FINDING THEIR VOICES: EFL TRAINEE TEACHERS DOING ENGLISH TEACHING PRACTICUM IN AN INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY SERVICES PROGRAM IN AN ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

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Education plays a pivotal role in shaping individuals and fostering their professional growth. Integrating practical experiences, particularly through international community service programs, is essential for teacher trainers to develop their pedagogical skills and broaden their perspectives. This study delves into the participation of teacher trainers in an international community service program at an Islamic Boarding School in Malaysia, aiming to comprehend their journey in finding their voice as educators. The objective is to explore how such experiences contribute to enhancing teaching effectiveness, deepening understanding of Islamic educational values, and fostering professional development amidst global dynamics.

Employing a qualitative approach with a narrative inquiry design, this study focused on understanding the experiences and perceptions of teacher trainees involved in a one-month international community service program. Through in-depth individual interviews conducted via Zoom meetings, data collection aims to capture the nuanced stories and insights of the participants. Participants, selected from active teacher trainees, engaged in discussions concerning their positive experiences, encountered challenges, employed strategies for overcoming difficulties, and the impact of the program on their professional identity development.

The findings of the study shed light on various aspects, including positive experiences gained, challenges faced, strategies employed, and teacher identity development. Positive experiences encompass improvements in class management and teaching skills, while challenges include managing diverse learning styles and limited resources. Strategies for overcoming difficulties include intrinsic approaches like improving class management and rapid adaptation, alongside external strategies such as collaboration with peers and resource utilization. The study suggests leveraging positive experiences to enhance teaching effectiveness, emphasizing effective class management techniques, collaboration with fellow teachers, and fostering continuous teacher identity development through workshops and reflection.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explains numerous topics related to the introduction of the current study. It consists of the background of the study, research questions, objectives of the study, scope and limitation of the study, significance of the study, and the definition of key terms

1.1 Background of the study

Education is a key foundation in character building and individual capacity building. Engaging teacher trainers in practical experiences, especially through the International Community Services Program, is relevant and vital to achieving this goal. Such programs expose teacher trainers to real-world realities and provide opportunities for them to find their identity and voice on the international education stage. With a focus on teacher trainers' participation in the international community services Program at an Islamic Boarding School in Malaysia, this study aims to understand their journey in finding their voice. This experience is considered a means to develop their pedagogical skills, deepen their understanding of Islamic educational values, and broaden their horizons in the face of global dynamics.

Numerous studies have been conducted on the significance of supporting the development of a teacher's identity (Bullough & Baughman, 1997; Wideen et al., 1998; Mayer, 1999; Korthagen et al., 2001; Nias & Nias,

2002; Olsen, 2008; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Research findings indicate that a stable and coherent professional identity is linked to favorable outcomes, including mental well-being (Zembylas, 2013), as well as the provision of high-quality instruction within educational settings (Agee, 2004). This argument applies to both educators and learners. According to the findings of Rots et al., (2010), establishing a robust professional identity can significantly contribute to teachers' confidence in their choice to pursue a career in education and enhance their commitment to their profession.

The term teacher identity refers to the comprehensive sense of self and professional identity that educators cultivate throughout their careers as a result of their beliefs, values, and experiences related to teaching. It encompasses the unique combination of personal and professional characteristics that shape a teacher's approach to education and their interactions with students and colleagues. Teachers' identities are shaped by various factors, including their educational background, personal values, cultural background, teaching experiences, and ongoing professional development. It is a complex and dynamic concept that evolves as teachers gain more experience and engage in reflective practices.

