"Because teaching is like a plantation of *dakwah*":
Understanding Complexities in Choosing to be a Teacher in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on findings from an ongoing research project involving pre-service English teachers' identity formation during teaching practicum at Riau University, Indonesia. It explores the motivations behind participants' decisions to become English teachers. Qualitative data were gathered during pre- and post-teaching practicum periods utilising in-depth one-on-one interviews of a small number of pre-service English teachers during placement in secondary schools in Indonesia. Additionally a focus group discussion was also conducted. Findings showed that motives to be English teachers were varied. They included altruism, religious values, the special status of English, and a suitable profession for females. Data also revealed that these motivations originated from childhood, schooling, and the familial experiences of participants. Yet, unlike what is widely believed by policy makers in Indonesia, factors such as remuneration (double incentive) scheme within current Indonesian Teacher's Certification Program did not appear to have any significant effect in their choices in profession. This indicates how young teachers often tend to value idealistic principles over financial rewards.

Keywords: *teaching practicum, pre-service English teachers, motivation, ELT in Indonesia, teacher identity construction, teacher training*

INTRODUCTION

This article is a report from an on-going research investigating on the complexities of pre-service English teachers' identity construction during teaching practicum in Riau University, Indonesia. The practicum itself is an essential component of the language teacher education curriculum in the university, which is usually allocated in the last year of their four-year bachelor degree program. The pre-service teachers are placed in secondary schools for a period of one semester, and experience being 'real teachers' for the first time in their lives. In terms of its function, therefore, this practicum is like an *estuary* in the continuum of their teaching and learning process within a teacher education program where pre-service teachers enact theory into practice. It is also "a place of transit*"* (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2006) for pre-service teachers to transform themselves from being a *student teacher* to a *novice teacher*. Indeed, learning to teach within a community of practice during practicum program is also considered as a process of identity formation (Wenger, 1998).

Although teaching is not as popular as other professions in Indonesia (such as a doctor or an engineer), teaching is a well-respected profession (Kuswandono, 2013; Suryani, Watt, & Richardson, 2013; Tilaar, 2002). Teachers affect the lives of many people. Because of the noble nature of teachers' roles, the profession has a special status in society where people usually regard teachers as role models and sources of knowledge and wisdom (Tilaar, 2002). A teacher is a valued person in society and teaching is considered to be one of the sacred and distinctive professions. In Indonesia, teachers

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are addressed by the title 'guru', which stands for 'Sing diguGU lan ditiRU', that is "somebody who deserved to be listened and modelled upon" (Gandana & Parr, 2013, p. 8). This cultural expectation still exists in today. It is important to explore why the younger generation choose to be (English) teachers.

This article explores three research questions. *First,* what are the reasons for participants' choice to become English teachers? S*econd,* what events or contexts have contributed to their decision to be English teachers? *Third,* is there any change in motivation after completing their teaching practicum? English is considered an important subject in Indonesian education. The Indonesian government has introduced a number of important policies in relation to teachers' lives in the last ten years.

The teachers' certification program is one of the most recent and progressive policies in Indonesia. As mandated by Law no. 14/2005, the government aims to certify Indonesia's 2.8 million state and private school teachers by 2015. Launched in 2006, the program requires educators to possess professional teaching certificates. This will ensure that teachers' qualifications are adequate. At the same time the government will improve teachers' salaries and working conditions. With a teaching certification, graduates are eligible to apply for a civil servant position to secure a permanent teaching position at a school and to receive double a basic salary and inclusive health benefits and pension. The remuneration policy is expected to attract some of the best students into the teaching profession, and in the long term, it is hoped this will improve the quality of national education (Jalal et al., 2009).

The reasons behind pre-service teachers' decision to enter the teaching profession would be expected to contribute to the development of initial teacher identity, and in the long run it would affect their commitment to teaching English (Canrinus, Helms-Lorenz, Beijaard, Buitink, & Hofman, 2011). Those who have a stronger motivation to be a teacher would be expected to have a stronger sense of being a teacher. It is difficult to separate one's personal self from one's professional self when one becomes a teacher (Olsen, 2008). In other words, a student's personal history prior to his or her decision to entering a teaching profession would be expected to affect his or her professional identity as a teacher (see Figure 1). This personal history includes schooling biographies as well as personal experiences during childhood and interactions with significant others. These complex biographies have led to a decision to study in a teacher education program and become a professional teacher. This article considers the complexities of participants' reasons to choose to be an English teacher in Indonesia. Do these reasons fit within Olsen's framework.

