

Contextual Dynamics of Professional Identity Development in ELT Indonesian Graduate Students: A Grounded Theory Method

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ABSTRACT

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received

July 15, 2024

Revised

August 9, 2024

Accepted

November 12, 2024

Through the ever-changing nature of globalized English Language Teaching (ELT) enterprises, graduate students are urged to engage in ELT to continuously construct, develop, and improve individual professional identity (PI) which is very essential. This process is crucial for students to be recognized as competent teachers and as respected professional in ELT community, creating opportunities for achieving individual future career aspirations. Therefore, this research aimed to explore the impact of cultural environment and personal experience in the development of ELT professional, examining the interplay between self-identified PI, individual identity development strategies, and personal cultural education among ELT graduates. The research applied grounded theory method and used interviews as the major instrument to gather data from four ELT Indonesian graduate students with diverse backgrounds and experiences. The outcome of this finding showed that ELT graduates had firmly defined individual PI as intermediate-level professional, skills teachers, and multi-students of experts in the field of ELT. Moreover, partakers crafted and refined this identity by following self-identification and expanded personal insights through additional teaching or programs such as refining teaching skills, research capabilities, and active engagement in community service. Diverse professional backgrounds of ELT graduates impacted individual level of PI development. During this research, two participants showed a high level, while others signified a moderate, and a low level of PI. Those with a high level were teachers in formal and informal settings.

Keywords: *ELT professional identity; ELT graduate student; grounded theory; identity construction; identity development.*

How to cite

Urbaq, S.M. (2024). Contextual Dynamics of Professional Identity Development in ELT Indonesian Graduate Students: A Grounded Theory Method. *Pedagogy: Journal of English Language Teaching*, 12(2). 228-249
DOI: 10.32332/joelt.v12i2.9566.

Journal Homepage

<https://e-journal.metrouniv.ac.id/index.php/pedagogy>

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INTRODUCTION

Developing strong Professional Identity (PI) has become crucial in an increasingly complex and competitive professional landscape. Development of English language teachers is a socially situated process that begins in preservice education and continues throughout individual careers (Barbarà-i-Molinero, Cascón-Pereira, & Hernández-Lara, 2017; Safari, 2020; Sutherland, Howard, & Markauskaite, 2008). According to (Britzman, 2003), teacher identity construction is a significant aspect of learning to teach. This process is influenced by various factors including past experiences, pre-service training, and societal expectations (Safari, 2020; Caldas, 2019; Ruohotie-Lyhty & Pitkänen-Huhta, 2022). Enrolling in an English Language Teaching (ELT) graduate program often leads to the expectation that graduate students will pursue careers as English as foreign language (EFL) teachers or professional. Following this discussion, participating in a master's program, completing ELT coursework, engaging in practical teaching, cooperating with peers, and acquiring real-world experience, can help students cultivate a strong PI (Safari, 2018). The increasing demand for globalized education has significantly impacted the professionalization of ELT landscape in recent years. The ever-changing educational landscape creates new demands for both teachers and ELT

students. To meet these demands, teachers and students should continuously invest in personal professional development to become more qualified as well as adaptable to students from diverse backgrounds.

Related to the phenomena, some ELT graduate students in Indonesia are completely conscious of individual identity and participation in ELT professional field. As a result, students put much effort into constructing and developing personal PI, to fulfill career objectives in the future (Barbarà-i-Molinero, Cascón-Pereira, & Hernández-Lara, 2017; Wijaya, 2021). Pursuing a master's level education is a way to show these efforts. Graduate students in EFL program, especially those enrolled in elite ELT program, are urged to establish, nurture, and validate individual PI before engaging in teaching or learning a second language (Wijaya, 2021). Additionally, the finding showed that rigorous nature of ELT field surfaced from the perception of graduates as wise decision-makers, thought leaders, and creative teachers capable of redefining personal PI over time. Establishing PI is a common and crucial practice for novice teachers, as it allows trainers to comprehensively evaluate individual thinking, teaching practices, and judgment (Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2017). Finally, future EFL teachers should prioritize self-awareness and reflect on personal objectives and identity as teachers in developing PI.

The development of strong PI among Indonesian EFL teachers is often hindered by the challenging transition from being students to becoming actual teachers, as previously mentioned. To address the issue, EFL teacher candidates should start shaping personal PI during college years. This effort helps prepare future teachers for the complexities of real-world educational environments that will arise in individual careers. The discussion is also supported by the argument of Day (2018) that nurturing development of PI from early stages of higher education can significantly improve professional capabilities of teachers, teaching qualifications, and organizational skills. By developing a strong PI, future EFL teachers can become more confident, competent, and capable of delivering well-structured, engaging lessons that meet the diverse needs of individual students.

