



The Contribution of Past Narratives in EFL Teacher Educators' Identity Construction: What and How?

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Abstract. Much research has been done regarding EFL teacher educators' identity construction. However, studies that look at teachers' past narratives as EFL learners and how such narratives contribute to their present identity construction seem sparse. This study, as part of a larger PhD research project, was designed to fill the gap by illuminating the contributions of past narratives on EFL teacher educators' identity construction. We employed a life-history narrative inquiry to elicit participants' narratives. The analysis was conducted using NVivo software for qualitative data analysis combined with Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis procedure. The narrative data indicate that past narratives significantly shape EFL teacher identity through reflection and the negotiation of experiences. Both participants transformed their challenges and triumphs into meaningful contributions to their teaching practices. These findings reinforce the importance of reflective practices in professional development and highlight the need for narrative-based policies and workshops to support EFL educators in Indonesia.

Keywords: past narrative, EFL teacher educator, language teacher identity, teacher professional development

1. INTRODUCTION

If asked how EFL teachers construct their identities, the answers would vary in terms of personal, professional, and social aspects. Identity has remained an intriguing topic in language teacher education for the past decades since Bonny Norton, a distinguished scholar, published her article on identity and investment in 1995 [1]. It is interesting to see that a bulk of research on language teacher identity has now appeared in academia. In this paper, we analyzed two EFL teacher educators' past narratives and how these contributed to the construction of their language teacher identity. The paper first reviews the existing studies on language teacher identity and discusses the knowledge gap in the literature. In the methodology section, we explain the use of

narrative inquiry as the oft-cited research design in the study of language teacher identity. The paper offers discussions into policy of current EFL teacher professional development.

Nowadays, language teacher identity construction (LTI) has been a prevailing issue in the language teacher profession across different contexts. It highlights the varying issues teachers face such as curriculum challenges [2], emotional labor [3], perceptions, and conflicts [4], [5]. For years, research has discussed LTI as an embodied component in teachers' professional lives. The discussions center on the multidimensionality of LTI such as personal, professional, and social contexts, which are related to each other [6]. In the context of teaching English as a foreign language, a myriad number of previous studies, for example, have particularly explored LTI from EFL teachers' personal reflection [7], Global Englishes (GE) perspectives [8], and emotional geographies [9]. Although these studies have contributed to the growing eminent of LTI as a central aspect in teachers' lives, little has been known regarding LTI construction from EFL teachers' narratives, particularly their past memories as EFL learners. Additionally, to the best of our scholarly understanding, previous studies explosively discussed LTI from EFL teachers' present narratives.

Much research has attempted to investigate LTI from EFL teachers' present narratives in recent times. For example, in their research, [10] explored how teacher identities are shaped and reshaped when they engage in co-teaching language and content in bilingual education (BE) settings, particularly in preschool environments. The study investigated the experiences of a pair of teachers—a homeroom teacher and an English language teacher—in a Turkish preschool. The study highlights the steps involved in transitioning to BE co-teaching and how dyadic identity develops, offering insights for teacher identity research and the design of effective bilingual education programs. An earlier study by [11] investigated how three final-year Vietnamese pre-service teachers (PSTs) of English developed their professional identities across their past experiences, present situations, and imagined futures in various contexts. By analyzing narrative data collected through narrative frames and individual interviews, the researchers utilized third-generation cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) to explore the construction of these teachers' language teacher identities. The study proposes a theoretical model of "professional becoming" that highlights the dynamic interplay between tensions, emotions, agency, and identity. It also discusses practical implications for fostering language teacher identity development, emphasizing the importance of mediating these complex relationships during teacher education.

Listening to the present narratives of novice EFL teachers using a community of practice theory, [12] explored the relationship between emotional labor (EL) and identity construction in three novice Iranian English language teachers over a three-year period. The research examines how these teachers navigated the emotional demands of their work and how these experiences influenced their professional identity development. Key findings highlight that identity construction was closely tied to the teachers' emotional experiences. This process could unfold in two ways: identity changes sometimes preceded the emotional challenges they faced, while at other times, their emotional labor shaped their evolving identities. In a Japanese context, [13] investigated the identity of Japanese "non-native" English-speaking teachers through a multi-layered analysis of discourses and identity. Drawing on poststructuralist per-

spectives on identity, the study explored dominant discourses about “non-native” English-speaking teachers by analyzing how they are portrayed in Japan’s national English education policy. Findings from her work highlight the discourse of teaching professionals in relation to EFL students and the discourse of “non-native” teachers in comparison to imagined “native” speakers of English.