While pre-service teachers' motivations have been extensively investigated in many parts of the world (See, for instance, Gao & Trent, 2009; Malderez, Hobson, Tracey, & Kerr, 2007; Stuart, 2000), this topic has been rarely investigated in Indonesia (Agustien, 2010; Soekirno, 2004; Suryani, et al., 2013 are some exceptional studies). Agustien (2010) investigated teachers' motivation to be teachers of students with special needs, while Suryani et al. (2013) explored Indonesian future teachers' reasons to choose teaching as a profession in general. Only a narrative study by Soekirno (2004) specifically examined becoming an English teacher in the Indonesian context. Considering the scarcity of relevant studies, this study is deemed important.

Study Design

This study involved ten out 52 pre-service English teachers of the English Education Department of Teachers Training and Education Faculty of Riau University. They were about to commence their teaching practicum in secondary schools in Riau province. The participants included seven females and three males, aged 21 to 23 years old. Nine of them have never had teaching experience in formal public schools. All participants registered in the teachers' education program in 2009 academic year soon after they graduated from their high schools. It was their first practicum experience. All 52 pre-service English teachers who were in the same cohort were invited into the study. Those who agreed to participate became the participants. For confidentiality reasons, all participants are referred to by pseudonyms.
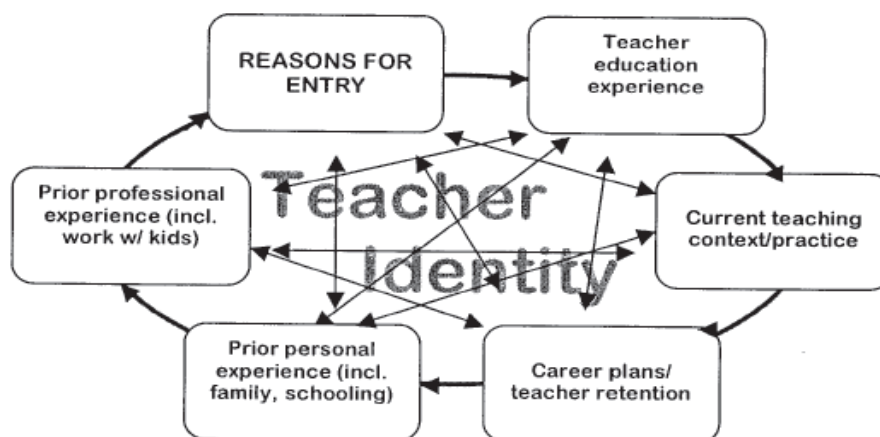
Figure 1: Dynamics Interaction of Teachers Identity Construction (Olsen, 2008, p. 25)

Two rounds of in-depth interviews with each pre-service teacher were conducted before and after their teaching practicum. One interview was done before practicum and the other one after practicum. The first round interview explored participants' personal and professional histories, schooling and teacher education experiences, past familial experience, as well as reasons for their decisions to study English and become English teachers. The second-round interview focused on any changes in their reasons to be English teachers. Has their sense of being novice English teachers been shaped and developed during the practicum? In addition to these individual interviews, a one hour Focused Group Discussion (FGD) was also conducted.

The transcripts from the interviews and the focused group discussion were analysed to create identity profiles for the ten participants. By using the data management tool, NVivo 10, data were coded and categorised based on themes and patterns. These patterns then were analysed to produce themes, with reference to literature on motivation and new teacher development. These phases of analysis generated the findings discussed here.

RESULTS

Motivation to be an English Teacher

Seven participants answered that they studied English because they wanted to be professional English teachers. The other three did not articulate this desire. If the earlier group deliberately wanted to choose teaching as their careers, the latter joined with the English education department because they loved studying English; or because they did not get their first choice in their university entrance test. This means that not all pre-service teachers originally aspired to be professional teachers.

The first group of participants were asked a follow up question: why do you want to be an English teacher? Their responses show they were inspired by a number of interrelated reasons, ranging from altruism, religious values, the 'speciality' of English, to gendered opportunities. Six participants reported that they are motivated to be an (English) teacher because of *altruism* and because they believed that *teaching is a respected and noble profession*; that they are willing to educate the nation – transferring knowledge and educating younger generation to secure a bright future. Dodi, for example, stated that his dream to be an English teacher was triggered by the poor condition of people's lives in his village. He wanted to improve people's lives.

Four participants mentioned that the feeling of satisfaction when a student understands what they teach is more important for them than financial rewards. One of them, Arel, articulated that being a teacher is like doing a 'holy mission.' Teachers are messengers of God (preaching religious values) and material rewards are secondary to religious rewards.