Developing PI in ELT requires more than just understanding of the field, it demands a vision of teachers as dynamic and contributing member of the profession (Tomlinson & Jackson, 2021). The process of developing identity of teacher is complex as well as culturally specific, taking place in various educational institutions and shaped by particular time, location, and context (Danielewicz, 2001). Understanding these factors is crucial for graduate students as it helps individual define career objectives and aspirations. To remain competitive, graduate students,

particularly aspiring teachers, should participate in lifelong learning to continuously improve personal skills and adapt to the changing demands of individual professions (Wijaya, 2021). This ongoing professional development is essential for strengthening understanding concerning PI and addressing the challenges graduates may encounter in individual career. Following the discussion, strength, and clarity of personal PI play a significant role in determining success in job market (Tomlinson & Jackson, 2021). A well-defined PI improves chances of graduates to secure employment and also shows individual suitability for specific positions to potential employers.

ELT graduate students should be urged to engage in regular, in-depth reflection on personal and professional experiences as instructors to improve stronger PI and maximize individual effectiveness as EFL teachers. This argument is supported by Heled and Davidovich (2019), who proposed that PI is shaped both by perception of external environment as well as self-perception of professional. PI of teachers is a dynamic and complex construct, that surfaces from the interplay between past and present experiences. These understandings shape individual teaching beliefs, which are influenced by both personal and societal values. Following this discussion, the understanding reflects how individuals perceive personal role concerning personal

profession and the broader professional community. Developing dynamic and flexible PI requires prospective EFL teachers to have personal understanding. The teachers need to ask important questions such as "Who am I as a teacher? and who do I want to become?" (Caldas, 2019). This concept is interconnected with theory of PI Barkhuizen (2017), claiming that PI was formed through a process of reflection, where individuals aimed to understand "who they are and who they want to become or fear becoming". By comprehending the identity and aspirations of teachers, teachers can acquire a deeper understanding of individuality. Consequently, the process provides more effective support in individual journey towards developing teacher identity and ability to excel in role as teachers (Ruohotie-Lyhty & Pitkänen-Huhta, 2022).

The construction and development of PI start before individuals enter the workforce, and can be observed in selection of an academic degree (Barbarà-i-Molinero, Cascón-Pereira, & Hernández-Lara, 2017). The transition to university represents a critical period for students to cultivate individual PI. However, not all students fully comprehend the significance of individual selected profession at this stage. As a result, universities play a crucial role in shaping and preparing future professional for careers. When entering university, students are exposed to diverse

perspectives, theories, skills, and terminologies relevant to individual field of research. This exposure significantly contributes to individual personal and professional development, helping students to identify as members of academic community in their selected discipline (Barbarà-i-Molinero, Cascón-Pereira, & Hernández-Lara, 2017). Cultivating PI is essential in guiding students toward successful academic and career paths. However, the process remains underexplored, particularly in higher education. Existing literature shows significant gap in research knowledge concerning how PI develops during the formative period. Therefore, this research addresses the gap by investigating the factors that influence development of PI among ELT graduate students. The finding also aims to provide valuable insights into how universities can effectively support students in shaping individual PI by reviewing the focus of the investigation. Moreover, the findings will guide the creation of specific interventions and strategies to improve outcomes of students, including academic performance, career readiness, and general well-being.

Empirical findings related to the depiction of image, perception, expectations, and performance of teachers in the development as well as construction of PI at universities have been explored by various research. The first finding conducted by Ruohotie-Lyhty and Pitkanen-

Huhta (2022), examined the diverse expectations, objectives, and imagined PI of preservice teachers at the beginning of individual university studies, despite different starting points. In the second research, Safari (2018) showed that student teachers frequently reconstructed and developed personal identity in a rapidly changing global context, influenced by postmodern ideas. This journey of identity exploration provides insights into how ELT courses and broader teacher education system shape beliefs of students teachers. Moreover, Vallente (2020) found that pre-service English teachers in multilingual settings struggled with PI, due to the changing role of English teaching, and the persistent influence of traditional, monolingual methods to language education. Lastly, Wijaya (2021) discovered that Indonesian English education master's students with stronger sense of PI were expected to build effective relationships with stakeholders and become competent teachers.

Despite existing research on PI development of ELT students in higher education, there has been minimal exploration of self-processes used by students to support this identity development. Significant research gap exists in understanding both the perceptions included and processes behind developing these opinions. Although the previous investigations have explored general trends in PI formation among ELT

students, there is a need for more in-depth research that aims at the perceptions and processes included in developing these opinions in environment of students. Therefore, this research aims to examine the exceptional factors and strategies that influence views of ELT graduate students concerning PI, including individual ideal image of a teacher, necessary skills, and future career expectations. By investigating these factors, this research also aims to improve understanding of PI formation among ELT students, and offer valuable insights for teachers, policymakers, and research.

