Proficiency and Motivation: Foundation of Pre-service English Teachers' Professional Identity Development

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ABSTRACT

Each pre-service English teacher is required to be professional as they will teach English subject, moral values, motivate and engage their students in the teaching and learning activities. The purpose of this study was to determine pre-service English teachers' professional identity viewed from their language proficiency and motivation in entering teacher education program. This research employed survey method and data were gathered through questionnaire. The questionnaire used open-ended and close-ended questions. The stages of analysis consisted of categorizing the responses, numbering them, and analyzing them using content analysis. Utilizing convenience sampling, there were 54 third-year college students getting involved in this study. The results of the study show that there are two cohorts of participants who had not yet taken (53.70%) and had already taken English proficiency test (46.30%) in the university before they conducted school teaching practice. From 25 pre-service teachers having taken EPT, it is found that 52% participants are included in the category of elementary proficiency, 44% participants are included in the category of low intermediate proficiency, and 4% participant is included in the category of high intermediate proficiency. The score range of their EPT classified them into elementary English users. Out of three types of motivation, the dominant motivation to be a teacher is altruistic motivation (62%). These results indicate that pre-service English teachers should empower themselves by acquiring higher English proficiency level since they are expected to teach English in varied school level and increase their motivation so it will implicate on their teaching performance during school teaching practice and post-degree sustainably.

Keywords: Language Proficiency, Motivation, Pre-service English Teacher, Professional Identity.

1. INTRODUCTION

To be a professional English teacher, a pre-service teacher is required to have certain educational background and excellent personality [1] that support their possession of four competences (e.g. professional, pedagogic, personality, and social competences) [2]. These four competences can contribute to the teaching performance and the ability to personalize models regarding the teaching context. Pennington and Richards [3] state that professional English teachers construct their identity which is not merely focused on what they know and how to deliver the knowledge to others but also related to their capacity of adapting and personalizing those into themselves and their teaching environment. Briefly, in English teaching, professional identity is constructed by two factors namely foundational and advanced competences.

In this paper, the researchers emphasize on foundational competences specifically language proficiency included in language-related identity because this competence will allow the teachers to use the target language fluently and confidently in delivering the instruction and giving feedback on their students' oral and written works [4]. Besides, being proficient in language being taught enables the teachers to be "a language model user" for their students [5]. The term of proficiency which the researchers refer to is "a specialized subset of language skills required to prepare and teach lessons" because it is required significantly while teachers utilize it for communication purposes in the context of teaching and learning activities [6]".

In regards to measure language proficiency, many tests e.g., Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), IELTS, and TOEFL and collaboration between government, English teaching associations, and school institutions are likely to be conducted. Taking these tests and cross-institutional collaboration into their national policy, some ASEAN countries have already had their own strategies to improve the quality of their teachers and students, and the preparedness of teacher candidates. To mention, the Brunei government through Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD) mainly at its education faculty, Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah Institute of Education (SHBIE) has attempted to provide qualified teacher education covering their content and pedagogical knowledge [7] including their language proficiency. The collaboration between the Brunei government, varied school level institutions, CfBT and the Brunei English Language Teachers Association (BELTA) are also significant to endorse the government policy ensuring the acceleration of students' learning achievement, provision of well-trained pre-service teachers', simultaneous teachers' professional development and address the national goal named Vision 2035. Similarly, The Thai government has evolved their national plans to ascertain the recruitment of competent and proficient teachers. In addition, CEFR is employed to evaluate and vouch for students' and teachers' proficiency [8]. The similar progressive endeavor is also undertaken in Vietnam. The Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) is determined to produce prospective teachers who are proficiently in English by developing National Foreign Language 2020 in which the use of CEFR "is believed to get credibility in the case of Vietnam [9]". By the same token, Malaysia employs CEFR as their reference to elevate the teaching and learning activities into optimal quality and use Malaysian *University* English Test (MUET) to measure the student teachers proficiency as MUET test result is considered as the required teacher qualification [10]. In Indonesia, TOEFL seems to be more popular than CEFR since this test is considered as the "preferred proficiency test" in many universities [11].

