Exploring Teacher's Identity in EFL Classroom: A Personal Reflection

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ABSTRACT

The importance of teacher identities catches the interest of many scholars. teacher identities are part teacher development as educator. The priority in education has been shifted to maximize the effectiveness of teacher role through developing their identity. Thus, it is a worth conducting a research which investigates. (1) What identity are constructed by teacher in English teaching learning process? (2) What are the factors that influence teacher's identity construction? The trajectory of this study was conducted through narrative inquiry research principles. The participants of this study were a teacher of one private university in Banjarmasin. To collect the data, semi-structured interview was administered. The collected data was analyzed through data familiarizing, decoding, and presenting the data. Finally, the result was presented descriptively. The finding of this study reveals type teacher identities in English language teaching. The data show that teacher identities includes language related identity, disciplinary identities, and context related identities. The data also show that the construction of teacher identities determines by teacher experience during teaching career and practiced-knowledge identity. Teacher experience develop through teacher trajectory of teaching. Meanwhile practiced-teaching skill cover language knowledge and pedagogic knowledge that teacher employ to help conducting effective teaching.

Keyword*: teacher identity, narrative, EFL classroom*

1. Introduction

The topic of teacher identities receives strong attention in recent language teaching and learning research agenda. A thorough understanding of how teachers see themselves is believed has significant contribution in teaching process. The subject has generally been approached from the perspective of what constitutes both the visible and invisible domains of the work and lives of teachers. The visible side includes what teachers do, for example, classroom interaction, assessment, material design, or task implementation. This is generally represented in the literature on teacher education as the technical or functional dimension of teaching. On the other hand, the invisible side involves more personal phenomena such as cognition, beliefs, expectations, or

emotions. Therefore, the exploration of teacher identity will be fruitful for both students and teacher.

Teacher identity is argued to be constructed as part of the process of learning to teach (Britzman, 2001). This process generally starts when students choose teaching as a professional alternative, even though they already have a clear notion of the meaning of teaching as a result of their experience as learners. Nevertheless, choosing teaching is a vital stage in assuming a new identity as a teacher, which evolves during the time they spend in a teacher education program. This provides pedagogical and subject matter knowledge as well as classroom experience, which are all considered essential factors in performing the teacher's role. Little by little, students then adopt a new identity. Classroom experience is generally planned in the final year as the stage of the practicum. During this time, student-teachers realize the true meaning of teaching as well as negotiating forms of participation and interaction that are fundamental domains of professional identity.

Generally, teacher identities can be defined as the way teachers perceive themselves and the images they present to others in their situated sociocultural contexts. Pennington (2015: 16). point out that identity can be viewed first in terms of the unique set of characteristics associated with a particular individual relative to the perceptions and characteristics of others. Teacher identity is a framework within which teachers build their own ideas about the teaching profession (Sachs, 2005). Therefore, through their identity teachers represent themselves by specific characteristics in particular situation. As process of development, identity concept is determined by professionalism attribute. Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop (2004) highlighted four elements of teacher's professional identity, stating that professional identity is "an ongoing process" of meaning experiences that connects "person and context," consists of "sub-identities" and needs the exercise of "agency" (p. 122). In a narrower context, these four elements are constituted in Barkhuizen's (2017) conceptualization of language teacher identity, perceiving that identities incorporate teacher's "cognitive,

social, emotional, ideological, and historical" aspect depicted on the process of "being and doing, feeling and imagining, and storying" how they are personally and professionally struggled in social interaction (p. 4). This concept explains the intertwine of identity and teacher professional development.

The priority in education has been shifted to maximize the effectiveness of teacher role through developing their identity. Although several studies had been conducted, it should be noted that the notion of identity among university teacher is require further investigation. Therefore, this study concern on kinds of identity constructed by the teacher and factor that influence. This research is aimed at investigating and exploring the existence of teacher identity in teaching learning process. In order to complete the purpose of this research, many research questions have been formulated: What identity are constructed by teacher in English teaching learning process? What are the factors that influence teacher's identity construction?

2. Method

The trajectory of this research was conducted through narrative inquiry principles. The study deals with teacher's identity while teaching English at University level. This research was conducted in one private university in Banjarmasin. The participant of this study is an English teacher. Further, some criteria were administered in choosing the participant of this research.