Considering the insights from previous investigations conducted by global and Indonesian experts in the field of ELT show that self-awareness, cultural education experience, and identity development hold significant value for future professional in this field (Barkhuizen, 2017; Day, 2018; Goktepe & Kunt, 2020; Heled & Davidovitch, 2019). By providing support to students during the critical phase, this research can create valuable contribution toward cultivating a more diverse and proficient ELT workforce. Participating in this process enables ELT graduate students to develop personal identity, which is essential for growth as teachers. Following the discussion, this research offers valuable insights and helps individuals acquire necessary skills as well as values for successful career. Participants are provided with the opportunity to

explore various pathways that aid development of individual professional teacher identity and improve personal legitimacy as ELT professional (Vallente, 2020). The process causes concern for this research due to the connection that has been drawn between prejudices in teacher education and what ELT master's students attempt to implement in the field (Crowe & McGarr, 2022). Consequently, personal experience of individuals as an ELT graduate, combined with the interactions among other peers in ELT master program associates, inspires this investigation into the development of these students.

The process of the investigation as an ELT student-teacher starts with picturing identity of English teacher in high school. Following this process, the upcoming teacher completes ELT courses, engages in practicing, associates with peers, and acquire hands-on experience. The process equips individual with a completely different vision of teacher identity, and it changes the vision of current identity of students. However, the students are constantly concerned about how to become the best English teacher possible. Despite the established value of teacher mentorship, the journey towards a future English teaching identity relies heavily on initiative of student-teacher due to lack of substantial guidance from instructors of program. Moreover, the research holds value by tracing the changing students paths that have been

accessed over time, showing how individual PI develops. The initial stage is crucial for ELT student-teacher to develop personal PI, navigating the process of self-discovery and PI formation (Safari, 2020). This knowledge equips individuals to offer aimed support and guidance throughout the journey of being student-teacher. Building on the previous investigation and recognizing the existing gap, this research is framed by the following two questions, including (1) What do ELT graduate students believe about individual identity as ELT professional? (2) To what extent do ELT graduate students have tried to be ELT professional from personal imagination?

METHOD

This research used qualitative method that focused on exploring specific personal traits, particularly institutional phenomena. The occurrences referred to the interactive and dialogical nature of communication among ELT graduate students in higher education for developing personal PI. This research also adopted a grounded theory method, which included developing theories based on collected data. The method was particularly relevant to the research as it aimed to acquire deeper understanding of the process of PI formation, which was not fully comprehended. In addition, Strauss and Corbin (2008) claimed that the theoretical framework signified the importance of social interaction and how individuals

perceived as well as responded to situations. The investigation added that grounded theory analysis showed these interpretations and individual effects on the phenomenon being studied. Therefore, this method explored how ELT graduate students perceived individual ELT PI, and what strategies were used in building PI through personal perspective. The method described and explored the meaning of the experiences before finally producing a theory to explain individual identity and PI. Following the discussion, the process aimed to understand how these participants develop PI in ELT, and how partakers aspire to achieve individual desired PI in the future through cultural education experience.

Participants

Participants in this research were four ELT graduate students, class of 2024, who were enrolled in a master's program in English education. The participants were domestic students who had different teaching experiences and language backgrounds before enrolling in graduate program. In addition, some participants had taught ESL or EFL and some had no teaching experience.

The research selected the participants because the group was well-suitable for examining the development of PI in future EFL teachers. Graduate students were at a critical stage in shaping individual PI, having already accumulated

learning experience, and in some cases, teaching understandings. These experiences provided graduates with strong foundation for understanding teaching profession. Compared to undergraduates, graduate students typically possessed advanced reflective skills, facilitating deeper insights into individual thoughts and experiences related to PI. Since these students were on the edge of becoming teachers, this research directly contributed to individual professional development and improved the quality of future education. Moreover, the inclusion of participants with diverse levels of teaching experience facilitated a more comprehensive understanding of how these experiences shaped the development of PI. The background information of participants during the finding was shown in Table 1.

Data Collection

The data for this research was collected through in-depth interviews with four participants from a master's program in ELT. The author initially contacted potential participants, explaining the research objectives and methodology while assuring students of the confidentiality of individual personal information. During this finding, the interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia to minimize language barriers and urge participants to respond more openly as well as elaborate on individual experiences.

Table 1 Overview of the Participant’s Background Information

Name	Gender	Age	Teaching Experience	Education Setting	Education Type	Language Use in Teaching	Teaching Methods
Participant 1	M	27	4 years	EFL teacher	Formal Education	Bahasa (sometimes English)	Structured following the existing curriculum with general and specific objectives. The teaching location was in the school. The assessment was systematic with exams and assignments.
Participant 2	F	25	2 years	EFL course tutor	Informal Education	Bahasa and English	Unstructured, with various objectives, allows for teaching in any location, and assessment is based on personal experience.
Participant 3	F	26	0 years	No experience	-	-	-
Participant 4	F	30	5 years	TOEFL Tutor	Non-formal Education	English	Flexible with various objectives. The teaching location was at training or course institutions. Assessment was conducted through tests, and participants received a certificate upon completion.