Particularly, being professional has not been solely developed based on language proficiency since the involvement of motivation contributes significantly to the initial phase of pre-service English teacher to not merely learn English but also purposefully enter and choose teaching as profession [12-15]. In this kind profession, the individuals who then be called as teachers play a number of important roles as a role model for his or her students, a learner, a task designer, and a learning facilitator [5]. The aforementioned demanding roles on teaching profession require the individual who dedicate themselves in this kind of profession to show "a high degree of responsibility and altruism" [16]. Further, referring to how impactful teaching profession for the future of one nation and its generation is, there is a need of high motivation that underpin people to be passionate on one profession they have chosen.

Motivation is a factor that brings enjoyment and satisfaction simultaneously when we do an activity. Thus, the diverse initial motives that drive people to work may result in their various ways of accomplishing tasks based on its difficulty and setting criteria to success [17-18]. There are various kinds of motivation. It can be intrinsic (e.g. people are interested in and enjoy working on particular things), extrinsic in which people decide to work on particular things because of its salary, job security and career status, and altruistic motivation such as commitment, love, and passion to dedicate themselves for reducing social inequality [19-23]. Concerning various kinds of motivation as one of the key factors that drives pre-service English teachers to be professional in educational field, these student teachers are also demanded to have high-proficiency on English. Proficiency means "a specialized subset of language skills required to prepare and teach lessons" [6]. Briefly, pre-service English teachers can be classified into the professional ones as their motivation leads them to make an investment e.g., leveling their proficiency up.

A wide range of studies related to the relationship between motivation, language proficiency, and professional identity has already been conducted for the last two decades by many scholars. Samad, Etemadzadeh, and Far [24] highlighted Iranian EFL learners' motivation and how it contributed to their language proficiency. As they gathered the data, it was found that the there was a significant correlation between students who were highly integrative motivated and their proficiency achievements. Contrarily, there was no significant correlation between the students who were instrumentally motivated and their proficiency achievements. Another study conducted by Cho [25] showed that motivation cannot strongly reflect the gained proficiency since the finding did not support the direct causality between those two components.

In Indonesian context, Nurweni and Read [26] found that the students' vocabulary size is inadequate and does not meet the expected standard. Further, Hamied [27] reported that English teachers cannot build a real-life communication since they are not sufficiently proficient in English. The lack of vocabulary which supports the English proficiency has become an issue because of the lack of exposure as well. In fact, exposure is required to promote the proficiency [28]. In addition, Renandya, Hamied, and

Nurkamto [11] stated that the process of teaching-learning process in classroom can run smoothly and efficiently when the teachers have adequate proficiency. However, proficiency does not stand alone since motivation and teaching skills are also required to promote the professional identity of pre-service teachers or in-service teachers. Although Purwanti, Puspita, and Mulyadi's [29] investigation revealed that there is a significant correlation between students with intrinsic motivation and their English proficiency achievement compared to those with extrinsic motivation, the correlation between English learning motivation and English proficiency is in weak level. The previous finding confirmed Cho's [25] study. Then, related to students' proficiency and their in-campus L2 environments that represent pre-service teachers' readiness for their upcoming profession, Susilo's [30] research findings showed that diverse quality of human resources (teaching staffs or administration staffs) and teaching facilities impacts differently on pre-service teachers' proficiency. On the other hand, pre-service teachers' readiness and choice to have a career in educational field is dependent on their extrinsic, intrinsic, and altruistic motivation [13], [15], [31].

Considering the previous researches, this present study aims to determine the pre-service English teachers' initial professional identity regarding their language-related identity or language proficiency and motivation in the process of becoming English teachers. To do so, the following research questions were investigated: a) How is the level of pre-service English teachers' language proficiency and its relation to their readiness to be professional teachers? b) What is the motivation type of these pre-service English teachers to be professional teachers?

2. METHOD

The present study employed survey as the method to determine pre-service English teachers' initial professional identity viewed from the combination of their language proficiency and motivation, they encounter during their learning process in order to become teachers. According to Abdelal, Herrera, Johnston and Mcdermot [32], the form of open-ended survey provide wide opportunity for the participants to portray themselves particularly about "their own notions of who they are, what matters to them and why, and how they decide who is or is not included in their group, without being pigeonholed by the researcher's prior biases and interpretations". Further, it is stated that open-ended questions allow the participants to have "greater freedom of expression" in giving their answers or stating their point of view [33].