The identity of the teacher is an important factor in the efficiency of the learning and teaching process. It affects a variety of facets of a teacher's profession (Stronge et al., 2007), including classroom management; teacher identity influences how teachers create and keep a happy and productive classroom atmosphere. Teachers who have a strong sense of their own identity

are better able to establish rules, procedures, and expectations in their classrooms, all of which contribute to a classroom that is well-managed and orderly. Instructional strategies the beliefs and values that teachers hold influence the techniques and methods that they use in their classrooms. The decisions that a teacher makes regarding lesson preparation, curriculum selection, and instructional strategies are all influenced by their identity. Teachers who have a strong grasp on their professional identities are more likely to employ instructional practices that are both successful and engaging, and which are also in line with their core values on education and student development. The quality of the relationships that instructors develop with their student's teacher identity has a significant impact on the quality of the relationships that instructors develop with their students. The identity of a teacher affects their capacity to establish rapport, trust, and open communication with their pupils. When teachers have a solid grasp on who they are, they are better able to connect with their pupils on a more profound level, comprehend the requirements of their pupils, and offer individualized assistance. Professional development and resilience, a teacher's identity is inextricably tied to their ability to grow professionally and remain resilient in the face of adversity. Teachers can reflect on their practice, locate areas in which they may improve, and look for chances for continued professional development when they have a well-defined identity. Teachers who have a strong sense of their own identities are more likely to welcome change, adapt

to new ways of teaching, and remain steadfast in their dedication to the academic achievement of their students.

The development of a strong professional identity is essential to the success of a teacher in the classroom setting. There were discovered to be research studies both within the setting of Indonesia and from other countries that explored the professional identity of English teachers. In this regard, the majority of research studies focus on the following topics: The Influence of Teacher Professional Identity on Learner Motivation (Zadjali et al., 2016); Critical incidents shape the professional identity of pre-service teachers. (Sudtho & Singhasiri, 2017). The professional identity of teachers (Mofrad, 2016; Qaimari, 2016) Cooperative learning is a component of the professional identity of beginner educators. (Astuti, 2016). Profiling teachers' professional identities (Canrinus et al., 2012). Rethinking studies on teachers' professional identities. (Beijaard et al., 2004); The professional identity of teachers (Rus et al., 2013); New teachers' identities are shaped and reshaped by their contexts. There are multiple conflicting discourses and outcomes about the professional identity of teachers (Sachs, 2001). Self - efficacy, job happiness, motivation, and commitment: investigating the links between measures of teachers' professional identity. (Canrinus et al., 2012), modifications and characteristics of EFL teachers' professional identities. (Caihong, 2011), the fluidity of teachers' identity (Ghanizadeh & Ostad, 2016).

A previous study was conducted by Ballantyne, (2022), The researcher examined the manifestation of teacher identity among Chinese overseas

students who engage in voluntary work in Australian educational institutions. There were 15 participants and all of them were new Chinese university graduates enrolled in a higher-degree research program at Western Sydney University's School of Education. Data were gathered via one-hour semi-structured interviews conducted in English. The findings are: Coded data from all 15 participants revealed that several expressed the idea of a teacher identity related to their school experience in Australia. Mei Mei, for example, indicated that she was "looking for professional identity" through the program. Bai Jiao mentioned "developing a sense of a teacher," while Chun Zhen mentioned presenting one's perspective as a teacher to students. Ju Lei stated, 'You can grow yourself in practice,' and Guang acknowledged that "my teaching philosophy was greatly transformed during this period." These extracts indicate that participants recognized their teacher identity formation during their time in Australian schools. Overall, reflection on the volunteering experience inspired self-evaluations such as Liling's statement "I feel like a teacher," Chun Zhen's description of her volunteering as a "real teaching experience," Qiuyi's self-identification as "a funny teacher," and Shuhua's reflection "to be a formal teacher, I should be serious with the students."

The setting of this study, nestled in the heart of Tanjong Sepat, Selangor, Malaysia, stands as a unique institution within the landscape of Islamic religious education. As an integral part of Malaysia's diverse educational tapestry, the setting of this study plays a crucial role in shaping the identities of its teachers, who serve as custodians of religious knowledge and

educators of future generations. The study of teacher identity holds significant importance, as it unravels the intricate threads that contribute to the formation of educators' professional selves. In the context of the setting of this study, this exploration becomes particularly compelling due to the intersection of cultural, religious, and educational influences that shape the identity of teachers within this institution.

Malaysia, known for its rich cultural diversity, presents a fascinating backdrop for investigating teacher identity. In the state of Selangor, Tanjong Sepat stands out not only for its natural beauty but also for the coexistence of traditional values and contemporary educational practices. Within this milieu, this place emerges as a crucible where teacher identities are molded through a dynamic interplay of pedagogical approaches, religious values, and community expectations.