Data Analysis

The collected data from interviews was analyzed using grounded theory. This analysis included 5 steps in action as proposed by Strauss and Corbin (2008). The first step was **Initial data collection**, which started by formulating a broad research question and gathering preliminary data to obtain general comprehension of the phenomenon. The second step was **Open coding**, including examination of data from transcripts of interviews simultaneously, recognizing preliminary ideas, and allocating "open codes" that captured the main ideas of data segments. Following this discussion, memorizing was essential for recording first ideas and connections. The third step was **Axial coding**, which included establishing connections between coded concepts by identifying individual properties, dimensions, and relationships to analyze the data. This stage focused on developing core categories that accurately represented the central phenomenon. The fourth step was **Selective coding**, comprising of research incorporation of all categories that had been found to create a comprehensive description explaining the main phenomenon. Moreover, every other category explained how the stage contributed to the main process, with core category serving as major theme. The last step was **Memo throughout**, which served as a crucial means of continuous reflection

during collection and analysis of data. The process facilitated data interpretation, allowed the research to monitor changes in theories, and supported the theory as it developed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the research showed that there were 6 major themes generated from data of participants, which were divided into 2 parts. The 3 themes focus entirely on representation of individual ELT PI, which was shaped by self-identification of ELT graduate students. The other 3 themes focused on actions and efforts of ELT graduate students in developing individual PI. These themes were derived from personal educational experiences, PI beliefs, and initiatives that students had engaged in to support construction and development of individual PI. The following explanation provided a more comprehensive explanation of how the 6 themes worked.

Self-identification as ELT Professional

Intermediate-Level ELT Professional

Drawing from the result of the interview data, the participants of ELT graduate students were categorized as intermediate ELT Professional based on criteria from individual point of view. These criteria were 1) learning experience, 2) achievements in education, and 3) teaching experiences. Based on some

participants, partaker 1 determined personal PI categories based on achievements in education, such as getting a bachelor's education degree from a university, which could be viewed by in following statements.

"I considered/placed myself at an intermediate ELT professional level because I had a bachelor's degree in English education. Moreover, I was not a native speaker who communicates in English every day." (Participant 1)

Participants 2, 3, and 4 believed were labelled as intermediate ELT professional based on individual learning and teaching experiences. The partakers clarified that enough teaching skills and experiences to teach students had been acquired, such as conducting a teaching practice from college before graduation, becoming a teaching assistant, or internship in school. Despite having teaching experiences, individual knowledge as well as experience were still limited, necessitating ongoing learning and development. As a result, these reasons became the source partakers were identified as intermediate-level ELT professional. In response, the participants also expressed the same idea in the following statements.

"To be honest, I still felt I was in the intermediate level of teaching, I was not an expert yet, in fact, my experience teaching English was still countless and it had been many years, hence, I put myself in the world of English work as in the middle." (Participant 2)

"Previously I had the opportunity to take part in activities such as apprenticeships at schools, as a teacher's assistant, as well as micro-teaching courses, hence I got the basics of teaching, I also had several teaching experiences, thinking my teaching level is in the middle." (Participant 3)

"I put myself in the intermediate level because of my 5 years of teaching experience." (Participant 4)

Based on this assumption, participant 1 stated that acquiring a bachelor's degree in education was a qualification to become professional in ELT, justifying intermediate level of teaching of the partaker. This statement was supported by Goktepe and Kunt (2020) urging educational institutions around the world to establish strong and unwavering supportive relationships with EFL teachers. The process was crucial for improving individual PI and reducing the conflicts that arose from personal identity and PI. More importantly, by developing PI through teaching experience, second, third, and fourth participants become lifelong students who were open to different educational perspectives shared by other ELT professional. As a result, these participants progressed to an intermediate level of teaching quality, benefiting students from diverse socio-cultural and educational backgrounds.

Good Skilled Teacher

In this section, the participants had different perspectives about individual ELT PI. Participants 1 and 2 agreed that

ELT Professional should have 4 basic competencies, such as social, pedagogic, personal, and professional competence. These competencies were usually obtained by students who had continued personal investigations in education field or received a degree in education. Individuals without a formal education background who entered the teaching profession often encounter significant challenges in the workplace. For instance, the person would not be able to manage a class or understand traits of students. Moreover, these four competencies needed to be balanced among ELT professional for teaching process to be successful. These detailed explanations were all related to the interview which was presented in the following statements.

