



English Teachers' Identity Development through Distance Learning

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Abstract

This paper aimed to describe the development of English teachers' identity through distance learning during the pandemic. Since the notification of covid-19, many schools held distance learning to replace classroom learning and strengthen the teacher identity. Besides, the research is also to improve teachers' ability in teaching using technology and online media as a medium of learning. The focus of this research is to analyze how English teachers conducted distance learning to strengthen their teacher identity as English teachers. This qualitative research was conducted questionnaire and interview with three English teachers from a private junior high school in Indonesia. They conducted distance learning in their school using google meet, zoom meeting, making a creative video using Kinemaster, and others. The findings suggest that teacher identity in junior high school in order to empower teachers need a long process through constructing teacher identity perspective and developing professional teacher identity to be a teacher identity. After the implementation of distance learning, two English teachers become more innovative during distance learning, by creating online materials, sharing and giving tasks to the students creatively. The implication of these findings, there will be papers that revealed the internal and external factors which affected teacher identity development.

Keywords: distance learning; English teachers; teacher identity

Introduction

The topic of this research is language teacher identity. Teacher identity is a dynamic, ongoing process, and that teacher identity is influenced by a range of external experiences such as life experiences (Flores & Day, 2006) and internal factors such as emotion (Rodgers & Scott, 2008). There are two elements of teacher identity in this research, namely social identity, and professional identity to form teacher identity. Social identity is characterized by awareness of being members of certain social groups; the value associated with memberships; the effect, strength of feeling associated with membership (Tajfel, 1981). While professional identity can be stated as tension or dialectic between the subjective or personal aspect and inter-subjective or collective aspects. Teacher identity is shaped by personality and professionalism through many occasions whether in a group or individually.

Language teacher identity is very important to research in second language teacher education since teacher identities play a vital role in teachers' learning-to-teach process and instructional practices. Teacher identity means teachers' dynamic self-conception and imagination of themselves as teachers that change when they take part in varying communities, interact with other individuals, and their position in a social context (Beijaard et al., 2004; Rodgers and Scott, 2008; Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009). The identity of language teachers is both cognitive and psychological and is closely linked with their beliefs and feelings, with what they think and feel about their activities (Barkhuizen, 2017). Therefore, it gets influences ranging from how language teachers learn to perform their profession, how they practice theory and theorize their practice, how they educate their students, and how they interact and collaborate with their colleagues in their social setting.

The most important previous study stated that the Indonesian government has begun paying special attention to improving the quality of teaching. The passage of the 2005 Teacher Law, aimed at providing incentives for teachers to increase their qualifications and professional skills by doubling the salary of those who qualify (Evans L, 2011) is one concrete effort the Indonesian government has undertaken to improve the quality of human resources in this country. Within Indonesian contexts, research highlighting English teachers is still scarce, although there has been a handful of studies on individual teachers (Basalama, 2010; Widiyanto, 2005) as well as on English pre-service teachers' professional development (Afrianto, 2015; Kuswandono, 2013). Even though neither of these reflexive studies directly relates to the professional identity of EFL teachers, they nevertheless illustrate how context matters in the development of teacher identities. Another study investigating English educators in Indonesia was conducted by Manara (2012), an English teacher educator himself who utilized narrative inquiry to investigate the professional development of five English teacher educators in the institution where he worked. His findings indicate that identity construction is complex and involves multiple and competing discourses.

The critical gap occurred due to the widespread of Coronavirus in Indonesia since March 2020, the Indonesian governments require to start teaching and learning activity through distance teaching at every education level. The goal is that students can still carry out learning activities even though they did not meet the teacher (Aristovnik et al., 2020). The Indonesian Minister of Education and Culture, therefore, advises all education institutions from the lowest level of education to the highest level to pursue distance learning. As a result, teachers are required to shift their instructional style from face-to-face teaching approaches to web-based technology-based instruction. During this time, teachers are demanded to develop their skills and ability to teach and communicate using technology. However, because of the pandemic situation, most teachers deal with the challenges of lack experience in using technology.