The participant of this study was selected based on the criteria; (1) participants have been teaching English for two years University level. (2) Participants is teaching at English language study program. (3) Lastly, Participants are accessible and willing to participate in this research. Before conducting data collection process, the participant was invited to attend the meeting with the researcher. The purpose of that meeting was to explain to the participants about the detail of this research including the purpose of this research, process of data collection, and so forth. The data were collected through semi-structured interview. In conducting interview, the researcher develops many interview protocols as guideline for interview session. Before

conducting interview, the participant of this research was told about the purpose of the research. The researcher also explained that the data gathered during interview will not be share to other party. The interview was conducted in face-to-face situation between participant and the researcher.

3. Result and discussion

3.1 What Identities are constructed by teacher in teaching learning process?

In this study, teacher identity is divided into two division which will be discussed subsequently. In this section the foundation of competency of teacher identity will be the main topic to be discussed. The elaboration covers language-related identity, disciplinary identity, context-related identity, self-knowledge and awareness, student-related identity.

Language-related identity.

The existence of identity is related to the teacher's background language and language proficiency. Language pedagogy requires both knowledge about language and specific skill to use the language in classroom. In classroom, teacher usually use English medium of interaction during teaching instruction. Therefore, teachers must have the ability to adjust communication strategies they use.

In university level, language instruction is usually conveyed through target language or in bilingual context since teacher and student might spend the same background language. in such context. The use English as language instruction will be beneficial for both teacher and students. In EFL context where target language exposure is very limited, classroom is the main stage for them to practice their target language. However, it is not easy for the teacher to conduct teaching learning process which uses English in all activities. It sometimes hinders student understanding of teaching content.

As novice teacher, the participant of this research dose has strong confidence of his language competencies. Since, she does not use English as medium

instruction every time she teach her students in the beginning of her career. She claims that it is not necessary if she produce some mistake while using English in her instruction process. She also emphasizes that this is happened only at the beginning of her career. As the time goes by, she realizes the important of using English medium of instruction as learning process. She also become more confident of her ability in English.

> *As non-native language teacher, I usually feel not confident about my language competencies. I afraid to make mistake when I have to use English in my classroom. By the time being, I become more confident to teach English by using target language in my classroom. Now, I try to use English in my classroom when I teach my students (Elyana; ITRV).*

English language needs to achieve certain threshold of competencies to be performed in classroom. The competencies cover language and pedagogic aspects. Richard (2010), in his review, explains that teacher must master particular skill, knowledge, values, and attitude in order to conduct good instruction. Therefore, there are competencies that can help you to be a good teacher.

Disciplinary identity

An identity of language teacher can be shaped by specific knowledge of the content of the field gained not only through experience teaching as a language teacher but also through formal education. Formal education which is connected to language teaching, such as Magister in English language teaching (M.Pd), not only builds relevant expertise, but also creates valuable disciplinary connections, support a career as a language teacher. In certain situation, a good degree will increase teacher's self-efficacy and build their confidence.

To be able to teach in university level, every teacher should hold a Magister degree in language teaching. The degree ensures every teacher have basic knowledge

of being a teacher. basic knowledge includes linguistics knowledge and pedagogic knowledge. The combination of both knowledge creates a balance teaching process for teacher. Teacher know what language aspect or skill are going to teach and how to teach it.

The participant of this research holds a Magister degree in language teaching. She took her graduate program in one of State University in Center Kalimantan. Practically, she admitted that the knowledge she got during graduate program help her much to teach her student. The knowledge equips her with an array of teaching method, evaluation techniques, and classroom management strategies. In short, she feels grateful for having a good degree as a language teacher.

> *I have an M.Pd degree in ELT. I graduated from one University in Palangkaraya. I took my graduate program maybe five years ago. The first reason I took graduate program because I want to enhance my knowledge of course. I right about that. There are significant differences between knowledge that I got in my undergraduate program and graduate program. I learn much about knowledge in English teaching learning process. For example, I learn many further theories in teaching English in classroom. This knowledge makes me more confident to teach English. (Elyana; ITRV)*

Having depth understanding and knowledge of linguistic and pedagogic knowledge is a critical foundation for career journey and can sharpen their identity as a teacher. Linguistics and pedagogic competence can be sharpened by enrichment of knowledge through teaching trajectory and language formal education. The interaction of both processes produce a critical factor that can influence teacher identity construction (Penington & Richard, 2016:9). In short, teacher develops only through experience but also through formal education.

