi and Yuli) reveal that they frequently joined professional development focusing more on teaching methodology, especially in integrating technology into their teaching practices. Yuli further claimed:

I have learned a lot about this COVID-19 condition, especially about technology. Alhamdulillah, we (the teachers at her school) have learned how to use Google Educator in 12 units. Then, I learned how to apply it. Well, it can be applied in this COVID period. (**Yuli, Lines 183-187**)

Yuli's story illustrates that technology has become one of the teaching aspects that must be learned to reconstruct her teacher identity in this situation. She is proficient with technology as an experienced teacher who has taught for over ten years. Recently, it has been found that technology enables young learners to be more engaged in language learning than traditional teaching (Effiong & Bubaraye, 2017).

Furthermore, some participants were reported to enhance their knowledge about teaching young learners by investing their time and money in collecting several books about teaching young learners, watching teaching young learners' videos from YouTube, and gaining insightful teaching methodology from various teaching websites.

Community of practice

Based on the interview, Yuli's participation in the teacher's community has developed her sense of being a teacher as she continuously interacted with practitioners in the same field. This experience might also improve her self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is considered one of the significant factors in shaping one's professional identity (Karaolis & Philippou, 2019). Canrinus et al. (2012) also found that teachers with solid self-efficacy will have a strong professional commitment and will tend to feel satisfied with their jobs.

Another experienced teacher, Andi, also highlighted that participating in a teaching-learning community enhanced his professional role. As he entails teaching other subjects besides English, his participation in such communities defines his role as an elementary school teacher even though he did not hold teacher certification to teach in elementary school.

Teaching Experience

From the participants' narratives, it is found that their teaching experience also contributed to shaping teachers' professional identity. Some stated that their sense of teacher identity departs from their experience conducting teaching practicum. In contrast, other experienced teachers mentioned that the length of the teaching period has shaped their teacher identity as professional EYL teachers. The following expert shows how the teaching practicum is connected to the participant's teacher professional identity.

Through the interview, Heru revealed that his experience conducting a teaching practicum as a student teacher in the EYL course helped him figure out how to teach young learners English.

Andi mentioned that he found what he likes to do with English and integrated his creative personality into teaching practice. Such an experience during practice teaching can set an aspirational goal that the teacher will work to implement in the actual class. The excerpt echoes Pennington and Richards (2021), who found that a language teacher works to construct an identity that integrates increasingly affluent general and specific teaching skills operationalized in performance about the teacher's values and goals.

Interestingly, two experienced teachers claimed that their length of teaching experience contributes to their teacher professional identity development. Yuli had been teaching for 23 years, and it led her to become a more mature person. For example, when I came to observe her session with grade one students, Yuli managed to handle the chaotic situation by observing the problems that the students had and tried to listen, and after that, the class ran well. This period has contributed to her professional identity as she identified herself as a caring teacher. This finding is in line with Kanno and Stuart (2011). Their study found that teachers' self-efficacy improves throughout the year as they become competent pedagogically regarding subject matter. I noted that their authoritative stance also made them more detached from students.

School as a professional space

The school context contributed to developing the participants' professional identity as EYL teachers. The results of this study show that positive interactions between teachers and school administrators impact teachers' job satisfaction and motivation to develop their professionalism as EYL teachers. The following story

portrays how Heru's school administrator gave him a chance to choose at which level he would feel comfortable teaching:

At the beginning of my teaching year, I was placed in junior and senior high school since the school foundation did not need an English teacher to teach in elementary school. However, the year after, Qadarullah (Destiny of Allah), the school administrator, offered me a teaching position in an elementary school. **(Heru, Lines 119-128)**

This interview demonstrates how Heru negotiated his identity through the school administrator. In this case, it is shown that the school administrator's support contributed to developing his professional identity as an EYL teacher. The influence of school administrators is considered a significant factor in shaping professional identity, as revealed in several studies (Caihong, 2012; Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Tsui, 2007). This reveals how the negotiation process involved interaction with the school administration.

It is clear from the interview that a teacher's satisfaction in doing his/her job is an important indicator and might be interrelated with other indicators of teachers' sense of their professional identity. How Yuli felt satisfied with the school administrator might grow her stronger sense of professional role. She used many opportunities the school gave her to improve her professionalism inside and outside the school.