> … being a teacher, for me, is like making a plantation for *da'wah* [preaching religious values]. It means that being a teacher is an altruism choice, in which we are not supposed to get any reward from this

profession. It is up to the society to reward it. If a teacher has begun doing this profession by calculating a reward they might gain in advance, what is the difference between a teacher and a businessman? (Arel, pre-practicum interview)

The choice of the term *da'wah* by Arel points to an important message behind his reason to be an English teacher. *Da'wah* is an Islamic term which literally means "issuing a summons" or "making an invitation." As the most populous Muslim country in the world, Indonesia has many social and cultural values which are derived from people's religious beliefs and doctrines. This is also evident in the discourse and practices of Indonesian education, including pre-service teachers' reasons to become a teacher. In the context of Islamic teaching, *da'wah* is a holy activity to be carried out by messengers of God, to guide people to the way of God. Arel's response could be understood in terms of his understanding, as a Muslim, that the roles and responsibilities of a teacher are as holy as the works of the prophets. This is a profession of service, sacrifice, and dedication - to improve people's lives.

In addition to altruistic reasons, five female participants said they preferred the teaching profession because it suited females. Teaching is not as 'complicated' as other professions. Selly said the following:

> I am a woman. I think that a teacher is not a complicated profession for a female like me compared to other professions, like working in the company or other fields.

They thought that teaching was not as demanding as other professions. They viewed teaching time as quite flexible, not having to spend a lot of time in school. Working in a private company might have more rigid requirements. They expected that they would be able to combine this profession with their roles as wife and mother when they get married. These participants also stated that they loved working with children.

> To be honest, I can see that being a teacher is a nice profession, not really hard, and having a flexible working time … I don't have to stay at school all the time … moreover if we talk about the future, I am a female, so I feel that teaching is my life. I love being with the kids, I am happy seeing the kids grow and do what we are teaching them. I believe that this would be fun for me. I would have a lot of people to share my work with … (Elvina, pre-practicum interview)

Six participants also said the special status of English as an international language as a reason for them wanting to be an English teacher. English is considered important by the Indonesian education system. They noted that globalisation has played a significant role in promoting English as an international language to many non-English speaking countries, including Indonesia. They were proud of being English teachers. They thought they were 'special' teachers in a sense that they had an 'added value' compared to other teachers in the school.

> … because I think if we are an English teacher, people will probably see us as a 'special teacher', different from other subject teachers. So we have an 'added value' as an English teacher. We can get a lot information from the outside; we can share with others from the outside. Other subject teachers, they only move inside Indonesia. That's why I want to be an English teacher. (Ayi, pre-practicum interview)

Data from both interviews (before and after practicum) indicated that the remuneration policy (double incentive schemes) within current teacher certification programs did not appear to have a significant effect in their choice to be a teacher. Some of them had decided to be an English teacher before the teachers' certification program was implemented.

> …actually I have had my dream to be a teacher long before the teachers' certification program. So, I didn't know about this program before. (Elvina, pre-practicum interview).

Although some of them knew there had been improvement to the lives of certified teachers, eight participants confirmed that increased salary was not main reason they wanted to be a teacher.

Sources of motivation

The data revealed that the motivations to be an English teacher often originated from their childhood, schooling, and experience within the family. The students' decisions to study English at school – that started their move to be an English teacher - could be tracked back before they entered

teacher education programs. Most participants reported that they were inspired to be an English teacher through their interactions with their own school teachers as well as with some of their family members who were teachers. Students' decisions to be English teachers are closely related to the influence of significant others in their lives. Andersen, Chen, & Miranda (2002) define the *significant other* as 'an individual who is or has been deeply influential to one's life, or in whom one once was emotionally invested" (p.160).

Participants' interaction with good English teachers formed their initial image of a good teacher.

> I think that it was from my English teacher when I was in primary school. My English teacher was a good English teacher; she could speak English fluently and was easy to understand. Since then, I was interested in English. (Selly, pre-practicum interview)

A similar story is narrated by Dodi who reported that he was impressed with one of his English teachers at senior high school. His English teacher was a figure who inspired him. He was impressed with the teaching method his English teacher employed in his English class. The class was fun, friendly, dynamic, and motivating.

In relation to the influence of school teachers, another participant, Ayi, explained that she was first interested in becoming an English teacher when she was in the junior high school. In her mind, an English teacher was a *smart person* with a lot of *added values* and wide perspectives. She was impressed with one of her English teachers who had these characteristics.

