

Exploring Language Teacher Roles as Teacher Identity

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Abstract— The article presents the concepts of teacher identity, how it relates to the particular characteristics of language teaching, and how teacher identity is developed through the teacher roles. In this article, teacher identity refers to the in-service PPG teachers' perception on the teacher roles as teacher identity. Drawing on a case study, including the use of questionnaires, a focus group discussion, the article demonstrates the relevant relation between teachers' identities and their roles in the classroom which comprises: 'teachers as teaching/learning material developer'; 'teachers as assessors and evaluators'; 'teachers as facilitators'; 'teachers as researcher'; 'teachers as learners'; and, 'teachers as researchers'. Implications for policy makers and practitioners are discussed.

Keywords— *in-service teachers; teacher roles; teacher identity*

I. INTRODUCTION

Danielewicz (2001, p. 10) defines identity as "our understanding of who we are and who we think other people are." In particular, the term teacher identity (TI) is used to describe how teachers seem to understand themselves as teachers (Ball & Goodson, 1985; Nias, 1989). Ball and Goodson (1985) argue importance of this concept that "the ways in which teachers achieve, maintain, and develop their identity, their sense of self, in and through a career, are of vital significance in understanding the actions and commitments of teachers in their work" (p. 18). Studies in

• *Definition of Teacher Identity*

TI as mentioned in many teacher education literatures is defined from various concept. Table 1 summaries the major definition of TI.

Table 2.2 Leading Definitions of Teacher Identity

'identity references individual's knowledge and naming of themselves, as well as others' recognition of them as a particular sort of person'	Clarke (2008: 8)
'the influence on teachers, how individuals see themselves, and how they enact their profession in their settings'	Varghese (2006: 212)
'instantiations of discourse, systems of power/knowledge that regulate and ascribe social values to all forms of human activity'	Morgan (2004: 173)
'relational, constructed and altered by how I see others and how they see me in our shared experiences and negotiated interactions'	Johnson (2003: 788)
'Who we are and who we think other people are. Reciprocally, it also encompasses other people's understanding of themselves and other (which includes us)	Danielewicz (2001: 10)
'Being recognized as a certain 'kind of person'; identity is connected not to internal states but to performances in society. It is also 'an important analytical tool for understanding schools and society'	Gee (2000-2001: 99)

adapted from Castañeda (2011)

the field of TI has attracted growing interest in understanding various aspects related to teaching English (Richards, 2006; Clarke, 2008). In particular, researchers have conducted the study on TI and their impact on classrooms and schools (Hayes, 2005, 2009). However, there is very little research addressing the relationship between English language teachers' roles and their identities. This article shares the small-scale study of in-service high school English teachers in Indonesia. In particular, it explores the interplay between their perception of their roles and TI.

Teacher Identity

Britzman (2001) claims that TI is developed along with the process of learning to teach which was gained since students study in a teacher education, although prior to this is that the students also bring with them their way of seeing TI as the result of their experience as learners. The students then have the real sense of TI when they have the classroom experience through the micro teaching, and teaching practicum at schools. The sense of TI obviously appears not only resemble from the acts of responsibility, roles, attitude, but also from the outfit and their appearance. In the Indonesia context, what used to be a tom-boy female student, for example appeared to be "very teacher" as the effort to strive for traits attached to TI.

• *Domain of Teacher Identity*

Castañeda (2011) says that, "...the meaning of being a teacher can be generally revealed by what constitutes the visible and invisible domains of work and life". The former refers to what teachers do, such as: classroom interaction, assessment, materials design, or task implementation. While the latter includes more personal phenomena such as cognition, beliefs, expectations, or emotions. The visible and invisible domains of TI are arguably described as the identity

concept of "internal (the self) or external (social) phenomenon". The internal (the personal) phenomenon refers to the understanding of knowledge, beliefs, emotions, or motivations. The external (social) phenomenon refers to more "... macro-cultural structures intimately linked to the professional actions undertaken in performing their roles".

Table 2. Domains of Teacher Identity

concept	invisible	Visible
	internal	External
	personal	Social
	'Who am I?'	'Who are you?'
developed by	teachers	teachers and community
developed through	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • experiential knowledge • professional knowledge or • theoretical knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • direct interaction • participation • classroom practice
when	learning to teach: teachers construct personal images of being a teacher	process that expands along with the teacher career
domain	teacher cognitions	teacher roles
	knowledge, beliefs, emotions, or motivations	professional actions undertaken in performing their roles

Table 2 summaries TI from the concept of visible-invisible, internal-external, and personal-social entity (Lorti, 1975; Bailey et al., 1996; Borg, 2004; Malderez et al., 2007; Castañeda, 2011). However, there is no fixed boundary between these concepts of TI. Moreover, TI is processing throughout the teachers' career along with the teachers gain:

'experience, consolidate professional knowledge, and adopt plans of personal and professional development. This process is significantly influenced by culture and the socio-political context in which teachers live and work (Tsui, 2003)'.