The development of teacher identity is an ongoing process of construct and reconstruction of who the teachers are and what they are doing (Beijaard et al., 2004). As Castañeda (2011) stated that teacher identity can be generally revealed by what constitutes the visible and invisible domains of work and life. Most researchers agree that teacher identity is constructed in a social context which always shifting and dynamic. The objective of this research is to know English teachers' perspectives about teacher identity, to know the kinds of teacher professional development have done by the English teacher during the pandemic and to know the contextual factors which support or constrain the development the English teacher identity. This research focuses on revealing the English teachers' identity before Covid-19 pandemic and explaining their process of professional identity during pandemic in a private junior high school. The topic is important to be conducted due to the issues of teacher identity shift, especially the professional identity of English teachers when they have to prepared and taught materials for their students using technology or a distance learning. A case study has been chosen to portray and report this case using in-depth observation and multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2018).

Research Methodology

The research used a case study. The goal of case study is to allow researcher to obtain and examine data in a context or phenomenon. The selected cases are teachers, students and school staff who are members of a school community (Creswell, 2011). Case study data is used to describe a case in-depth in real-life comprehensively (Yin, 2012). In this study, the impact of teachers' identity was explored in-depth before and during the Covid-19 Pandemic in Indonesia.

A literature search was carried out to determine the conceptual and operational definitions of the research focus, namely data relating to teachers' identity before and during the Covid-19 Pandemic. The formation of instrument was based on the operational definitions. Data collections were done in stages, through distance learning and off-line events, interview and questionnaire to obtain in-depth data. Data analysis was conducted following established procedures for analysing observation items and indicators (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

According to Sugiyono (2005), "Technique of data collection is the most strategic step in research, because the main goal of research is to get data." Data collection used in qualitative research is a technique enabling data obtained in relatively long period. In this research, data collection technique the researcher used are observation, interview and documentation or triangulation. *Observation*, the researcher conducted participant sustainable observation to gain information from informant directly related to the topic researched by observing teachers' activities in preparing and performing learning process. *Interview*, in this research, the researcher interviewed teachers, headmaster and school staff of a private junior high school connected with personal and professional identity. The interview is conducted in-depth to get detail information. *Documentation*,

Hamidi (2004) stated that documentation is information derived from important notes, whether institution, organization, or person. According to Sugiyono (2013), documentation can be in the form of a manuscript, picture, or monumental work of someone. In this documental study, the researcher took pictures of working teachers, their work and analyzed them to get comprehensive information.

Data analysis is an attempt to break down a problem of focus of study into parts so that the structure and order of the form of something decomposed appear clearly visible and easily digested or captured in meaning (Helaludin & Wijaya, 2019). According to Walidin (2015), data analysis can be: *Descriptive analysis*, which is the data that has been obtain by the researcher and translated in form of sentences by describing the actual situation. *Comparative analysis*, the data is translated by the researcher into sentences by comparing one data with other related data. *Predictive analysis*, the data is translated by the researcher into sentences to estimate what will happen in the future based on existing data. *Causal analysis*, the data is translated by the researcher into sentences to explain the causal relationship. In this study, the researcher used descriptive analysis and comparative analysis to get comprehensive information.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

From three English teachers observed in junior high school, mostly based on the questionnaire and interview, indicate teacher identity built through *Language Teacher Identity* concept which complies; teachers' experiences of academic life or teacher biography, community activities, teacher learning, teacher cognition and teacher emotion.

Table 1: Conceptual framework of language teacher identity (LTI)

| Framework | Elaboration |
|----------------------|--|
| Community activities | Communities where teachers learn to teach their subject matter and their cognition evolve as they actively participate in the practices of teaching communities and seek membership to these communities. |
| Teacher emotion | Heightened state of being that change as a result of their reflections on past and future teaching practices and interactions with the dynamics of their teaching context and with their colleagues, students and students' parents. |
| Teacher cognition | Teachers' knowledge, belief and thoughts and of the ways they relate to their teaching practices in the classroom. |
| Teacher biography | Teachers' personal histories or biographical trajectories found to hold a crucial role in the construction and reconstruction of their pedagogical knowledge and in their growth as teachers in general. |
| Teacher learning | Teacher should be equipped with knowledge about language, language learning, language teaching, teaching practice and methodologies. |

After the conceptual framework of teacher identity was constructed through several dimensions, teacher identity developed naturally through phases. One of the phases is the Virtual School Teacher Professional Development. This happened because the covid-19 pandemic that

triggers the long-distance learning process for about two years and it continued to blend learning. Teachers and students must not gather during a pandemic, this condition forced teachers and students to use virtual learning methods. Among the school virtual learnings are e-learning, communities of learning, authentic learning, activity-based learning, individual needs, subject-based TPD (teacher professional development), Course-based TPD, and School-based TPD.