The unique challenges and opportunities faced by teachers in the setting of this study offer a rich terrain for exploration. Understanding how teachers navigate and negotiate their identities within the cultural and religious context of Tanjong Sepat is crucial for informing educational practices and fostering a deeper connection between teachers and students.

In this context, the researcher examines Indonesian people who practice teaching in Malaysia for 1 month. In general, research on teacher identity in Islamic boarding schools is limited, especially in Selangor, Malaysia. There have not been many studies that specifically identify aspects of teacher identity in the context of Islamic education in the region. There is a lack of

research that focuses on the teacher identity of teachers living for some time in Malaysia. Such research could provide unique insights into how the Malaysian environment and experiences influence the development of their teacher identity. Previous research has been inadequate in understanding the local factors that influence teacher identity in the research setting. Factors such as local culture upheld Islamic values, and relationships with the surrounding community need to be the focus to understand teacher identity more deeply. There are not many studies that combine interdisciplinary approaches in analyzing teacher identity in Islamic boarding schools. An approach that includes psychological, sociological, and educational aspects can provide a more comprehensive understanding of teacher identity.

This research attempts to delve into the multifaceted dimensions of teacher identity in the setting of this study, exploring the influences of cultural and religious elements on the professional selves of educators. By shedding light on the factors that contribute to the construction of teachers' identities in this specific context, the study seeks to provide insights that can inform educational policies, and teacher training programs, and contribute to the broader discourse on teacher identity in diverse educational settings.

1.2 Research Question

Based on the study's backdrop, the researcher highlights the following four research questions:

1. What are the positive experiences that teacher trainees have gained in the program?

2. What are the difficulties faced by the teacher trainees have faced in the program?

3. How did the teacher trainees overcome the difficulties?

4. How has the program developed their professional identity as a teacher?

1.3 Objective of the study

The goal of this study was to investigate an English teacher's trainee identity as a teacher when teaching English in the setting of this study.

1. Explore and identify the positive experiences gained by teacher trainees participating in the international community services at the school in Tanjung Sepat Selangor Malaysia, focusing on aspects such as class management improvements and enhancements in teaching effectiveness.

2. Investigate and analyze the difficulties encountered by teacher trainees during the international community services at the school in Tanjung Sepat Selangor Malaysia, with a particular emphasis on challenges related to class dynamics, diverse learning styles, and restricted facilities.

3. Examine and document the strategies employed by teacher trainees to overcome the identified difficulties, including but not limited to engaging students in captivating learning activities and fostering collaboration among peers at international community services at the school in Tanjung Sepat Selangor Malaysia.

4. Assess and understand the impact of the international community services at the school in Tanjung Sepat Selangor Malaysia on the development of professional identity among teacher trainees, exploring how participation in community service initiatives contributes to the enhancement of teaching skills, communication proficiency, and positive interactions with students.

1.4 The scope of the study

The research narrows its focus to three selected teacher trainees at the international community services at the school in Tanjung Sepat Selangor Malaysia who have actively participated in international community service initiatives. Their experiences, challenges, and strategies were central to the findings, providing in-depth insights into the impact of these programs on individual professional development. The research focused on four primary themes derived from the research questions: positive experiences gained, difficulties faced, strategies for overcoming challenges, and the program's influence on the development of professional identity.

1.5 The significance of the study

This study holds significant implications for the professional development of teacher trainees at the school. By examining the experiences of teacher trainees engaged in international community service, the research aims to uncover valuable insights into how such programs contribute to their pedagogical skills, cultural competence, and overall readiness for the teaching profession. The international community service initiatives at the school

provide a unique opportunity for teacher trainees to engage with diverse communities and cultures. Understanding how teacher trainees navigate and appreciate cultural differences during these experiences is crucial for fostering cross-cultural understanding, which is increasingly vital in today's interconnected world. The findings of this study could inform the development and enhancement of teacher education programs, both at the school and beyond. Insights into the positive experiences, challenges faced, and strategies employed by teacher trainees can guide the integration of similar initiatives into broader teacher training curricula, ensuring a more comprehensive and globally oriented education for future educators. This study holds significance in its potential to inform educational practices, enhance teacher training programs, and contribute to the broader understanding of the role of international community service in shaping the professional journey of teacher trainees at the school in Tanjong Sepat, Selangor, Malaysia.