Context-related identity

Different context of teaching learning process particularly requires specific understanding of teaching. New teaching context offer new opportunities and challenges for teacher. New teaching context comes along with fresh teaching circumstances. Many new teachers partner that can offer some new experience in teaching process. On other hand, teacher is required to adapt as quickly as possible. New context teaching usually offer different requirement to the teacher. To be successful, teacher must adapt and reconstruct his/her identity.

The participant of this research has experienced the situation where she had to adapt into new teaching situation. At the beginning of his career, she was accepted in the one of development program in one state university. At this program, she was a part time teacher with less-demanding teaching context. She used to teach in the morning for one class with beginner class level. At that class she taught English for beginning level for student across program study. Recently she was accepted at the one of private university in Banjarmasin. At this university she has a role as full time teacher and teach at English study program. She realizes that she needs to adapt to new teaching environment which more demanding from the previous one.

> *I teach in the private university now, but previously I also teach in the private university. The two university provide different circumstances t as a language teacher. in state university, I only a part time teacher. it means I don't have really much to do. I also teach an ESP class with beginning level., Meanwhile for in private university, I become full time teacher at English department program. So I need to adapt myself to the new teaching situation. Because I realize it is different from the previous one (Dea; ITRV).*

New teaching context usually offer many opportunities and challenges for teacher. Teacher usually have new work culture that is different from previous one. On the excerpt above, the participant realize she came to new university and want to adapt herself. Being a fulltime teacher in an English study program absolutely requires different attitude from being teacher in ESP program.

Another reflection has been made by the participant regarding the nature of student characteristics. In her previous teaching class, she had mostly non-English study program students. The students are from many program studies who are required to learn English as part of the curriculum. Meanwhile at the new teaching class, she has English study program students. Obviously, they have significant gap among characteristics as English language learner.

> *Because in the private university I teach in English study program, I know that I have different student. I mean in term of motivation and the way the learn. So I have to reshape the way I teach them because the needs also different (Dea; ITRV).*

From the excerpt above, we can see that the teacher adjust her teaching process to meet her current students needs. The consideration to adjust her teaching process comes from the fact that students from English study program requires more complicated teaching objectives than students from ESP program. As Barkhuizen & Mendieta claim "different teacher identities are negotiated at different time and different context depending on who they are and what they are doing…" (2020: 4).

Students-related Identity

English language teacher should not only focus on teaching material but also students' characteristics. Students characteristics gives teacher a valuable indicator on how to design an effective language teaching process in classroom. An effective teaching learning process can meet current students' need. Students will actively

engage in teaching learning process when the activities can give them something to learn. Thus, teacher takes students characteristics into consideration.

On interview process, the participant of this research explains that students' characteristics are one of significance challenge when she arrived to new teaching context. In the previous university, she taught ESP student with limited interest in learning English because they come from non-English study program. On other hand, when she at the private university she teach student from English study program. Therefore, the students are different in term of motivation and needs.

The participant explains that in new teaching context the students are more motivated than students in her previous university. The participant claims that it is easier to teach student when they have strong motivation to learn. Motivation will influence the way student perceive they teacher and what they have in their classroom. Student with strong motivation usually are willing to engage in learning activities. Besides, they are willing to invest more time and energy in learning inside and outside classroom.

Another challenge that the participant has when she move to new teaching context is student needs. There significant array of different need between student form students from non-English study and program English study program. The first usually are required to learn basic English or English skill that can support their learning trajectory in their program study. There is no need to learn advance knowledge of English. Meanwhile the latter, are required not only English knowledge but also have to learn pedagogical knowledge. Since, they are going to be an English teacher. Therefore, the teacher should provide a learning situation that can help them to achieve those competencies.

> *When the first I arrive at my new university, I realize that I am going to teach a new learning classroom. I don not have experience to teach English students before. So I need to carefully plan my teaching learning process. I also need to perceived this*

new learning environment differently from the way I used before

(Dea; ITRV).