The E-learning model is one of the alternative long-distance learning models applied in the pandemic era. This model is very popular in Indonesia for the last two years.

"E-learning learning model is urgent in the pandemic era as a method of long-distance learning because the government prohibited the teacher and the students gather to make a crowd in a close distance. This model made me skilful in using long-distance learning because the condition forced me to change from the traditional model to distance learning" (Participant 1).

Since no other alternatives were used as a learning process in pandemic period, learning distance is best medium of learning.

"E-learning learning or long-distance learning with various media such as google classroom, google meet, WhatsApp, web model and other LMS (learning management system) are very important. Those models are applied to change the face to face meeting which were prohibited by the government" (Participant 2).

Long distance learning for many Indonesian junior high school is categorized as new model or even something new for students or teachers. Teachers and students were forced to adapt in a new model of learning during covid-19 pandemic. The transition era is very hard for the students or teachers for long distance learning needs some modern tools such as smartphones, tablet, laptop or personal computer. Students also need more budget to buy internet package.

"Virtual school or long-distance learning firstly shocked some teachers and students since it is new, but later long-distance learning is an accustomed one because learning process must run inspire of the pandemic. There were no other alternative ways in pandemic era for both teachers and students to have face to face meeting" (Participant 3).

Teacher identity development is also influenced by some factors such as teachers strengthening and constraining and psychological underlying processes. *Direct work environment, Wider context of higher education, contact with students and Staff development activities* are some factors that cause teachers strengthening and constraining and psychological underlying processes.

Table 2: Strengthening and constraining factors towards psychological process

| No. | Factors | Effects | Utterances |
|-----|--------------------------------|--|--|
| 1 | <i>Direct work environment</i> | strengthen or constrain sense of appreciation, sense of connectedness and imagining a future career trajectory | <i>"Distance learning made me more interactive with other colleagues in making learning videos, but sometimes I doubt myself in making them"</i> |

| | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| | | | (Participant 2) |
| 2 | <i>Wider context of higher education</i> | constrain sense of appreciation | "During the distance learning, I imagine myself teach another level of education" (Participant 1) |
| 3 | <i>Contact with students</i> | strengthen both sense of appreciation and sense of competence | "I appreciated my students which always join the distance learning and submit the tasks ontime." (Participant 3) |
| 4 | <i>Staff development activities</i> | strengthen sense of appreciation, sense of connectedness, sense of competence and imagining a future career trajectory | "Since the applying of distance learning, we always discussed about the materials together." |

Based on the findings above, teacher identity perspective is formed by teachers' experiences of academic life or teacher biography, community activities, teacher learning, teacher cognition and teacher emotion. Then some factors developed teacher identity are virtual school TPD and strengthening and constraining factors. The two elements affected from teacher identity perspective and teacher identity development and finally become the real teacher identity.

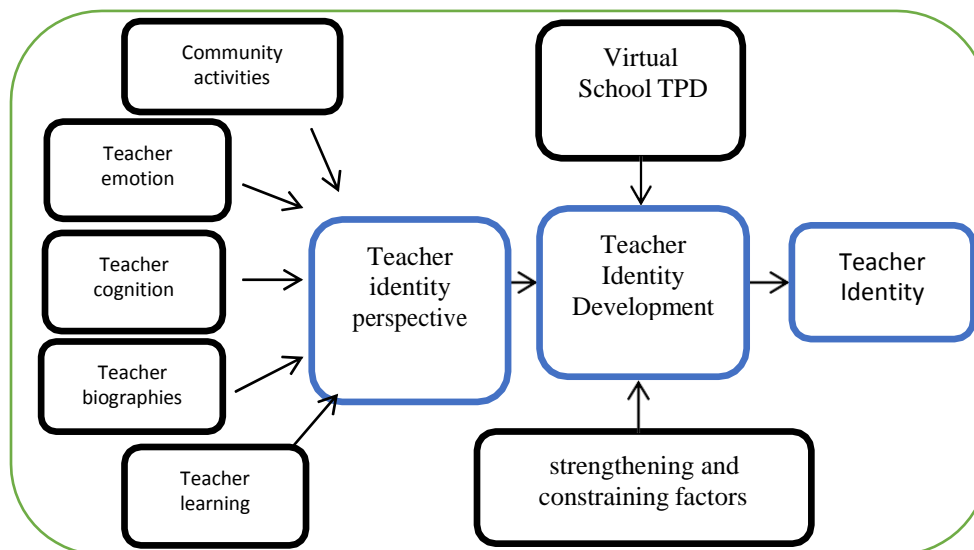


Figure 1. Language teacher identity conceptual framework

The unexpected findings are that teachers are forced to develop their professional development by teaching process using online media. This condition force teachers to create and develop learning model virtually because of the pandemic. The creativity of teachers influenced students in adapting the new model of learning through online media. Distance learning has become a new model during covid-19 pandemic and after.