Teacher Roles

Harmer (2001: 156) mentions three crucial aspects to create effective language class: language environment, language system, and the teachers themselves. Teachers competence on what to teach (content knowledge) and how to teach (pedagogical knowledge) are able to plan effective lessons. However, to make them happen, teachers need to cultivate the various roles of teacher. Sometimes a classroom is regarded as a stage, students are the actors, and the teacher plays many roles: '...director, prompter, coach, scriptwriter and audience' (Yan, 2012: 558). Wright (1991:51) mentions two major teacher roles in the classroom, which includes: to create the conditions under which learning can take place: as the social side of teaching; and to impact, knowledge to their learners: as the task-oriented side of teaching. Teacher role has been described by scholars through different aspects. Harmer 1991, for example has listed 6 major aspects of teacher roles, comprising: Controller, Assessor, Manager, Resource, Participant, and Teacher as an Investigator. Han (2004), as another example provides 8 aspects of teacher role, included: 1) Manager: teacher should manage the teaching and learning process in the

class, 2) Facilitator: the teacher should be able to offer help so that learners are easier to graph the lesson, 3) Organizer: the teacher is able to organize activities for students to practice English, 4) Cooperator: the teacher sets nice communication with learners, while also provide correction and suggestions, 5) Inspirational: teacher is encouraging students to use English communicatively, 6) Monitor and evaluator: the teacher provides feedback to the students' performance, 7) Resource: in teaching, the teacher provides some references and materials for English learning, and 8) Atmosphere creator: the teacher is able to create conducive atmosphere for learning.

• *Teacher Role and Teacher Identity*

Under the concept of visible-invisible, internal-external, and personal-social entity (Castañeda, 2011), as mentioned in Table 2, TI falls into two domains: teacher cognitions, and teacher roles. As teacher role identities are represented through several activities that teachers carry out in their classes, it is relevant for the teachers in this study to explore the activities that they perceived as teacher roles.

II. METHOD

This is a descriptive study since it aims to describe the current situation the topic being studied. This study also adopted a qualitative one as it aims to gain perception from the participants about developing teacher identity through teacher roles. The data were collected through the distribution of questionnaire, class observation to 5 teachers, and followed by a focus group discussion of 5 teachers. Data were then analyzed using qualitative data analysis

III. FINDINGS

Tabel 3 shows that there were six (6) main teacher roles which identified teacher identity including: 1) teacher as a

Table 3. Frequency of teacher roles perceived as teacher identity

No	Teacher Role	Male		Female		Total	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
1	Model	66	82.5	96	80	162	81
2	Material developer	64	82.5	98	81.65	164	82
3	Assessor and evaluator	64	80	98	81.6	162	81
4	Facilitator	66	82.5	99	82.5	165	82.5
5	Learner	34	42.5	58	48.3	92	46
6	Researcher	32	40	60	50	92	46
Total		68.3		70.7		69.7	

Overall 69.7% participants believed that the teacher roles were potential to be considered as TI; 68.3% from male teachers, and 70.7% from female teachers. While being a facilitator, assessor and evaluator, and model were the first three teacher roles believed as TI, teacher role as a learner, and researcher were the least selected as their TI. The following is the description of the finding on teacher roles as the basis of developing TI.

- *Teacher role as a model* is the third percentage among the six teacher roles identified as TI, which is 81%. All teachers in this study showed relatively strong perception on teacher role as a model for their students to learn from, to admire, and retain in their memory. The teachers also expressed that the role model not only about modelling the language – English they taught, but also the way teacher talk, communicate, and wear their outfits.
 - *I hope what I did is somehow able to inspire my students.*
 - *For students, teachers are sometimes more influencing than their parents ...that I need to speak right and do right.*
 - *... afterall in Javanese a teacher is “digugu lan ditiru” (being obeyed and imitated).*
 - *At schools, teachers are parents for their students. Therefore, the teachers’ behavior should be appropriate to emulate.*

As the participants were English teachers, they were also aware that included in the role model was the language model of English. Needless to say, the teachers were performing as a language model every time they used

procedures.

There were 20 in service English teachers consisting 8 male and 12 female teachers. They were all teaching in the senior high school, 7 of which were teaching in the vocational schools in Surakarta. The teachers were between 30 – 38-year-old with at least 6-year teaching experience. Two of the teachers held master degree academic certification, and the rest of them (18) were graduated from undergraduate degree.

model, 2) teacher as a material developer, 3) teacher as an assessor and evaluator, 4) teacher as a fasilitator, 5) teacher as a learner, 6) teacher as a researcher.

English in the classroom. However, in the class almost all teachers did not use English all the time, even not more than 40% of the whole lesson time. The observation showed that English was used: almost all the time in the opening and the closing of the lesson; but very limited during main lesson. The teachers claimed that the students encountered difficulties to grab the–whole English lesson. Nevertheless, almost all teachers argued to have strong perception on this role as TI, even when they used lower percentage of English in the class.

