CONSTRUCTING PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF AN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATOR IN INDONESIA

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Abstract:

Understanding how English language teacher educators construct their professional identity is crucial for developing effective and context-responsive teacher education programs. While academic qualifications and teaching experience are often seen as indicators of teacher quality, how these elements shape educators' self-concept is still underexplored. This study explores how an English teacher educator in Indonesia develops his professional identity through long-term classroom practice, academic progression, and reflective engagement. Drawing on a narrative inquiry approach, data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews and analyzed thematically to find out key dimensions of identity development. Findings show that professional identity is not static, but it evolves through the interplay of sustained teaching experience, leadership roles, postgraduate education, and active participation in professional communities. The participant's story highlights identity construction as a context-sensitive and lifelong process which is shaped by institutional roles, language use, and the needs of a multilingual teaching environment. This study emphasises the need for professional learning environments that go beyond credentials, promoting reflective practice, collaboration, and institutional support to nurture dynamic teacher identities.

Keywords: English language teaching, Indonesian higher education, narrative inquiry, professional identity, teacher educator development

1. Introduction

English Language Teaching (ELT) has become the focus of Indonesian education policy as the country seeks to improve the quality of human resources to address the global demands. English, serving as a foreign language in Indonesia, is widely recognized as a critical tool in the fields of communication, professional mobility, and academic advancement (Rozi, 2023). The growing importance of the language has caused increased

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expectations for ELT at all levels of education, from primary schools to universities. As a result, the government has emphasized the recruitment and development of qualified and professional English language educators (Gunantar, 2016). Teacher quality, especially the qualifications and teaching experience, has been consistently identified as the main factor that contributes to students' achievement and learning outcomes (Cirocki & Farrell, 2019). Yet, while several reforms have been introduced to improve English teachers' competencies, limited attention has been given to the professional development and identity formation of English teacher educators in higher education settings.

Teacher identity, particularly in the context of ELT, is not static. It is a dynamic and ongoing process that is shaped by a number of factors, such as personal histories, professional experiences, academic qualifications, and interactions within social and institutional contexts. Rushton *et al.* (2023) elucidate that identity is formed through the interplay of personal agency and contextual forces, such as institutional policy and culture. For teacher educators, for example, identity formation becomes even more complex due to their roles as instructors, researchers, mentors, and curriculum leaders. Although numerous studies have pointed out the competencies required for English teachers in Indonesia (e.g., Zein, 2017), fewer studies have investigated how English language teacher educators understand and construct their professional identities over time.

Previous studies have extensively focused on technical aspects of teacher training, such as language proficiency and pedagogical content knowledge (Zein, 2015; Wati, 2011). Others have examined systemic barriers to professional development, including bureaucratic inefficiencies and inadequate support from training agencies (Zein, 2016). While all these studies provide rich insights into the structural challenges facing teacher development in Indonesia, they often overlook the aspects of individual narratives and reflections that shape educators' sense of self. This present study explores how an English language teacher educator develops his professional identity through academic qualifications and teaching experience. The central research question guiding this study is: How do English language teacher educators develop their professional identity through their academic qualifications and teaching experiences?. The analysis in this study is guided by Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop's (2004) conceptualization of teacher professional identity as a dynamic, multifaceted construct influenced by teachers' subject matter expertise, pedagogical beliefs, and the contexts in which they work.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Teacher Identity and the Role of Qualifications

Teacher identity is a fluid and evolving construct, developed over time through interactions between personal histories, organizational structures, and professional roles. Identity is shaped by both structural conditions (such as school context and professional standards) and the agency of teachers to make meaning of their work (Rushton *et al.*, 2023). A widely recognized framework by Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop (2004) further

emphasizes that teacher professional identity is constructed through a combination of subject matter expertise, pedagogical understanding, and didactical knowledge, which are all shaped by ongoing reflection and contextual realities. For teacher educators, these dynamics become even more complex, as they are responsible for mentoring teacher candidates while also navigating institutional, disciplinary, and academic expectations (Barkhuizen, 2021).