Though the pandemic has been successfully controlled nowadays, the model of distance learning is still going on. Even in new normal distance learning can be done and mixed with

classroom meeting to be blended learning. Teachers experienced a very important teaching practice during the pandemic and in new normal era. This experience will be very useful for developing teachers' identity.

Discussion

The objective of the study is to describe English teachers' perspective about teacher identity, to know the kinds of teacher professional development have done by the English teacher during the pandemic and to know the contextual factors which support or constrain the development the English teacher identity. Then study contributed some findings that are important to know the perspective of English language teacher identity, its development and the essence of English teacher identity. Understanding the English teacher identity can improve the learning process and finally create better output and outcome of education.

The first finding that perspective language teacher identity is constructed by some dimensions such as teachers' experiences of academic life or teacher biography, community activities, teacher learning, teacher cognition and teacher emotion is in line with statement of Miles and Huberman (1994). The second finding, teacher identity development is formed by virtual school TPD. The unexpected findings are that teachers are forced to develop their professional development by teaching process using online media. This condition force teachers to create and develop learning model virtually because of the pandemic. The creativity of teachers influenced students in adapting the new model of learning through online media. This situation made betterment of distance learning, the distance learning process has been a new model for distance learning, this learning model developed teacher professional development (Elger & Russel, 2003). The third finding, there are some factors that support teacher professional development underlying psychological process. Among the factors are *Direct work environment*, *Wider context of higher education*, *Contact with students and Staff development activities* that strengthen and constrain teacher professional development (Lankveld et al, 2017).

The findings of research are the formation of English language teacher identity perspective, the professional teacher identity development and final teacher identity. The findings of this research are different from the previous ones because these findings are the combination of conceptual formation of English language teacher identity perspective and professional teacher identity development than result in teacher identity. These findings are more comprehensive than the previous research findings.

Conclusion and Suggestion

Based the discussion above, the researcher concluded that teacher identity is a construct of *teacher identity perspective* which consists of some dimensions such as teachers' experiences of

academic life or teacher biography, community activities, teacher learning, teacher cognition and teacher emotion, and *teacher identity development* that comprises school virtual TPD (teacher professional development) in which distance learning is the model of learning in covid-19 pandemic, and strengthening and constraining factors.

The factors are *direct work environment, wider context of higher education, contact with students and staff development activities* through psychological underlying basis, namely; sense of appreciation, sense of connectedness, sense of competence, sense of commitment and imagining a future career trajectory. The combination of two elements, *teacher identity perspective* and *teacher identity development* formed teacher identity holistically. Good teacher identity gives better learning methods and create good output and outcome of students.

School management especially, headmasters should support the development of teachers' identity by developing professional teacher development in several ways. Giving instruction to the teachers using LMS (learning management system) for distance learning such google meet, google classroom, zoom and the like improved the quality of learning. In house training for learning, short course in teaching management, joining teacher organization are suggested, in order to develop teacher identity.

Some dimensions of conceptual framework formed teacher identity perspective because teacher identity is not a sudden entity, it needs long and complicated processes. School virtual TPD (teacher professional development) in which distance learning is the model of learning in covid-19 pandemic worked well so that this unexpected phenomenon made the teacher identity be more complete and mature. Some elements of teacher professional development; *direct work environment, wider context of higher education, contact with students and staff development activities* helped teachers develop professional teacher identity if all process ran properly.

The reason of restricting this research is that teacher identity has wide coverage in word of research. The research restricted teachers' identity viewed from conceptual framework and the professional development of identity in order to conclude what really teacher identity is. This research is also limited to one of the private junior high school in small town as a portrait of real condition of teacher identity. For the future researcher, the findings of this study can be reference for to further and deepen the research or take other related topic researches. The future researchers can also conduct a research from one side of this topic to develop the essence of teacher identity.

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