The aforementioned excerpt show that teacher identities are dynamic and shifting construction which are influenced by social and context. Farrel (2009) states that teacher experience is co-constructed institutional culture where they belong to. On their study, Varghese (2005) found that teacher-student relationship is among the factors that potentially teacher construct in the future. Therefore, teacher identities are socially and contextually negotiable and constructed.

3.2 What are the factors that influence teacher's identity construction?

The following part explain many factors that influence the construction of teacher identity in teaching learning process. Using abduction principle, the following discussion mainly refer to Barkhuizen & Mendieta (2020) concept. The following discussion includes experience and history factor and classroom practice factors.

Experience and History Factors

Teacher experience and history are developing through their career. For many, their experience and history of teaching begin when they are in pre-service teacher when they have practicum in their course. The experience they have during pre-service teacher can be different from what they are in-service teacher. It is quite obvious that many teacher programs fail to fill the gap between pre-service teacher and in-service teacher world. Thus, the gap could change teacher identities.

Teacher history or experience is perhaps the most influential factor in identity construction. On her interview, the participant of this research admitted that how she perceives language teaching during pre-service and in-service is different. The discrepancy comes between the imaginary teaching learning process and the reality. She emphasized that the ideal teaching learning process that exist in referential book does not always come in real classroom. the same thing happened to ideal imaginary

teacher profile that she had before teaching career. In nutshell, teacher identities dynamic poses strong correlation with what happened in teacher career.

> *I have been teaching for several years but not too long actually. During this time, I found many bittersweet memories as a teacher. Teaching is simple as it is written in the book. I ever feel frustrated because I am not able to handle one of my students (Dea; ITRV).*

Practiced Teaching Skill

Every teacher is equipped with an array of teaching skill that are implemented during teaching practice in classroom. For English language teacher, the types of teaching skill include language teaching and pedagogic teaching. Well implemented of those skill will result an effecting act of teaching. Yet, different context requires different teaching skill.

Practicing particular type teaching within different context makes teacher more flexible to adapt new challenge or circumstances. A degree of successful in being flexible is in line with teacher language and pedagogic knowledge. Teachers need to integrate various knowledge in teaching learning process. Flexible teaching is a product of internalizing what teacher have learned and suit it to specific context. Being flexible and adaptive to select particular strategies to teach build teacher confidence.

> *I teach English in my previous university but it is not English class, I mean the student not from English student. Because it a language development program, every teacher teach base on fix curriculum with given teaching material. So I just vary the strategies or activities in class room. I try to vary kind of teaching strategies that I use in classroom meeting to meeting. It is different when I arrive at my new university. I teach English student there. Of course there many differences*

in how I teach in my new university compare to my previous.
New curriculum, student need, student competences for
example. But it ok, I am ready for that and I can adjust my
teaching strategies (Dea; ITRV).

The aforementioned excerpt shows during classroom interaction teachers develop their as personal and social figure. Pennington & Richard (2016) highlights "Internalizing what has been learned in course and teaching practice build confidence in new teacher …" (p.16). Teacher will reflect on what to pick up from their knowledge to conduct the best practice. Reflection on practice leads teacher identities evolvement.

4. Conclusion

This study aims to identify types of teacher identity and factors that influence it. Type of identities that posed by the teacher are related to how they perceive themselves as language user. Further, teacher identities are also sharpened by the disciplinary they have as a teacher. The higher their status of disciplinary, the better their confidence in teaching will be. Besides, teacher identities are constructed in a classroom as where social interaction happened between teacher and student. Practically, student characteristics define how they way teacher perceive teaching learning process.

The finding of this study confirms that teacher identities are not entity but rather a dynamic construction. Data analysis shows that teachers' experience and practiced-teaching knowledge play important determiner in teacher construction. Teacher identities develop through teaching experience most teacher have in their teaching career. During his trajectory, teacher might have different teaching situation which enrich their experience. Teacher identities are also influenced by teaching knowledge or skill that the teacher practice in classroom. Different teaching context offer variation in students' characteristics which require teacher creativity in choosing teaching strategies or activities in order to conduct effective teaching.

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