Regarding the aforementioned explanation, the researchers arranged an open-ended questionnaire and split it into four sections which asked the participants' demographic information, their English language proficiency, and motivation of taking English teacher education program related to their future profession. The questionnaire was written in Indonesian in order to allow the participants opine their thought or explore their answer. Later, the researchers displayed the translation of the participants' comments and answers for the purpose of readership. Related to the procedure of collecting the data, the questionnaire was made online and easily accessed by the participants. For the research ethics, the researchers informed the participants about the aim of the study and ensured them that their identity was written pseudonym. The data analysis was conducted by making subjective interpretation. The researchers compressed the responses into a set number of categories, numbered them with particular value, and analyzed them using content analysis [34].

Concerning the sampling, the researchers utilized convenience sampling. There were 54 participants who had completed pre-requisite courses offered by English teacher education program at public university, northern part of Borneo, Indonesia prior to partaking in the study before they enrolled school teaching practice program. The 54 participants consisted of 44 female pre-service teachers (81.48%) and 10 male pre-service teachers (18.52%). The participants were varied in their birth year. There were participants who were born before the year of 1998, 1998, and 1999. Additionally, these participants were selected to join in because they had already taken a set of pre-requisite course which are required to support their latter involvement in school teaching practice program. Further, the participants had different language background. They did not only speak Indonesian but they also spoke vernacular languages in their daily life. The other uniqueness was that they graduated from diverse senior high schools (e.g., not only from language class but also from other class). All of these senior high schools were classified into two types e.g., public and private schools.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Pre-service English teachers' language proficiency level and their readiness to be professional teachers

To address the first RQ, the researchers asked the participants about whether they had already taken English Proficiency Test (EPT) or not. Based on the data, 25 participants had taken EPT (e.g., standardized proficiency test organized by the

university by adapting TOEFL as the preferred proficiency test) and 29 participants had not taken any EPT yet. Taking a look at the number of participants who already took the EPT and those who had not yet taken, it was relatively close. It is interesting to note that, only a few of them had taken EPT (see Table 1) and realized about their level of proficiency. Meanwhile, the rest participants still had not known yet about their English proficiency. In fact, these participants must ensure themselves about their preparation e.g., their English proficiency before going to the field in terms of conducting their teaching practice at the pointed schools.

Table 1. Range of participants' English proficiency test scores

Score Classification	Frequency	Percentage
Elementary	13	24.07
Low Intermediate	11	20.37
High Intermediate	1	1.85
Advance	0	0.00
Not yet taken EPT	29	53.70
Total	54	100%

Based on the data displayed in Table 1, 24.07% participants achieved elementary proficiency while 20.37% and other 1.85% participants had low intermediate and high intermediate proficiency. Considering the score of their proficiency test, the majority of participants fall into the elementary range or it can be possibly classified into the A2 level on the CEFR scale. On the other hand, there were still 53.70% participants who did not know in what level proficiency they were classified. Further, when asked the participants about when they took EPT, the majority of participants (64%) said that they took the test less than a year ago, compared to each 28%, 4% and another 4% who took EPT between one and two years ago, two and three years ago, and four and five years ago.

Reflecting on the aforementioned proficiency test score, it was revealed that 46.30% of the participants have already taken EPT and been known that they are still classified as the English users in the elementary range or A2 level on the CEFR scale. Captivatingly, the other 53.70% have not taken any EPT whereas it can provide the pre-service English teachers about their strengths and weaknesses in English proficiency. Therefore, it can be inferred that these pre-service teachers, who have not taken any EPT or less proficient in linguistic competencies, can get difficulties to construct their own advanced pedagogies and thus have high dependence on teaching resources [35] so they are not capable to deliver the subject content effectively [36]. The aforementioned finding and elaboration confirm the relevant researches that highlight proficiency as one of the issues mainly in the context of English pre-

service teachers' training and education [5], [11], [28].

3.2. Type of pre-service English teachers' motivation

The second RQ focused on the pre-service teachers' motivation to be teachers. The participants gave various responses. Some expressed confidently and emotionally such as:

My motivation to become a teacher is because this profession is part of worship. Because teachers are unmarked heroes and also doctors, pilots, and so on succeed because of a teacher. So, I think the teacher is the noblest profession. (TR, F, 21)
(Motivasi saya menjadi guru adalah karena profesi ini merupakan bagian dari ibadah. Karena guru adalah pahlawan tanpa tanda jasa.. Dan juga dokter, pilot, dan lain sebagainya berhasil karena seorang guru. Jadi saya rasa guru adalah pekerjaan yang paling mulia.)