> It was because I saw my English teacher when I was in junior high school. It seems to me that being an English teacher was identical to being someone smart. I also saw that the English teacher had many friends. He could have friends with '*bule*' [a popular term in Indonesia to refer to white people visiting the country]. So, it impressed me. It looked cool. That's why I wanted to be an English teacher.

Seven participants reported that inspiration came from relatives or family members. Selly, for example, recalled that she was first wanted to be a teacher after observing her mother's teaching. When she was six years old, she accompanied her mother to school where she was impressed with the way the students respected her mother and with the pleasant atmosphere created by her mother. Three participants got inspired by relatives' teaching attire. Dodi reported that he was wanted to be a teacher after looking at his uncle *wearing a teacher's uniform* (which is common in Indonesia) every morning. The uniform looked and symbolised the social level of the person wearing it.

> I was first inspired probably by my family, because there are many relatives of mine who are teachers, like my uncles. I saw them wearing neat and clean uniforms every day, going to school, I liked it. (Dodi, pre-practicum interview)

In some cultures, people value the outfits associated with certain professions. Indonesian society generally tends to value a profession that requires careful dress, such as those wearing professional uniforms with ties and clean shining black shoes. A professional outfit symbolises higher social status. They can be considered middle class, even if their salary is low. A young person might choose to be a sales person wearing professional attire, even though her salary may be less than those who work on farms.

Another source of inspiration was the experience during *teaching practicum,* when pre-service teachers interacted with their mentor teachers and other teachers at school. Four participants mentioned that the dedication of their mentor teachers had inspired them. On the other hand, inspiration also came from unhappy stories in placement schools where some senior teachers did not perform well. The poor teachers strengthened their desire to be a good teacher.

> I am bit worried with the teachers' condition at the moment. For me, it is the negative teachers who have motivated me to be a teacher. We can minimize the existence of the negative teachers by becoming the good ones. I don't want to put the future of the nation on their shoulders. (Demire, Focus Group Discussion)

Most participants confirmed that their willingness to be English teachers was stronger after the teaching practicum. The experience of interacting with school members as a *community of practice* seems to be the reason behind this growing sense of being a teacher.

… before my teaching practicum, my willingness to be a teacher was not as strong as today. It was only about 50% at that time, but now it is nearly 90%, probably, because I have met with many new things. I see and interact with students in real life, understand how a school system works, how a learning process works. And I found those activities are fun. (Dewinta, post-practicum interview)

It is important to bear in mind that the degree of the growing willingness to be an English teacher was different from one participant to another, depending on the quality of interaction and supervision they received during the practicum. Arel mentioned that his motivation had fluctuated during practicum. He came to his practicum with no intention to become an English teacher. He joined the English education department because he did not pass the police entrance test, his career dream. Yet, during practicum, he was impressed with his students' behaviour in respecting him as a student teacher. However, in his post practicum interview, he reported that his motivation was again down because he felt he was not successful in helping his students to learn English. He still aspires to be a policeman.

DISCUSSION

This section explores in more detail themes that emerged from the data. The notion of *teaching as a plantation of 'dakwah'* and the influence of *significant others* will be considered further in this section. The current findings also will be linked with the model of teachers' identity construction proposed by Olsen (2008).

The data in general reveals similarities to findings by Sinclair (2008), Richardson and Watt (2006), and Hellsten and Prytula (2011). Sinclair (2008) argues that motivation to be a teacher can be classified as intrinsic or extrinsic. Generally, participants in this study tended to place more importance on intrinsic motivation. For example, the participants strongly endorsed factors such as *teaching as a noble profession, teaching is like a plantation of 'dakwah', being a teacher is a hero, making a difference in others' lives* as part of their motivation to be an English teacher. It can be argued that these four factors could generally be related to the principle of *altruism.*

In its broadest sense, altruism is the opposite of selfishness. The altruist is someone who bases his or her intention to do something beyond his or her personal interest. As indicated earlier, the use of the term *'dakwah'* informs some participants' reasons to be an English teacher . Considering the holy and noble nature of the work of *dakwah* (as the work of messangers), these preservice teachers are aspiring to be English teachers because of this altruistic principle, not because of financial or personal reward. This finding is in line with what Suryani et al., (2013) found in their study of the motivation of 802 fourth year undergraduate teacher education students in four universities in Jogyakarta Indonesia. *Making a social contribution* and *religious influences* were the main reasons for choosing teaching as a career.