"In my opinion, a teacher should have the following four competencies, namely social, pedagogical, personal, and professional competence. When a teacher wants to be referred to as a professional teacher, the person should possess all of these skills. I once met a non-teacher who struggled with classroom management and personal inability to comprehend the traits of a student." (Participant 1)

"It is crucial for teachers to have a balance of professional, personal, social, and pedagogical competencies. Rather than excel in one area while lacking in others, the ideal teacher strives to develop and maintain proficiency in all four competencies." (Participant 2)

Other participants believed that an ideal ELT PI should have broad knowledge

in the field of education because it was the basic aspect of teaching process, allowing an ELT Professional to share personal knowledge with students. In addition, a good teacher should be capable of motivating students and serving as a friend. Teachers could help students understand suitable learning strategies and make learning meaningful and relevant to everyday life. Through this process, students would feel more comfortable with the teacher, allowing the students to develop individual skills easily. Goktepe and Kunt (2020) prompted worldwide educational institutions to form a higher degree of insistent supportive relationships with various EFL teachers to fully nurture individual PI and mitigate the conflicting personal identity along with PI. All these conceptions corresponded with excerpts of third and fourth participant as follows.

"In my opinion, a teacher should have good knowledge of the world of education where those who came from an undergraduate degree in education according to individual role, were able to be professional in teaching, could become teachers, motivators as well as friends for students, allowing many students to become more developed and better." (Participant 3)

"The perfect teacher is someone who imparts knowledge to individual students in learning and also helps students comprehend suitable learning strategies. Additionally, teachers ensure that learning is meaningful and applicable to everyday life." (Participant 4)

Following the responses explained above, all of the participants agreed that

having a higher degree of PI helped to become a more professional and supportive facilitator for students from diverse backgrounds. The partakers also recognized that having a strong PI helped to implement effective teaching and learning strategies, even when faced with difficult learning challenges. This set of explanations supported previous research conducted by Sardabi, Bilia, and Golestan (2018) on PI of EFL teachers. The research found that EFL teachers with higher degree PI were more motivated to incorporate humanistic, transformative, and supportive language teaching as well as learning activities for students.

Multi-students of ELT professional

During the process of self-identification, ELT graduate students relied on social comparison with others to construct and develop individual PI. This comparison served as a tool for students to evaluate personal attitudes and teaching skills. Scheepers & Ellemers (2019) believed that students were driven to cultivate a positive social identity by engaging in optimistic social comparisons with other groups. Another perspective believed that desired Self (Positive Identity) could be formed through social comparison, grounded on the authority, prestige, and power of social categories (Whitaker, 2020; Stets & Burke, 2000). From some particular perspectives, social comparison was shown as important and useful for the process of

constructing and developing PI. Moreover, participants in this research used peers and ELT professional as self-comparison. For instance, Participant 1 believed that his friends were used as intermediaries to learn other skills and increase personal knowledge. The justification for this statement was found in the following statements.

"I do not often compare with my classmates, but I frequently learn about things I have not mastered, such as critical, creative, and social thinking skills with friends. Therefore, I take more lessons from others." (Participant 1)

Following the response above, the first Participant assumed that there was no comparison of ability to other peers, but only learned from friends. The partaker explained that many things were learned from friends, particularly critical thinking, creativity, and discussion. This statement was quite different from the explanations provided by the other three participants, who mentioned using self-comparison to individual peers as a tool to assess personal skills. Partakers believed that there was equality for individual peers in terms of skill and knowledge in the field. In addition, participants also assumed that some peers might have the same learning abilities but some did not. Some friends might not possess a skill that partakers excelled at, but excel in other skills that were lacking. Therefore, the participants used this assumption as inspiration to research more effectively in the future by

comparing individual weaknesses to friends. All these comprehensive justifications had to do with the interview which was found in the following statements.

"Comparing myself with my classmates, I think there were friends who were on par with me in individual English teaching abilities. Yes, but some friends were more experienced. Because in class, some had experience as teachers for many years and had been tutors for many years. Therefore, peers were more experts as people say, "Experience was the best teacher ever". When assessed, some are equal to be compared among classmates, yes, some are equal to me, some were taller and have more experience than me." (Participant 2)

"I assessed my academic progress by comparing it to that of my peers. Specifically, I looked at how well they understood the material and how engaged and enthusiastic they were in their investigations." (Participant 3)

"When compared to my friends in class, I feel equal in terms of receiving knowledge. However, I also feel fortunate because I can research and teach. This dual experience allows me to understand language education more practically and theoretically." (Participant 4)

Participant 2 added that the disparity in teaching experience among friends caused some peers to be more advanced, with greater depth of knowledge and expertise. The reason was that majority of ELT graduate students were from diverse educational backgrounds and had different experiences. Moreover, participant 3 and 4

considered that the comparisons to friends were not too exaggerated, which was later used as an effort to improve personal skills. Participants recognized a substantial gap between personal abilities and those of professional, specifically in terms of teaching experience, signifying a need for further development. As a result, partaker preferred to view ELT professional as role models in teaching-learning process, and not as a comparison.