1.6 The definition of a key term

Definitions of crucial phrases are provided to avoid confusion and misinterpretation. Several words used in this study include the following:

1.6.1 Identity

Identity is a complex concept that encompasses various aspects of an individual's sense of self. It involves how we perceive ourselves and how we believe others see us. Identity can be impacted by several aspects, including cultural, social, personal, and psychological components. Culturally, identity

often relates to the shared customs, traditions, and values of a particular group or community. Socially, identity can be shaped by our interactions with others, such as family, friends, and society at large. Personal experiences, beliefs, and characteristics also contribute to our sense of identity. Additionally, psychological factors, such as personality traits and self-perception, play a crucial role in forming one's identity.

1.6.2 Teacher identity

Teacher identity is a subset of professional identity, specifically focusing on the unique characteristics and roles that define an individual as a teacher. It encompasses beliefs, values, and practices that shape a teacher's sense of self within the educational landscape. Teacher identity involves examining how teacher trainees at the Islamic religious school perceive their roles as educators, the influence of cultural and religious elements on their identity, and how international community services contribute to the shaping of their teacher identity at the school in Tanjong Sepat, Selangor, Malaysia

1.6.3 Language Teacher Identity

Language teacher identity refers to how language educators perceive themselves and construct their professional roles within the context of language teaching. It encompasses the various roles, beliefs, values, and self-perceptions that teachers hold regarding their profession and their impact on students. This concept recognizes that teachers bring their personalities, experiences, and beliefs into the classroom, shaping their teaching practices and interactions with students. Language teacher identity is influenced by

factors such as educational background, cultural background, language proficiency, teaching philosophy, and personal experiences.

1.6.4 Teaching skills

Teaching skills are the abilities, approaches, and strategies that educators use to provide effective learning experiences for their pupils. These abilities may include classroom management, communication, lesson planning, and the capacity to adapt to different learning styles. The school's international community services have an impact on teaching skills because they allow teacher trainees to fine-tune their pedagogical approaches, adapt their teaching methods to varied cultural situations, and develop novel strategies for effective classroom participation.

The acronym TPACK stands for "Technological, Pedagogical, and Content Knowledge." This is a framework that aims to comprehend the relationship between the use of technology (known as "Technological Knowledge"), understanding of teaching (known as "Pedagogical Knowledge"), and subject content (known as "Content Knowledge"). In the context of TPACK, English teachers need to use technology in the educational process to make learning more effective and efficient. This demonstrates that TPACK is an essential component that has the potential to be utilized as a resource for enhancing and assessing the characteristics of educational programs.

1.6.5 Islamic religious school

An Islamic religious school, commonly referred to as a madrasa or pondok in the Malaysian context, is an educational institution that primarily focuses on the teaching of Islamic principles, values, and religious subjects. These schools play a crucial role in imparting religious education to students. The setting of the study serves as an Islamic religious school where teacher trainees undergo training to become educators in the Islamic tradition. The international community services at the school provide a unique lens through which the integration of Islamic teachings into broader educational practices can be explored.

In the setting of the study, they learn about Formal Classes with General Subjects. The students follow the learning of general subjects such as Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, and English. The applicable curriculum in Malaysia gives them formal education. Pesantren Class with Quranic Studies. In the boarding school, students study the Quran. They learn to read, understand, and memorize the holy verses of the Quran with the guidance of competent teachers. In addition to the Quran, students also learn Arabic to understand the context and meaning of Arabic books. The skill of reading Arabic books becomes the focus of understanding religious teachings more deeply. Amaliyah (Practice), Pesantren also includes an amaliyah aspect, where students not only understand religious theory, but also involve themselves in religious practices such as prayer, dhikr, and other worship activities. Through the combination of formal activities in the classroom and religious learning in

the pesantren, the school creates a holistic educational environment that

combines scientific and religious aspects, preparing students to become

knowledgeable and faithful individuals.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This chapter explains the conclusion and suggestions from the study. The researcher presents the conclusion briefly from the findings and the discussion from the previous chapter. Furthermore, the researcher also gives suggestions for future researchers related to this study.