In the context of Indonesia, qualifications are the main feature of teacher identity. As ELT becomes increasingly crucial for global competitiveness, academic degrees, particularly postgraduate qualifications, are considered not only as indicators of expertise but also as necessary for professional legitimacy. Cirocki and Farrell (2019) emphasize that highly qualified and experienced teachers are better positioned to support student achievement. However, despite national investments in recruitment and certification programs, few studies have examined how qualifications form the self-concept and identity of teacher educators in higher education, who occupy a unique space between language teaching, research, and academic leadership.

2.2 Professional Development and Experience in Identity Formation

Professional experience also plays a key role in how educators understand themselves. McLean and Price (2017) found that identity is constructed through iterative experiences of teaching, reflection, and discourse. Over time, educators have shifted from idealized expectations to more grounded and independent teaching identities. This mirrors the way many teacher educators in Indonesia likely experience their professional growth, beginning as subject matter experts and gradually developing a pedagogical identity shaped by years in the classroom and involvement in training and curriculum work. This growth is supported or hindered by the structure and quality of professional development.

Zein (2017d) identified three broad developmental needs for Indonesian English teachers: language, pedagogy, and classroom practice. These remain relevant for teacher educators, who must model effective practices for future teachers. Hayati, Armansah, and Ismail (2021) explored teachers' experiences in blended learning environments in Indonesia and found that teachers encountered multiple challenges, such as a lack of resources, low student motivation, and technology-related obstacles. However, they also noted opportunities for teachers to engage students in new and interactive ways. These findings highlight the importance of sustained professional learning tailored to teachers' working conditions and realities. Systemic issues such as bureaucratic inefficiency and underqualified facilitators (Zein, 2016a, 2016b) still influence the way teacher educators engage in identity construction through their professional development.

2.3 ELT in Indonesia and Its Influence on Educator Identity

Indonesia's evolving relationship with English shapes not only ELT policy but also the identity of English teachers and teacher educators. Even though English is not widely used in everyday life, the language is increasingly prioritized for academic and

professional advancement (Gunantar, 2016). Rozi (2023) argued that the rise of monolingual and multilingual ideologies in ELT classrooms symbolizes broader tensions between global linguistic prestige and local identities. English is frequently associated with elite status, particularly in the urban centers, and this perception influences the roles and expectations that are assigned to teachers.

Teacher educators must address these ideological expectations. On one hand, institutions often adopt English-only policies to promote fluency and international competitiveness. On the other hand, teachers themselves are embedded in a multilingual society. Their language practices often reflect a need to balance English with Indonesian and the regional languages they use. This sociolinguistic complexity becomes a key factor in how educators understand their roles, especially in multilingual classrooms. Rozi (2023) and Lie (2017) have noted that educators often face competing demands to uphold English proficiency, promote equitable learning, and retain cultural authenticity. These forces, educational policy, sociolinguistic context, and institutional culture, all contribute to shaping teacher educator identity in Indonesia.

3. Methods

This study used a narrative inquiry approach to investigate how an English language teacher educator constructs his professional identity through his academic qualifications and teaching experiences. Narrative inquiry is grounded in the belief that individuals make sense of their lives and professional roles through the stories they tell (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This method helped the researcher to explore the participant's lived experiences in depth and examine how his past and present intersect to shape his evolving identity as an educator.

To collect data, in-depth semi-structured interviews were used, involving an English language teacher educator from a public university in the Province of Gorontalo, Indonesia. The participant was selected purposively based on his educational background, years of teaching experience, and involvement in professional development. The participant is a male educator with over 25 years of experience in ELT. He holds a bachelor's degree in literature and a master's in English Language Education. In addition to his teaching responsibilities, he has served as Head of Department and regularly presents at academic forums. The participant represents an experienced professional who has witnessed the evolving landscape of English language education in Indonesia, making him well-positioned to reflect on how academic qualifications and teaching experiences contribute to his professional identity formation.

The interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia and lasted approximately 45 minutes. The participant was voluntarily invited to share personal stories related to academic journeys, teaching careers, and reflections on how these experiences contributed to who he is as a professional. The conversational structure of the interviews allowed the participant to narrate his development organically. Although the data were collected through narrative interviews, a thematic analysis approach was used to analyze

the narratives. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework, the researcher first transcribed and repeatedly read the interview data for familiarization. Initial codes were developed to capture recurring ideas, which were then grouped into broader themes reflecting key aspects of professional identity construction. The interpretation was guided by Beijaard *et al.*'s (2004) theoretical lens, which views professional identity as shaped by subject expertise, pedagogical competence, and personal agency in context.

4. Findings

4.1 Teaching Experience as a Foundation of Professional Identity

The participant describes his teaching experience as a significant contributor to his professional identity. His narratives reflect a progression from early career phases to a more seasoned role, where accumulated teaching years have shaped his sense of self as an educator. The participant began teaching in the English Department in 1998 and has since accumulated over 20 years of teaching experience. His account reflects the ways in which long-term classroom engagement and leadership roles have influenced his pedagogical identity.

> *"Saya sudah mulai mengajar sejak tahun 1998. Dari waktu ke waktu, saya semakin memahami bagaimana cara mengelola kelas, menyampaikan materi pembelajaran, dan membangun hubungan profesional. Saya juga pernah menjabat sebagai Ketua Jurusan selama empat tahun, yang memberi saya perspektif baru tentang pendidikan dan kepemimpinan."* (Participant)

> (I began teaching in 1998. Over time, I developed a better sense of how to manage a class, deliver teaching material, and build professional relationships. I also served as Head of Department for four years, which gave me new perspectives on education and leadership. (Researcher's translation))

This extended experience has afforded the participant a deep understanding of teaching, classroom management, and departmental operations. Such longevity contributes not only to his teaching approach but also to his confidence as an academic leader. As Santos and Miguel (2019) suggest, accumulated experience informs educators' beliefs, planning styles, and expectations, all of which shape their professional identities over time. This also lends support to Beijaard *et al.* (2004), who emphasize identity being shaped by teachers' evolving competence in their subject and their contextual roles within institutions.

4.2 Academic Qualifications as a Pathway to Expertise

The participant emphasises the role of academic advancement in shaping his identity as a competent and credible teacher educator. He has a Bachelor's degree in English Literature and a Master's in English Language Education. He also observes the diversity

of qualifications among his colleagues, with many earning degrees from institutions in Indonesia, Australia, and the United States.

> *"Dosen di Jurusan Bahasa Inggris ini memiliki beragam kualifikasi. Ada yang S2 dalam negeri, luar negeri, dan ada juga yang sudah selesai S3 dari luar negeri. Bahkan ada yang sudah mencapai Guru Besar. Ini menunjukkan satu hal bahwa kita semua berusaha untuk terus berkembang."* (Participant)

> (The lecturers in our English Department have diverse qualifications - some hold local Master's degrees, others from overseas institutions. Also, some lecturers have earned doctorates abroad. In fact, a number of our lecturers have even become full Professors. This shows that we all strive for continuous growth. (Researcher's translation))

This participant emphasizes that qualifications not only enhance individual expertise but also reflect the department's commitment to educational excellence. This institutional environment reinforces his identity as a scholar-educator who values formal credentials as a marker of professional growth. As Rahimi *et al.* (2020) and Lo (2021) note, academic qualifications are instrumental in enhancing teaching effectiveness and pedagogical understanding. This resonates with Beijaard *et al.*'s (2004) notion of identity being shaped by content knowledge and professional legitimacy.