As a teaching expert, I had my role model in teaching, namely a high school teacher and the supervisor of my two theses. I referred to experts in researching and teaching students." (Participant 1)

"When compared to English teaching experts, I was still at a lower level. I recognized that I was not equal to the professional in terms of experience and skills. Experts possess extensive experience in the field of education and have been teachers for many years. Individual abilities were vast and highly specialized." (Participant 2)

"When I compared myself to ELT experts, I preferred to view the professional as role models in constructing and developing my PI." (Participant 3)

"Of course, in terms of comparison to experts, I was still very far behind because I believed that I still had a lot to learn" (Participant 4).

Concerning the statement above, participants agreed that students had not reached the same level as expert ELT professional. Partakers assumed ELT experts had a lot of skills and experiences

that participants lacked and obtained only from university or community. The perception came from the recognition that experts possessed invaluable knowledge and practical experiences, obtained through exclusive exposure to the field, which were not easily replicated. Therefore, participants viewed ELT experts as individual role models as ELT professional in the future.

A Key Skill Requiring Development

Teaching ability

Teaching ability was skill that should be developed by teachers to be successful in individual careers in the educational field. This skill was closely related to teaching satisfaction, in which teaching satisfaction contributed to formation of pre-service teacher identity and teaching participation (Horvath et al. 2018). Moreover, teachers who believed in personal ability had higher self-efficacy (Nalipay, Mordeno, Semilla, & Frondoza, 2019). Teachers who had higher levels of self-efficacy in the use of instructional strategies and in managing individual classrooms generally showed higher levels of job satisfaction (Nalipay, Mordeno, Semilla, & Frondoza, 2019). Most participants believed that teaching ability should constantly be updated and improved. This justification was based on the finding from the interviews, which included the following statement.

"I believed that because learning a language was dynamic, it needed to be updated constantly – both in terms of the methodologies used to teach it and the subject matter." (Participant 4)

ELT professional or teachers needed to continue learning to broaden individual knowledge, improve personal skills, and acquire more experiences. Moreover, majority of participants had realized the repercussions of working as an ELT professional and had selected various steps to continue learning new things and improving personal abilities. A major step was to increase personal knowledge to support individual ELT PI and continue investigations in Master's education program. Additionally, participating in various kinds of workshops, seminars, or training was also considered very effective in improving teaching skills.

"I constantly improved myself by taking part in class training or seminars and by keeping up with scientific developments through governmental policies. As for my PI growth as a teacher, I intended to pursue a master's degree. From there, I acquired a lot of knowledge about creating teaching materials or methods." (Participant 1)

Research ability

Research ability was another skill required by ELT graduate students to support development of individual PI. The following statement received from Participant 3 supported this report.

"To support my career, I had conducted research that was related to class observations in

observing students motivation, the obstacles faced in class, and the level of self-confidence.” (Participant 3)

This skill was needed for career purposes and to fulfill final assignment to obtain bachelor's degree. Therefore, ELT graduate students who in the future would become Professional ELTs were expected to improve and develop these skills, because of the need as well as frequent usage of the abilities.

Participants had conducted some research before continuing master's program to support individual careers. This research was directly related to education that was performed at undergraduate level. Through the finding, participants believed to have obtained insight into development, specifically in the field of education. Through prior research, partakers obtained understanding of various methods and strategies, which were considered to be implemented in personal teaching-learning activities in the future.

“As I could remember, I conducted classroom action research when I was in S1 and I thought it was one of the essences of finding to develop personally in teaching because of the effort to build cognitive development of students through learning method.” (Participant 1)

Some participants improved personal research skills by helping other ELT professional to conduct findings. This activity certainly provided many benefits in developing and forming PI of ELT

graduates, because students could learn and work directly with experts. The research was mostly focused on 21st-century education, which implemented the use of technology in teaching-learning activities. By performing this action, ELT graduate students felt that some new insights were acquired about methods for conducting research and obtaining novel knowledge in the field of education.

“For the next research, I helped lecturers to conduct research, which was concerning the use of digital storytelling. Therefore, my role was the same as helping to collect interview data. There was also research on the use of artificial intelligence on students rating abilities, which I helped with observations, interviews and I got a lot of views from these investigations including, oh it turned out this teaching method. It seemed that from the data collected, the method was effective, specifically for the 21st century. The success of this innovation showed that such applications were highly effective in supporting students learning.” (Participant 2)

Community dedication

Besides conducting teaching activities and research, an ELT professional was also expected to perform community service or dedication. Typically, ELT graduate students had participated in this activity since the students were still undergraduates. The activity was still in educational field, such as providing children in rural areas with tutoring some materials or teaching students in the environment. This kind of community service activity became a major university program to get a bachelor's degree.