Furthermore, the student's role is also considered a pivotal aspect of teaching and learning. In a photovoice interview, Susi showed me a picture of her student role-playing as a weather forecaster. Susi pointed out that her professional identity as an EYL teacher developed as she observed that her students could apply what she had taught. As a teacher recognizes that his/her teaching methods are successful, proven by students' improvement, it may lead to the teacher's confidence in their ability. This resonates with Canrinus et al. (2012), whose study revealed that teachers' self-efficacy improvement affected their enthusiasm and professional commitment.

Teachers construct and reconstruct their professional identity according to their interaction, which might involve students' feedback in the teaching and learning process. The teachers can always reflect on what worked and did not work in the classroom by observing their students' behavior and achievement in the classroom. This reflection can help the teacher become more confident in classroom management, their autonomy, and the development of their professional identity as a teacher.

Lastly, student motivation was also found to be the resource that shaped a teacher's professional identity. Through the photovoice interview, Heru presented a

picture of him with his Indonesian student who was born and raised in Japan and could not speak Bahasa Indonesia or English as he returned to Indonesia. Heru found it was a challenging situation at that time, but he was motivated to facilitate this student in order to be comfortable and have a solid motivation to learn the language.

TEYL

The interview indicates that the participants' professional identity was shaped by their passion for English, children's development, and flexible curriculum. When most of the teachers were confused about designing their teaching materials since there was no fixed curriculum for teaching English in the elementary school, interestingly, one participant cited that a flexible curriculum could enhance his creativity in teaching.

Andi put forward his intrinsic motivation or personal enjoyment from being a teacher. Without any fixed standard in teaching, he could gain motivation and strengthen his professional identity. Heru also highlighted that intrinsic motivation departed from the teacher's satisfaction with teaching EYL. Even though Heru was single and had no children yet, he committed to having this passion for children's development. He also stated that he wanted to pursue a career in teaching EYL. He projected his future career as a teacher trainer in the EYL arena and wanted to build his elementary school. Therefore, he invested more to develop his professionalism in EYL teaching. This passion also motivated him to be a loyal teacher at the school he was teaching at. According to Latham & Pinder (2005), work motivation is an excellent source of teacher identity since it can impel a person to spend time, energy, and resources to initiate behaviors related to his/her work. From this study, it can be concluded that teachers' passion for the subject of EYL itself led to an improvement in their work motivation, which in turn contributed to the shape of their professional teacher identity.

How EYL teacher professional identity construction journey affects their belief and practices in teaching EYL

Teacher Reflections

From this study, I realized that shaping teachers' professional identity influenced their belief in teaching EYL. The first category related to teacher reflection is being a reflective teacher who is involved in beliefs about teacher roles (Domović & Vidović, 2019). This means that their experiences have shaped their belief that a

teacher should always reflect on their teaching practice, such as dealing with their characteristics, the need to be more resourceful, and reflecting on what they have known about teaching.

This aligns with Musthafa (2013), who argued that children's characteristics differ from adults. Therefore, the teacher's role in creating a positive learning experience is paramount. This finding implies that reflective teachers must reflect on their manner, which needs to be suitable for teaching young learners. Moreover, reflective teachers also relate to how the teacher plays their agency to become resourceful teachers (Kayi-Aydar, 2015). The following statements show how teachers believe they constantly improve their professionalism.

I happen to have a student with dyslexia, so I think I need to have this kind of book. I will set aside my income to buy imported books that support my performance in teaching EYL (**Heru, Lines 231-233**).

Unlike Heru, Yuli reflected that a teacher is a role model and an inspiring person.

Because I am willing to take on difficult or troublesome matters, such as bringing a guitar, making learning media, etc., a new teacher with no experience may find this troubling (**Yuli, Lines 82-84**).

The excerpts above demonstrate that teaching is reflective of the teacher. Reflecting upon their experiences shaping their professional identity, the teachers believe they are role models (Susi, Andi) and inspiration (Susi, Yuli) for students. From the findings, all the participants perceived that teaching EYL is evolving. Teachers must constantly reflect on their experiences to improve their professionalism in the classroom (Canrinus et al., 2011).