4.3 Ongoing Development through Reflection and Engagement

The development of professional identity is not static but involves continued learning and reflection. The participant demonstrated a commitment to staying current and engaged with their fields. He discusses his ongoing involvement in the national and international conferences, in which he views a way to expand his pedagogical knowledge and keep pace with educational innovation.

> *"Saya aktif mengikuti seminar. Di sana saya bisa belajar tren pengajaran terbaru, memperluas wawasan, dan bertukar pikiran dengan rekan dosen dari universitas lain."* (Participant)

> (I actively attend academic seminars. I learn about new teaching trends, broaden my perspective, and exchange ideas with fellow lecturers from other universities. (Researcher's translation))

This proactive engagement supports his evolving identity as a reflective practitioner and lifelong learner. Lo (2021) emphasizes that participation in scholarly forums can enhance classroom innovation and teaching quality, which reinforces the educator's role as both a teacher and a learner.

5. Discussion

This study explored how an experienced English language teacher educator in Indonesia constructs his professional identity through long-term teaching experience, academic qualifications, continuous professional engagement, and reflective growth. The findings reinforce the idea that professional identity is dynamic and contextually shaped, as suggested by Beijaard *et al.* (2004) and Rushton *et al.* (2023). Instead of being a static attribute, identity emerges through ongoing negotiation between individual aspirations and institutional expectations.

Teaching experience emerged as a basic foundation of the participant's professional identity. His story traced a clear trajectory of development, from early challenges in classroom management to a more confident, pedagogically grounded educator. His leadership experience, especially serving as department head, further contributed to his evolving identity and self-perception as a competent academic. This supports Beijaard *et al.*'s (2004) view that teachers' identities are shaped by their perceived competence, experiences, and the roles they perform within their institutions. Academic qualifications served as both a credentialing tool and a source of professional confidence. The participant considered his formal education, particularly his master's degree, as vital for developing expertise and getting academic legitimacy. His recognition of peers with various educational backgrounds also reflected a departmental culture that values lifelong learning. This finding aligns with McLean and Price (2017), who highlight the role of academic progression in legitimizing educators' identities and enabling deeper engagement with scholarly discourse.

Importantly, the participant's commitment to ongoing professional development through seminars and academic conferences further shaped his identity as a reflective practitioner. His engagement with professional forums reflects not only just a desire for self-improvement, but also a deliberate strategy to stay relevant and innovative within the field of ELT. Lo (2021) and Hayati *et al.* (2021) note that such professional engagement helps educators internalize current pedagogical trends, which in turn reinforces their sense of belonging in the professional community.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the construction of professional identity in an experienced Indonesian English language teacher educator by using a narrative inquiry approach. The findings demonstrate that professional identity is not a fixed state but an evolving construct, informed by accumulated teaching experience, academic qualifications, continuous reflection, and active professional engagement. The participant's long teaching journey contributed significantly to his pedagogical confidence and understanding of institutional dynamics. Leadership roles further reinforced his identity as both an educator and a decision-maker. Formal academic qualifications, particularly at the postgraduate level, enhanced his subject-matter expertise and positioned him as a

credible scholar within his department. Meanwhile, his participation in academic seminars and conferences illustrated a commitment to professional growth and reflective practice, contributing to his identity as a lifelong learner and informed practitioner.

While the single-participant scope limits generalizability, the study offers valuable insights into how teacher educators in Indonesia, especially in multilingual, evolving educational environments, shape their professional identities. Future research should consider more samples and explore how institutional policies, global academic mobility, and digital pedagogies further develop identity formation. Institutions should invest in not only academic qualification pathways but also continued opportunities for reflection, leadership development, and professional collaboration.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

About the Author

Abid is a faculty member in the English Department at Gorontalo State University, Gorontalo, Indonesia. He obtained his doctoral degree from Curtin University in 2017. He also teaches undergraduate students majoring in Science, Economics, and Psychology. His research interests include English language education, textbook analysis and language skills development.

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