Therefore, participating in this activity provided a lot of experiences to ELT graduate students, such as improving direct teaching experience.

"The community service in which I had participated was during my undergraduate level. The activity was focused on teaching elementary school students. Besides teaching at school, I also opened tutoring after school. Even at night, I accepted students who wanted to research together or just do the homework they had already done on that day. This kind of activity was training me to improve my teaching skills step by step." (Participant 3)

Some ELT graduate students who became participants claimed that students were conducting community service activities through a research program held by individual university. The activities students performed were still in the educational field, such as sharing knowledge and experience with some children around the area where the research was conducted. The program was incredibly helpful for ELT graduate students in developing personal professional ELT because it allowed students to take classes that would help in developing skills, necessary for future careers.

"As I can remember, when I was doing PKM while completing my thesis, I did community service at a learning house by teaching storytelling to the children there. I submitted 2 PKMs, which was approved and funded by UNS." (Participant 1)

"For community service, it was still related to the research I had conducted when I was in my undergraduate degree. I joined a program such as Students Creativity Week (PKM). I and some of my friends also researched the effectiveness of a teaching method." (Participant 2)

Some participants performed community service based on personal initiative through an organization managed by individual friends. The community service mostly focused on social activities in school environment. Moreover, the activity was conducted in partnership with a literacy community in Solo. The activities included campaigns about violence in schools, sharing books, etc.

"My several colleagues and I had initiated an event to raise awareness about the badness of bullying in schools. I had also partnered with literacy communities such as Sahabat Kapas Solo donating books for children who were victims of disasters and children in prisons." (Participant 4)

The Environmental Impact on the Level of PI Development

The environment in which professional worked had a significant impact on how participants developed individual PI. Environmental factors, including organizational culture and teaching styles, played a crucial role in shaping as well as influencing PI level of an individual (Widayati, MacCallum, & Woods-McConney, 2021; Qoyyimah, Singh, Exley, Doherty, & Yosi, 2020). This level of development could be observed

through different backgrounds and experiences cultivated by participants. While all participants shared the same educational background, the individual had diverse professional experiences. Some had worked as English teachers in school, English tutors, or TOEFL instructors. Consequently, there was a participant without any prior teaching experience. These varied professional backgrounds had significant influence on the development of individual PI level. The rationale for this decision was supported by the findings from the interviews, as shown in the following statement.

"I am a full-time English teacher at a senior high school in Indonesia, where I have been teaching for four years. I teach five days a week, primarily using Indonesian as the main language of instruction, though I occasionally include English to explain certain concepts. Although I am a non-native English speaker, practicing speaking English in the classroom from time to time has greatly improved my communication skills, making me quite proficient. I follow the current curriculum in teaching, which urges teachers to be more engaging and innovative in individual methods, motivating me to be a lifelong students dedicated to improving my knowledge as well as skills. Through the experience I have accumulated, I feel confident in my ability to teach at the university level when the opportunity arises." (Participant 1)

Based on the insights gathered from Participant 1, the result showed that the partaker had a high level of PI. This category was reflected in active engagement of the participant in

educational field. As a teacher with four years of teaching experience, the partaker undoubtedly developed a comprehensive understanding of the essential values and skills that contributed to a strong PI. This depth of experience implied that the participant was well-equipped to navigate the complexities of teaching profession. Generally, journey Participant 1 reflected a significant investment in his professional development, showing how the partaker experiences and aspirations contributed to a well-defined as well as developing PI in the field of education.

The actions of the participant signified a strong support for the core principles of effective teaching, showing the importance of ongoing growth and engagement in professional community. Moreover, PI of an individual could be considered as high level, when the person had genuine passion for personal profession, possessed extensive knowledge with a well-defined career plan. Actively engaging in professional activities, which serve as an exemplar for others could also be believed as high PI level (Bandura, 1986; Pakpahan & Saragih, 2022; Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019). Therefore, Participant 1 in this research possessed a high level of PI. Another exemplification could be viewed in Participant 2 expressions in the following statement.