- *Teacher role as a material developer* was 82% or the second identified as TI. During the FGD, it was revealed that the teachers did not only rely on the official books provided by the government. They said that they compiled other sources of learning material using various media as video, songs, and other printed materials. The government do not provide particular English textbooks for vocational school, that makes it more obvious for the vocational school teachers to optimize their competence as a material developer in order to accommodate their students’ different language needs.
 - *To be a material developer should be the main TI.*
 - *I count on google to have learning material.*
 - *You have to be keen enough, like when I dedicated time on google ... and yes everything (learning material) is in there.*
 - *Do not hesitate to involve your students to have more interesting learning material.*

- *Teacher role as an assessor and evaluator* is the third percentage among the six teacher roles identified as TI, which is 81%. All teachers decided that the role of *teacher as an assessor and evaluator* is inherent in the TI as it belonged to the daily routine of teacher's job.
 - *No teaching is done without testing the students.*
 - *Evaluating students is the important TI.*
 - *We need to evaluate students to measure their competence.*
 - *I am waiting anxiously the testing results ... the result shows how much students grasping the lessons.*
- *Teacher role as a facilitator* is the highest percentage among the six teacher roles identified as TI, which is 82.5%. In the observation teachers showed strong gestures in order to help students easier to receive and understand the lesson. Some reflections during the FGD revealed the teacher's perception for their role as a facilitator, as follows:
 - *To be a facilitator is not difficult as long as I am willing to open my ears, and open my eyes to my students.*
 - *To facilitate means to help ... if teachers do not help students in the class, then who else?*
- *Teacher role as a learner* is perceived as the basic philosophy for teachers to carry out professional development (PD) continuously. As mentioned in Table 1, the questionnaires showed only 46% for *Teacher role as a learner* to develop as TI. This was because the teachers counted PD as the "*obvious-serious PD*" only such as joining seminar, and conducting research. However, through the FGD when the teachers had better understanding about types and ways to do PD, their perception was improving. These teachers then were able to mentioned more types and how to do PD besides the main stream of doing PD: *while preparing the lesson, through teaching, watching TV or video, discussion with colleagues, even learning from the students through: students' questions, consultation, and communicating through WhatsApp Message.*
- *Teacher role as a researcher* is 46% agreed as TI. Despite the lower percentage of *Teacher role as a researcher* as TI, during the FGD teachers mostly agreed that being a researcher is important in order to have better understanding and improving of their classes. Underpinning this insight is the principles of classroom action research, the type of research that they were usually introduced and encouraged to do for teachers. In this study, teachers reported they mostly conducted research when the completed their formal study: undergraduate and master degree study. Other situation of research the teachers encountered was indicated when the teachers were invited to be the team member by a lecturer

who happened to carry out research at school. The other example of conducting research was done when a teacher needed to do a job promotion from one rank to the other.

- *If there is no important need I do not do research.*
- *I am not confident to do research in my class as I am lack of theoretical knowledge and also the procedure of research.*
- *Research is very time consuming.*

IV. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATION

The purpose of this study was to describe how teachers perceive teacher's roles identified as TI. Although the teacher roles selected in the study were the major and the obvious ones, the percentage of perception was not really high, which was 69.7%. The *teacher role as a learner and as a researcher* in particular, were perceived the lowest percentage through the questionnaire, which was 46%. The percentage seems not quite assuring in terms of the teachers' commitment to fulfill their roles that were identified as TI. However, when the teachers' roles were discussed in the FGD and the teachers participating in this study gained better understanding, the perception was increasing. They reported that the decision to score the teacher role to develop as the TI was based on how they felt about their participation and involvement in each of the role itself. Teacher HK for example, she had a strong perception that being a researcher was an important TI, but when she thought that she was not active enough to carry out PD activities, then she chose a lower score for the *teacher role as a learner*. Through the FGD, when she had better insight on the idea of teacher being a learner, she then restated her perception; and was even able to mention several activities she has been involved before that categorized into PD activities. Likewise, this also happened in the case of *teacher role as a researcher*. In the case of the inconsistency on teacher as a language model where the teacher use of English was not really high, the teachers argued that they concerned more on the student ability to understand the lesson if they use English all the time. This is debatable: what if the teachers use Indonesian language all the time in their English class; is it able to guarantee their students to have better comprehension of the lessons? It needs more studies and convincing data to clarify the reasons: teachers' competence to use fix-phrases of classroom English, teacher attitude to use English, or teacher perception about using English.

Nevertheless, the teachers credited a high value to language teacher' roles as TI. They were fully aware that students learn and develop not only from parents, but also from their teachers at school. That teachers realize they have important impact on the development of their students is vital for them to control and maintain the teachers to engage in their roles. In addition, once it is convinced that teachers role is the basic for TI, it is necessary for the teacher education to

update the teacher curriculum and provide the students with learning activities that enable students to develop and internalize the conducts of teacher roles. Not to mention that this should attract more scholars to carry out studies on TI particularly based on teacher role from different perspectives.

V. CONCLUSION

TI as reflected in their roles as language teachers is crucial for their commitment and dedication to their work. This study shows that most of the teacher participants perceived TI as facilitator as their role, which might contribute to assist their students to optimize their learning. The roles of teacher as learner and researcher were least perceived by the participants, implying their insufficient awareness that improving the quality of their teaching through these closely related roles is significant in their career. This suggests the need for more teacher trainings that facilitate teachers to learn and conduct various educational research studies that are advantageous to their teaching.

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