Responses to the student's needs

Typical responses from the participants related to their belief about teaching English to young learners was that of being responsive to students' needs. Heru stated:

Children are innocent, straightforward, and not manipulative. Sometimes, their innocence excites me. They do not have the critical capacity we cannot compare with adults. Children do not feel bored or in a bad mood feeling. If we show them we are happy, they will also be happy. It is very different from teenage students. I have often prepared lessons and games; if the students did not like them, they would not physically and mentally get involved in the learning. However, if we are ready and cheerful, children will usually be engaged (**Heru, Lines 236-242**).

It is clear from the participants' comments that being responsive to students' needs entails acknowledging that students are individuals (Heru, Susi), differentiation

instruction to accommodate all students (Heru, Yuli), and using real-world applications to create meaningful learning experiences (Heru, Susi Andi, Yuli). Similar to Yuli, during my classroom observation, I found Andi wearing a doctor's classroom when teaching about the respiratory system to his students. He also addressed his students as junior doctors to create a meaningful and contextual learning environment. Contextual and meaningful classrooms are adequate for language learning (Pinter, 2009). From my observation (22 October 2020), Andi was thoughtful every time he was about to attend his classroom. He even told me about many teaching resources that might be useful for teaching EYL. As an EYL teacher, I could also reflect on how experienced teachers tried to upgrade their resources and chose to use something other than old material when teaching students since every year, there would be different students with different characteristics and needs that teachers need to accommodate.

It is related to beliefs about learning and learners.

The third theme that emerged from the data related to beliefs about teaching was related to the student-teacher relationship. In regards to the teacher-student relationships, Susi stated that:

I usually put myself as their friend. I am not ashamed if I have to play to be anything because if we are excited and dare to appear, they will also become excited (**Susi, Lines 112-114**).

This study reveals that the teachers' beliefs about teaching were reflective of the teacher, responsive to students' needs, and related to the teacher-student relationship (Zonoubi et al., 2017). Based on the interviews, participants demonstrated how they are responsive to the needs of their students. To create a meaningful learning environment, teachers must acknowledge that students are individuals, differentiate instruction to accommodate students' needs, and use real-world applications to create meaningful learning experiences when teachers learn English. The participants also explained that teaching involves connectedness between teachers and their students and caring for them as individuals within a professional boundary.

DISCUSSION

Consistent with earlier research, the participants shaped their professional identities through acknowledging the influence of both past and present experiences while envisioning potential future trajectories. Engaging with critical

events, teaching experience and investing on professional development program envision themselves as expert EYL teachers within their careers.

As highlighted in the literature (Flores, 2020), the process of professional identity formation among EYL teachers is dynamic and intricate. Their self-perceptions regarding classroom management, which serves as both the subject matter and medium of instruction, significantly influence this process (Richards, 2021). The current experiences of EYL teachers serve as a pivotal point from which they reflect on past experiences and anticipate future developments to construct their professional identities. This underscores the importance of past learning histories and present educational experiences in shaping the professional identity of student-teachers (Flores, 2020; Shieh & Reynolds, 2020).

As evidenced in the cited passages, the past experiences of student-teachers as language learners, often triggered by recalling their teachers' practices, reflect the didactic influence that teachers can impart on student-teachers' perceptions of education (Banegas, Pinner, and Larrondo, 2022). The finding of the study is in line with several studies that oversee that learning in teacher education programs can be seen as a way of becoming and being a teacher as well as the process of bridging individual as a person and as a teacher (Beijaard, 2019; Caihong, 2012; Canrinus et al., 2011; Farrell, 2011; Moloney, 2010b). From this point, it can be concluded that teacher educators might influence the development of teachers' professional identity. Thus, teacher education programs must pay more attention to raising awareness of developing teachers' professional identities.

Professional development is an important part in shaping professional identity. The result illustrates the role of agency by which the teachers actively engage in their professional development (Canrinus et al., 2012). This also resonates with Pennington and Richards (2015), who discovered that teachers' professional identity is developed as they integrate their experience in learning to become teachers into their teaching practices.