"Besides being a graduate student, I have been tutoring English part-time for two years. I usually teach twice a week, mixing Indonesian

and English to help my students improve. This has improved my English-speaking skills. It is a win-win situation because the process prepares me for a teaching career and helps me practice my English. I am flexible with my teaching methods and am happy to teach anywhere because we are learning together. I am confident about teaching high school students but still need to build up my confidence for university-level teaching.” (Participant 2)

According to Participant 2, individual primary teaching experience was obtained through informal English lessons, which offered flexibility and freedom from traditional educational framework. While these cultural teaching experiences improved English-speaking skills, participant did not obtain a comprehensive foundation for teaching. As a result, there was lack of confidence to teach at higher levels. Consequently, PI of partaker as a teacher could be assessed as medium level. This process supported academic perspectives signifying that a medium level of PI was characterized by initial interest in the profession, basic knowledge, early career development steps, and participation in some professional activities (Bandura, 1986; Pakpahan & Saragih, 2022; Stets & Burke, 2000). The next exemplification was from Participant 3, by the following statement.

“As a current graduate student, I have opted to prioritize my academic pursuits and have not acquired any paid teaching positions. My teaching experience has been limited to undergraduate practicum courses. Consequently, I lack confidence in my ability to teach at a school or university immediately upon

graduation. My English language proficiency requires further development. Therefore, I plan to focus on improving both my teaching skills and language abilities before pursuing a full-time teaching position.” (Participant 3)

From the statement above, the statement showed that Participant 3 lacked real-world teaching experience. Exposure to teaching of partaker was limited to academic practice in a non-native English-speaking environment. Consequently, the confidence of participant in teaching at a school or university level might be compromised. This outcome showed that PI of Participant 3 as a teacher was at a relatively low level. PI of an individual could be categorized as low when showing lack of interest in profession, possessing limited knowledge, struggling with career-related decision-making, and having minimal participation in professional activities (Bandura, 1986; Pakpahan & Saragih, 2022; Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019). While partakers might possess foundational understanding of teaching methodologies, individual practical experience was insufficient to fully develop the necessary skills and confidence required for effective teaching. The last exemplification was from Participant 4, by the following statement.

“I am a non-native English speaker pursuing a master's degree in ELT. Moreover, I have been tutoring TOEFL for five years, teaching three sessions a week entirely in English to help students become comfortable with the language.

Apart from the process, engaging in this activity also improved my confidence and fluency in English communication. Although I am flexible with my teaching methods, I often teach at a tutoring centre. I am confident that I can teach at a school or university based on my experience and abilities." (Participant 4)

As a result of these experiences, Participant 4 was expected to benefit significantly in terms of individual professional development. Through active teaching engagement and regular use of English, the participant experienced significant growth in individual PI of partaker as an EFL teacher. This ongoing practice helped to solidify individual language skills and also instilled a sense of authority and credibility in personal role of a teacher (Vallente, 2020; Widayati, MacCallum, & Woods-McConney, 2021). In the long run, such experiences would undoubtedly play a crucial role in shaping future endeavors of Participant 4 in the field of ELT, equipping partaker with necessary skills and confidence to thrive in formal educational environment.

Examining the experience of Participant 4 signified that this individual was deeply engaged in teaching activities. Although these activities did not occur in a traditional classroom setting, the activities were structured and organized in a way that closely resembled formal educational environments. Despite the informal nature of the setting, Participant 4 used an unsystematic method of teaching, signifying the importance of maintaining

flexible and effective educational framework. A standout feature of teaching practice of the participant was the commitment to communicating entirely in English. This process showed high level of proficiency in the language and also signified confidence in using English as a medium of instruction by the participant. Therefore, participant 4 was categorized as having a high level of PI.

CONCLUSION

This research explored how ELT graduate students developed their personal professional identity (PI) and the actions taken to support this process. The results showed that most Indonesian ELT students had a well-established sense of PI, identifying themselves as "good teachers" who possessed essential competencies, motivation, and the ability to foster a positive learning environment (Safari, 2020). While many students expressed confidence relative to their peers, their self-assurance was often lower compared to more experienced professionals. As a result, students took active steps to improve their skills, engaging in additional programs focused on teaching, research, and community service, which played a key role in enhancing their personal PI.

Furthermore, the development of PI varied among students based on their professional backgrounds. Those with more teaching experience demonstrated a stronger sense of PI, while others showed medium or low levels. The research

highlighted the importance of raising awareness of personal PI, as it helped students recognize their role in the classroom and prepared them for global challenges and diverse cultural contexts in ELT. This awareness equipped them to navigate socio-political influences and foster student success in an interconnected world, ultimately contributing to the long-term success of both their students and the ELT field (Safari, 2020).

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors are grateful to Mr. K.A.P for the valuable guidance and inspiration throughout the work. Furthermore, the authors are also grateful to all participants who generously contributed and assisted toward the completion of this research.

STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTION BY AUTHORS

The authors took full responsibility for every aspect of this article, including the formulation of the research question, objectives, and total design of the project. The authors were also actively participating in data collection, analysis, and interpretation, including conducting interviews with participants as well as transcribing and coding the data. Additionally, the authors made significant contributions to drafting and editing of the manuscript, ensuring that the ideas were

coherent, clear, as well as logically organized.

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