The findings show that that the teaching profession is still regarded as a 'holy' and respected profession by Indonesia's younger generations. The model of teacher as 'guru' embedded in Indonesian culture appears to have been transferred to the younger generation. The belief that teaching is like a 'holy' profession is significant because such a personal calling could maintain the perseverance of these young teachers. In addition, this sense of a personal mission could affect the construction of their identity as new teachers, and, in the long run, their competence as teachers (Korthagen, 2004).

In the present study, such idealism may be attributed to the young age of these pre-service English teachers, ranging from 21 to 23 years old. These are the ages when people often tend to be idealistic, to be inspired by factors beyond their personal interest (Latif, 2013). Hellsten and Prytula (2011) investigated 279 pre-service English teachers in Saskatchewan, Canada, and confirmed a similar result, that the younger participants more so than the older participants provided idealistic reasons to become teachers.

Being motivated by a spiritual factor (seeing teaching as a *'dakwah'*) may seem strange to teachers in the West, where teaching generally has no direct relation to teaching moral or religious values. While western countries have teachers who see their profession as concerned with ethics and

moral behaviour, the emphasis on moral and especially religious values is more pronounced and culturally sanctioned in Indonesia.

As a nation that explicitly endorses Islam, religious values permeate Indonesian educational philosophy. This relationship could be seen in the goals of national education as stated in Law Number 20/2003 on the national education system. Article 3 of Law Number 20/2003 states that the national education development is an "effort to develop the intellectual life of the nation and improve the quality of *faithful*, devout, and moral Indonesian people who master science, technology and the arts to create a modern, fair, prosperous and civilized society based on *Pancasila* and the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia" ("Law on National Education System," 2003, p. 2). The notion of *faithful* indicates that all teachers, including English teachers, need to remain faithful to their calling.

Pancasila means 'five principles.' It refers to the philosophical foundation of the Indonesian state. The first principle is *Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa* (Belief in the divinity of God). This principle indicates that Indonesia is a religious country. Religious consideration is inherent in every aspect of life, including in the educational sector.

As mentioned earlier, one of the reasons for the introduction of double incentives within the teacher certification program was that better benefits and higher salaries would attract people to teaching. Results from this study suggest that using external enticements as the primary recruiting strategy may not be meaningful to all beginning teachers, at least not at this initial stage.

Although this study was not designed to investigate differences between male and female participants, it is interesting to note that five out seven female participants mentioned *gendered* reasons behind their motivation to become (English) teachers. Given the flexible nature of the teaching profession in Indonesia, most female participants reported that this profession was appropriate for females. In Indonesia female teachers outnumber male teachers. Data from Indonesian Ministry of National Education, for example, reports that there are 8003 subject teachers for all secondary schools across Riau province in 2010, comprising 2,988 (37.33%) males and 5,015 (62.67%) females (Kemendiknas, 2010).This finding can be linked to Indonesian culture where working women usually have multiple roles and responsibilities (Rahmah et al., 2013). Apart from being school teachers, women are frequently involved in domestic responsibilities: being a housewife, cooking, and looking after children.

External motivations to be an English teacher also emerged. English is an international language so developing proficiency in it is important. There also are 'significant others' who acted as their role models to the student teachers.

Not only is English a compulsory subject in Indonesia schools, but also it is used to be used as a medium of instruction in a number of public International Standards Schools (ISSs). These schools have been controversial and have been banned. There was concern that use of English as the medium of instruction threatened Indonesian national identity (Zacharias, 2013). English proficiency is considered prestigious for some groups in Indonesia (Lauder, 2008). One is considered well educated if one has mastered English.

In terms of reasons to choose teaching, the current findings fit with the model of teachers' identity construction proposed by Olsen (2008) who argues that teacher identity is constructed through a dynamic and holistic interaction among multiple parts. Participants' personal experience (including familial and schooling experience) and their experience of teaching practicum are important factors in this interaction. These personal and school biographies have contributed to their decision to enter the English teaching profession.

Consistent with Olsen's model, *significant others* who emerge during participants' life trajectories have affected their decisions. *Significant others* can be family members (parents or relatives), past school teachers, and individuals during their childhood experiences.

Conclusion

This study shows a variety of reasons to become an English teacher in Indonesia: life experience and the influence of significant others; moral and religious values; altruism; the status of English as an international language; and the way in which teaching can fit with the roles of wife and mother. Altruism stood out as important reason to be an English teacher. Teaching is seen as a noble profession that can help young people develop. The participants of the current study were young pre-service teachers. Older teachers may be less altruistic. For them, financial considerations may be more important.

Future research about teaching in Indonesia should look at the motivation of older teachers. A longitudinal research design would be useful to look for changes in the motivation of English teachers as they move through their careers.

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