I want to be like my elder brother who was always passionate about teaching English and making my parents happy. (Mag, F, 33) *(Ingin menjadi seperti almarhum kaka yang selalu semangat dalam mengajar bahasa Inggris dan membuat orang tua bahagia.)*

Others focused on their satisfaction and ambition to teach English kids in remote areas.

The other motivation is that to become a teacher has a particular satisfaction for me. (Si, F, 18)
(Motivasi lainnya yaitu menjadi guru memiliki kepuasan tersendiri bagi saya)

I want to share knowledge and teach kids in remote areas. (DFi, F, 39)
(Saya ingin memberi pengetahuan dan mengajar anak-anak di tempat pedalaman)
I want to contribute to the progress of education in remote areas.
(TPN, M, 4)
(Saya ingin memajukan pendidikan di pedalaman)

Other participants had a broad reason why they want to be teachers. In addition, there were several participants rejected to give a comment related to their motivation to be a teacher. Even, one participant thought that he only took his current major because he needed the title for applying a job. In short, the response from the participants have been classified into fourteen points and displayed in Figure 1.
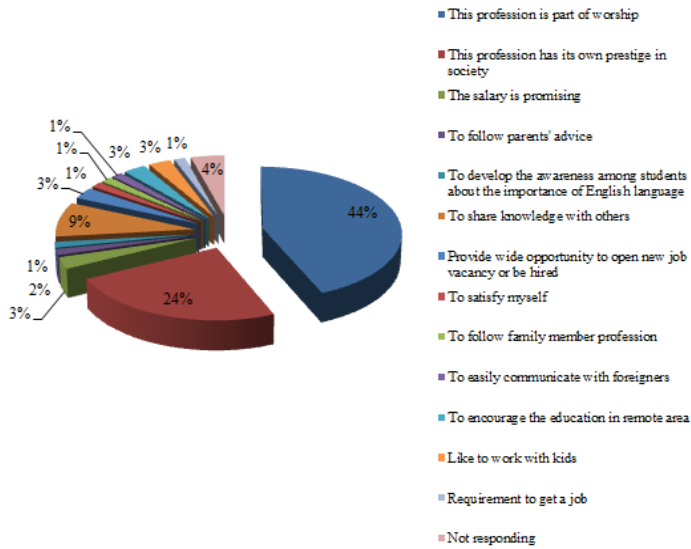
Figure 1. Participants' reason to be teachers

Figure 1 shows that 44% participants responded that they are motivated to be a teacher because it is part of their worship. In short, religiosity influences their choice to get into teaching profession. In a different way, 24% participants thought that when they worked on educational field, they would get a particular position or prestige that distinguishes them with others. Thus, they considered that teaching is a noble profession. On the contrary, only a small percentage of participants show that they chose to become a teacher because of their own passion (1%) and the promising salary (3%), while 4% had no idea why they enter English teacher education program and the rest (24%) had various reasons of choosing the major and ambition to pursue their study.

Based on the gained results, the researchers found that 44% of the participants are motivated by religious values to teach and affirmed that teaching profession enables them to express their gratitude to God through the beneficial and contributive acts for people's life e.g. sharing their knowledge. One of the viewpoints was given by TR who used the phrase teachers as the unsung heroes. The term unsung heroes indicate a significant point that teachers do their work sincerely without expecting for award acceptance. Sincerity is closely related to the religious values which are commonly being taught in family institutions and sustainably developing in sociocultural circumstances in Indonesia. By upholding this religious value, TR believes that teaching profession can give a wide opportunity for people to get secured job and puts teaching as the noblest profession. This reason confirms the previous researches [13], [31] that in Indonesian context, religious values influence pre-service teachers to choose teaching as their future profession.