One of the aspects of a language teacher's identity is the teacher's engagement with one or more of the communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Based on the interview, Yuli's participation in the teacher's community has developed her sense of being a teacher as she continuously interacted with practitioners in the same field. This experience might also improve her self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is considered one of the significant factors in shaping one's professional

identity (Karaolis & Philippou, 2019). Canrinus et al. (2012) also found that teachers with solid self-efficacy will have a strong professional commitment and will tend to feel satisfied with their jobs.

Through participation in such a community of practice, Andi gained many insights that might benefit his teaching practice. Pennington and Richards (2015) mentioned that teaching is a profession, which means that teaching is viewed as a career in a field of educational specialization. In doing the job, every teacher requires specialized knowledge gained through academic study and practical experience. It is a field of work where entry requirements and standards determine the membership.

Pennington and Richards (2015) argue that pedagogical reasoning skills are required to collaborate the various kinds of knowledge needed for teaching and to apply the integrated knowledge in all stages of instruction. In playing their role, EYL teachers should become more confident in their sense of identity as teachers of young learners and in their self-efficacy to implement the integrated and automatized reasoning that underlies skilled performance.

Beyond practicing teachers' pedagogical reasoning skills, teaching practice also builds teachers' confidence that they know what to apply when teaching. Furthermore, observation during practice teaching and early classroom experiences construct teachers' sense of what is possible in language teaching and thus their ideal model for their teacher professional identity (Farrell, 2011). For example, teaching children, as shown in Heru's photovoice, requires learning ways to create enjoyable and fun teaching experiences without eliminating the sense of learning the language. The teacher can use various songs, games, and other interactive activities to engage the learners in teaching.

The study also found that teachers' job satisfaction significantly relates to their interaction with their colleagues at school. As discussed in the literature review section, motivation can determine the duration, intensity, direction, and form of teachers' behaviors (Canrinus et al., 2011). With work motivation, the teacher may continue their career. On the other hand, a teacher with solid motives for teaching tends to be loyal to their job (Karaolis & Philippou, 2019). The schools need to create a motivating and supportive environment in which the teachers can build good relationships with others.

The above description demonstrates the role of teacher agency in motivating their students, which significantly impacts the development of teachers' professional identity. This experience also can have an impact on a teacher's professional commitment. Day (2005) argued that students' achievement, attitudes, and motivation influence teachers' professional commitment. Therefore, teachers need to pay more attention to students' responses, behavior, and achievements to grow their sense of teacher professional identity.

CONCLUSION

Drawing upon the narrative approach by Connelly & Clandinin (1990), this study has unfolded teachers' lived 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 I gained from each participant, a teacher's professional identity is constructed in the interaction between the individual and the social construct in which teachers play a role. The study has also revealed the negotiation process that the teachers have ever done in order to balance their multiple identities to be more in harmony in the practice of teaching EYL.

Regarding the process of shaping teachers' professional identity, all participants responded that their professional identity as EYL teachers is influenced by their significant life events, such as their previous education, teaching experience, involvement in the community of practice, and their family influence. Furthermore, the participants also stated that school, as the context in which they construe the meaning of being a teacher, also plays a vital role in shaping their professional identity. Finally, the content of EYL itself, such as the status of English in the elementary curriculum and their interest in children's development, develop their personal beliefs and assumptions about teaching young learners English. The participants' stories, both novice and experienced teachers, demonstrated that they continue developing their professional identities. Therefore, expectedly, such identity development evolves throughout a teacher's career.

This study offers some implications for teaching English to young learners. The study's results emphasize the significance of teachers' experiences and school, social, and political contexts in shaping teachers' professional identity. This dynamic nature of the development of teachers' professional identity imposes the critical role of teacher agency so that teachers can map their state of being EYL teachers with

autonomy, motivation, and critical consciousness. Teachers can engage in regular reflection on their teaching practice to critically examine their beliefs, assumptions, and instructional decisions. They can use reflective journals, peer feedback, self-assessment tools, and video recordings to deepen their understanding of their teaching effectiveness and identify areas for refinement or innovation.

Furthermore, developing teachers' professional identity entails reflecting within situated contexts and how the teachers respond to the context. In so doing, the teachers must also invest their time in professional development and community of practice.