5.1 Conclusion

This study discusses the experiences of Malaysian Islamic religious school teacher trainees in an international community services program. It emphasizes the development of teacher identity, teaching skills, and the challenges faced in the program. The study used qualitative research methods, including interviews and classroom observations, to gather data from two teacher trainees. The participants' experiences, difficulties, and the development of their professional identity as teachers were explored. The study aims to address the gaps in the literature and gain a deeper understanding of teacher identity in the context of an international community service program at an Islamic religious school in Malaysia.

The study sought to better understand the experiences of teacher trainees in an international community service program, as well as how these experiences influenced their professional identities as teachers. The research findings highlighted the positive experiences, problems, and strategies of the program's

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teacher trainees. It also emphasized teacher identity, teaching skills, and the program's influence on participants. The study has implications for teacher education programs, highlighting the need to promote teacher identity formation and the impact of community service efforts on teacher trainees' professional identities. The findings add to our understanding of teacher identity, teaching skills, and the impact of international community service programs on the professional development of teacher trainees.

The study recognized the limitations of the research design, such as the limited number of participants and the emphasis on a specific environment, and also the duration of the program was quite short, which may limit the findings' generalizability. The study proposes that future research look at the long-term effects of such programs on teaching practices and career choices, as well as the impact of cultural and religious factors on teacher identity in Islamic religious institutions. The study's implications for theory and practice include the relevance of supporting teacher identity formation in teacher education programs and the need for specialized ways to understand and develop educators in the setting of Islamic religious institutions.

To further strengthen the understanding of teacher identity and its development, future research could explore the long-term impact of such community service programs on teacher trainees' teaching practices and career choices. Additionally, investigating the role of cultural and religious factors in shaping teacher identity within the context of Islamic religious schools would provide valuable insights for educational practitioners and policymakers.

5.2 Suggestion

The researcher gives some suggestions related to this study. The suggestions are presented for EFL trainee teachers, the students, and the future researcher.

5.2.1 For EFL trainee teachers

The findings suggest focusing on leveraging positive experiences from the program to enhance their teaching journey. Emphasizing effective class management techniques, such as establishing clear expectations and utilizing positive reinforcement, can create a conducive learning environment. To address challenges like managing diverse learning styles and limited resources, trainees can collaborate with fellow teachers, adapt quickly to different situations, and creatively utilize available resources. Additionally, fostering teacher identity development by continuously improving teaching skills and communication abilities through workshops, peer learning, and reflection can further enhance their effectiveness in the classroom. By embracing these strategies, EFL trainees can navigate the complexities of teaching with confidence and resilience.

5.2.2 For the students

The findings highlight the importance of recognizing the positive aspects of their learning experiences in the international community services program. By observing how teachers manage their classes, improve their teaching skills, and handle emotions, students can gain valuable insights into effective teaching practices. Understanding the difficulties teachers face, such as managing diverse learning styles and limited resources, can foster empathy and cooperation among

students. Students can support teachers by actively participating in classroom activities, adapting to different teaching methods, and utilizing available resources to enhance their learning experience. Moreover, by witnessing teachers' ongoing development of their teaching skills and communication abilities, students can be inspired to cultivate their growth mindset and strive for continuous improvement in their academic journey.

5.2.3 For future researchers

This study offers valuable insights into the experiences of participants in an international community services program, particularly focusing on positive experiences, challenges faced, strategies for overcoming difficulties, and teacher identity development. Researchers can further explore these themes by conducting in-depth qualitative interviews or surveys to gain a deeper understanding of the specific factors influencing each theme. Additionally, longitudinal studies tracking the long-term effects of such programs on participants' teaching practices and professional development could provide valuable data. Furthermore, comparative studies across different cultural contexts or educational settings could offer insights into the generalizability of the findings and inform the development of tailored interventions or training programs for educators. By building upon the findings of this study, future researchers can contribute to the ongoing advancement of teacher education and development initiatives. And future researchers can focus more on students who have longer experience living abroad.

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