Following the religious values is the consideration that teaching profession enables the pre-service teachers to get prestige in society (24%). The current group thinks that when they are involved in educational field as teachers, their career status is equal to other career status belonged to other professionals such as doctors and pilots. However, the motivation which underpins their choice to be teachers is dissimilar to the previous group since the current one's motivation can be classified into extrinsic motivation while the first group lies on the altruistic motivation. In addition, sharing knowledge to other percentage (8%) fills the third rank based on the frequency. Based on the participants' affirmations, they are motivated to share knowledge with others because they consider the importance of English mastery mainly for those who living near border area or living in a remote area. It is to minimize the gap of knowledge and competences between people who live in a big city and in a small, remote, or border area. These participants want the people not to merely learn the language but improve their living condition as well so in the future, people who live in a small, remote, or border area can get assurance that they get secure work. This motivation is associated with altruistic motivation in which the purpose of teaching is to help others and make a contribution to society [37]. Further, there were 3 participants or 4% who are in the fourth rate stating that they just entered the program in order to get the certificate and graduate as the ones who have bachelor title. Accordingly, it can be inferred that the participants still get obscured to determine whether they enter English teacher education program because of intrinsic, extrinsic or altruistic motivation. Further, their lack of certainty in taking teaching as future career might be related to the shifting of teachers' status in contemporary societal environment and wide opportunity to get "better financial benefits" [38] in another variety of profession which requires their English competence.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the preceding results and discussion, most of pre-service English teachers' proficiency is classified in the elementary range (24.07%) or possibly A2 level on the CEFR scale. In addition, there were only 46.30% pre-service English teachers who had taken EPT and 53.70% had not taken the test yet. For pre-service English teachers, taking proficiency test mainly before they enroll microteaching course and school teaching practice program in their final year of study is very important because it can give them information about what linguistic competence, they need to enhance so they can deliver the subject matter knowledge to their students later. In addition, they will enable to teach English through English confidently. Considering the

motivation type, 44% participants stated that they are motivated to be English teacher because it is part of their worship, 24% thought that teaching profession is prestigious, 1% chose teaching as their future profession because of passion, 3% stated that teaching profession has promising salary, 4% had no specific reasons to enter English teacher education program and 24% voiced their various reasons to pursue tertiary education. Briefly, provided research results, pre-service English teachers need to improve their proficiency since it is required for their short-term goal mainly teaching practice in their final year of completing bachelor degree and long-term goal e.g. teaching profession. Besides, for pre-service teachers who are still confused whether they will teach or not after graduation, the role of teacher educators and sufficient curriculum is consequential to increase pre-service teachers' motivation to get into teaching field and develop their professional identity.

Not only focusing on the low level of pre-service English teachers' proficiency, the policy makers in Indonesia also have to provide a set of tests including speaking and writing section in order for assessing and getting a comprehensive level of proficiency [39]. Related to the low proficiency, the participants opine that they have low exposure in using English for their daily life communication [27], [40]. Thus, to cope with such kind of condition, pre-service English teachers have to use L2 in their collegial and daily environment. The supportive environment and the intensive involvement of the pre-service English teachers in the on-going effort of using English in their communication can help them retain the language [41-43]. The other point is to allow them use appropriate learning strategy [44], optimize the use of media (e.g., English broadcasting programs) as the learning source and conduct daily practices outside class in college environment which can expose them to the frequent use of English through an interaction with lecturers, administrative staffs, and peers [30], [45]. Of the concern is the professional identity, in the present study the term professional identity related to their language-related identity (language proficiency). Since 46.30% of the participants were categorized at the elementary range and a further 53.70% was not yet classified, there is a need to increase pre-service English teachers' awareness of proficiency, familiarize them with proficiency test, and set a minimum score before they do their teaching practice at school [11].

In addition, concerning the issue of pre-service teachers' uncertainty towards their teaching profession, the role of teacher educators is vital in recognizing the basis of pre-service teachers' motivations and concerns [46]. Provided these fundamental points during teaching and learning activities and communication in the classroom, teacher educators are encouraged, therefore, to formulate a teaching model that enable the pre-service teachers to get meaningful learning experiences and learn the pedagogy of English language which in turn will be advantageous for them to reflect on and apply when they enroll microteaching course and school teaching practice (*Praktik Pengalaman Lapangan*) program.

It is noteworthy that this study was conducted in a very limited number of participants and taken only from one institution. Thus, the result of the present study has a number of limitations. Firstly, the study provides only the proficiency level test score history of participants without utilizing proficiency test to find out their level at the time responding to the present instrument. Secondly, the number of participants only involves a localized cohort data from certain semester in a single institution. Corresponding to the aforementioned limitations, the future empirical research is required by creating a motivation questionnaire, a set of proficiency test, and calculating their relationship as the effort to examine the pre-service English teachers' motivation and how they make an investment to achieve certain proficiency level as prospective teachers. In addition, further research is expected to involve more participants since it can afford more findings that can be drawn to advance the quality of teacher education e.g., curriculum, lesson content, delivery system, and create the college environment sustainably so the pre-service teachers will have high motivation and form their professional identity simultaneously in pre-, whilst-, and post-degree teacher education.

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