This study also has an implication for teacher education programs to purposefully make opportunities for pre-service teachers to reflect upon critical events to help them adapt and prepare upon starting their profession as EYL teachers. These kinds of experiences can be embedded in TEYL courses, though involving pre-service students in teaching experiences not only in junior and senior high school but also in elementary school with similar periods. School administrators need to develop the teachers' professional identity by giving sufficient support for the teacher to join several professional development programs. They also need to investigate any additional support required by the teachers, such as financial support and teaching workload, to increase students' motivation in the workplace.

Even though this only occurred in a small part of the larger contexts of Indonesia, the findings of this study are expected to contribute to the EYL teaching practices in general. However, the study can also be conducted in public elementary schools. Therefore, there will be a comparison to support the findings of this study. This study was conducted within in a short period of time, longitudinal study will provide more comprehensive understanding and complex phenomena as it allows researchers to capture development process, changes, and trajectories of the teachers in shaping professional identity. Longitudinal study will also provide more insights into how the teachers interact and evolve across different life stages.

Furthermore, it is recommended that future studies contribute to broader knowledge from different contexts (e.g., different genders, schools, or geographical settings) so that more feedback can be obtained as the considerations for the EYL policymakers to improve the teaching practice of EYL. Moreover, the concept of teacher identity is highly recommended to be one of the teacher competencies in Indonesia since it is related to passion towards teaching, dedication, and

commitment as a teacher so that it can be used as a way to find the right teacher whose passion in the teaching and working with children.

Finally, this present study employed narrative inquiry in which teachers' narratives were the primary source of data collection. My suggestion for future researchers in the arena of teacher identity is to consider various data collection methods such as reflective journals, multiple phases of interviews, or longitudinal studies.

REFERENCES

- Atay, D. (2008). Teacher research for professional development. *ELT Journal*, 62(2), 139–147.
- Avidov-Ungar, O., & Forkosh-Baruch, A. (2018). Professional identity of teacher educators in light of demands of pedagogical innovation. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 73, 183-191. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2018.03.017>
- Beauchamp, C., & Thomas, L. (2009). Understanding teacher identity: An overview of issues in the literature and implications for teacher education. *Cambridge Journal of Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057640902902252>
- Beijaard, D. (2019). Teacher learning as identity learning: models, practices, and topics. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 25(1), 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2019.1542871>
- Caihong, H. (2012). Changes and characteristics of EFL teachers' professional identity: The cases of nine university teachers. *Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 34(1), 3–21. <https://doi.org/10.1515/cjal.2011.001>
- Canrinus, Esther T., Helms-Lorenz, M., Beijaard, D., Buitink, J., & Hofman, A. (2011). Profiling teachers' sense of professional identity. *Educational Studies*, 37(5), 593–608. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2010.539857>
- Clandinin, D. J., & Caine, V. (2013). Narrative inquiry. In *Reviewing qualitative research in the social sciences* (pp. 178–191). Routledge.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, M. (2004). Knowledge, narrative, and self-study. In *International Handbook of Self-study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices* (pp. 575–600). Dordrecht.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Rosiek, J. (2019). Mapping a landscape of narrative inquiry: Borderland spaces and tensions. In *Journeys in Narrative Inquiry* (pp. 228–264). Routledge.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). Strategies for qualitative data analysis. In *Basics of Qualitative Research. Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Day, E. M. (2002). Identity and the young English language learner. *Multilingual Matters*.
- Domović, V., & Vidović, V. V. (2019). Development of teachers' beliefs as a core component of their professional identity in initial teacher education: A longitudinal perspective. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, 9(2), 119–138. <https://doi.org/10.26529/cepsj.720>
- Effiong, M., & Bubaraye, I. (2017). Teachers use Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to teach English in Senior Secondary Schools in Akwa Ibom State. *Equatorial Journal of Education and Curriculum Studies*, 2(2), 28–33.

- Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (2011). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. University of Chicago Press.
- Farrell, T. S. C. (2011). I am exploring the professional role identities of experienced ESL teachers through reflective practice. *System*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2011.01.012>
- Flores, M. A. 2020. "Feeling like a student but thinking like a teacher: A study of the development of professional identity in initial teacher education." *Journal of Education for Teaching* 46 (2): 145–158. doi:10.1080/02607476.2020.172465
- Gandana, I., & Parr, G. (2013). Professional identity, curriculum and teaching Intercultural Communication: An Indonesian case study. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 26(3), 229–246. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07908318.2013.833620>
- Gatbonton, E. (2008). Looking beyond teachers' classroom behavior: Novice and experienced ESL teachers' pedagogical knowledge. *Language Teaching Research*, 12(2), 161–182.
- Goodson, I. F., & Cole, A. L. (1994). Exploring the teacher's professional knowledge: Constructing identity and community. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 21(1), 85–105.
- Hawanti, S. (2014). Implementing Indonesia's English language teaching policy in primary schools: The role of teachers' knowledge and beliefs. *International Journal of Pedagogies and Learning*, 9(2), 162–170. <https://doi.org/http://www.tandfonline.com/action/showCitFormats?doi=10.1080/18334105.2014.11082029>
- Kanno, Y., & Stuart, C. (2011). Learning to become a second language teacher: Identities-in-practice. *Modern Language Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2011.01178.x>
- Karaolis, A., & Philippou, G. N. (2019). Teachers' professional identity. In *Affect and mathematics education, fresh perspectives on motivation, engagement, and identity* (Eds., pp. 397–417). Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-13761-8>
- Kayi-Aydar, H. (2019). Language teacher identity. *Language Teaching*, 52(3), 281–295. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444819000223>
- Kelchtermans, G. (2011). Professional responsibility: Persistent commitment, perpetual vulnerability? In *Professional Responsibility. New horizons of praxis* (C. Sugrue, pp. 113–126).
- Latham, G. P., & Pinder, C. C. (2005). Work motivation theory and research at the dawn of the twenty-first century. *Annu. Rev. Psychol*, 56, 485–516.
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge University Press.
- Martin, A.D., (2018). Teacher identifies and English learners in mainstream classroom: A discourse analysis. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, 16(2), 130-151.
- Moloney, M. (2010a). Professional identity in early childhood care and education: Perspectives of pre-school and infant teachers. *Irish Educational Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03323311003779068>
- Moloney, M. (2010b). Professional identity in early childhood care and education: Perspectives of pre-school and infant teachers. *Irish Educational Studies*, 29(2), 167–187. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03323311003779068>
- Musthafa, B. (2013). Teaching English to Young Learners: Through the Eyes of EFL Teacher Trainers. *ELT Research Journal*, 2(3), 95–110.
- Olsen, B. (2016). *Teaching for success: Developing your teacher identity in today's classroom*. Routledge.
- Pinter, A. (2017). *Teaching young language learners*. Oxford University Press.

- Republic of Indonesia. (2007). Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan Nasional Indonesia tentang standar kualifikasi akademik dan kompetensi guru. Menteri Pendidikan Nasional.
- Ruohotie-Lyhty, M. (2013). Struggling for a professional identity: Two newly qualified language teachers' identity narratives during the first years at work. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 30(1), 120–129. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2012.11.002>
- Richards, J. 2021. "Teacher, Learner and Student-Teacher Identity in TESOL." *RELC Journal* 003368822199130. doi:10.1177/0033688221991308.
- Sachs, J. (2001). Teacher professional identity: Competing discourses, competing outcomes. *Journal of Education Policy*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680930116819>
- Saldaña, J. (2015). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Sfard, A., & Prusak, A. (2005). Telling identities: In search of an analytic tool for investigating learning as a culturally shaped activity. *Educational Researcher*, 34(4), 14–22.
- Solari, M., & Ortega, E. M. (2020). Teachers' Professional Identity Construction: A sociocultural approach to its definition and research. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, 35(2), 626-655, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10720537.2020.1852987>
- Timoššuk, I., & Ugaste, A. (2012). The role of emotions in student teachers' professional identity. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 35(4), 421–433. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2012.662637>
- Tsui, A. B. M. (2007). Complexities of identity formation: A narrative inquiry of an EFL teacher. *TESOL Quarterly*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1545-7249.2007.tb00098.x>
- Zein, M. S. (2017a). Elementary English education in Indonesia: Policy developments, current practices, and prospects. *English Today*, 33(1), 53–59.