While it is true that the existing literature has discerned ideas into LTI in different contexts and multidimensionality, the discussions exclusively center on the EFL teachers’ present narratives and how their LTI is constructed by the present condition, with many portions from emotions. This has left a knowledge gap in how EFL teachers’ past narratives help construct the teachers’ LTI in their professional lives. Positioning teachers’ past narratives as essential as their present narratives, this study extends the literature by arguing that LTI is dynamic. Changes may appear from past to present and therefore, teachers’ memories of their past narratives are worth exploring.

As a larger PhD research project, this paper sets out a discussion on the contribution of EFL teachers’ past narratives to their LTI construction. LTI is seen as a site of struggle encompassing multiple aspects and vulnerabilities. However, previous studies oftentimes do not put teachers’ past narratives as a central topic in recent literature. Teachers’ past narratives are stories or memories of their initial contacts and experiences in learning certain subjects wherein they become experts in the present in these subjects. In English as a foreign language setting, studying teachers’ past narratives of the initial phase of learning English in formal schools would add rich interpretations into how in the present they construct LTI. Unfortunately, previous studies have not exclusively explored this idea as they mainly discussed the present narratives.

One main research question guides this study:

- How do the EFL teacher educators’ past narratives contribute to their language teacher identity construction?

2. METHOD

This study employed a life history interview to elicit the two participants’ narratives of their past English language learning histories and how these contribute to their present language teacher identity construction. A Life history interview is part of narrative research that learns individuals’ life histories in terms of their longitudinal experiences from childhood to adulthood scenes [14]. Two tenured-track EFL teacher educators voluntarily participated in the interview sessions. First, Mr. Anton (aged 35) is currently teaching English as a foreign language to pre-service teachers at a private university in the eastern province of Indonesia. He is also currently undertaking a doctoral degree at a public university in Malang, East Java province. Mr. Anton held the belief that he must pursue professional development in order to serve his students well during the class. Second, Mrs. Evi (aged 36) is a Javanese-born woman who escaped from her teaching workload at the university and currently beginning her doctoral degree in TEFL at a public university in Surabaya, East Java province. Mrs. Evi was extremely enthusiastic in telling her narratives to the principal investigator as she experienced ups and downs during her initial English language learning journeys and teaching career as a lecturer.

The principal investigator of this study conducted multiple interviews with the participants from January to September 2023. Most of the interviews were free-flowing conversations that focused on the participants' initial English language learning experiences and their encounters with school English teachers. Each participant was interviewed individually in different places and times. Data from the interviews were transcribed using Nvivo software combined with the thematic analysis process to yield codes, categories, and final themes that help answer the research questions [15]. This combination allows for a quick and thorough interview data analysis [16].

To maintain the study's trustworthiness, the principal investigator of this study invited the two participants to review the data transcription and their storied narratives. Upon reading the documents multiple times, all researchers worked together to refine each word, sentence, and expression that was not included during the interview sessions. In addition, the storying process was also examined by two external reviewers whose research expertise lies in the areas of narrative inquiry. This approach enables data quality in narrative research and allows for comprehensive data analysis [17].

3. RESULTS

The findings of this study are detailed in two past narratives by Mr. Anton and Mrs. Evi. The two highlight the participants' previous English language learning experiences in formal schooling sectors and their encounters with the English teachers. In addition, the narratives presented also depict how the participants see themselves in the current positions after experiencing a series of past narratives. The following section details the two narratives from the participants.

Past Narratives of Mr. Anton

Mr. Anton was born originally as an eastern resident in the Province of East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. He embarked on learning English as a foreign language at the junior high school level where he encountered a lot of problems with his English teacher. Mr. Anton describes his early experience of learning English in junior high school. It begins with his recalling the setting—learning English in their hometown. He describes his English teacher as "fierce," which suggests that the teacher was strict or harsh in the teaching approach. The teacher's anger would often be directed at him and his classmates when they struggled with pronunciation, even though incorrect pronunciation is a common challenge for language learners. This experience highlights a possibly negative or stressful learning environment where mistakes in language learning were met with frustration or criticism rather than support. Mr. Anton's mention of this harsh behavior may also hint at how it impacted his own relationship with language learning. He narrated that:

Excerpt 1

I first learned English at a junior high school level in my hometown. My English teacher at that time was fierce. He often got angry with me and my classmates simply because we could not pronounce correct words.

In the next excerpt, Mr. Anton reflects on his recollection of a frustrating and embarrassing experience in an English class. He made a mistake when he guessed the color of an object mentioned by the English teacher, which turned out to be incorrect. As a result, the entire class laughed at him. The use of "What an annoying experience was!" emphasizes how this event left a negative impression on him, possibly affecting his confidence in language learning. This moment highlights the emotional impact that mistakes can have in a classroom, especially when he is met with ridicule rather than understanding or support. In our interview, Mr. Anton shared that:

Excerpt 2

I once ever made a mistake in my English class. At that time, I guessed the color of a thing mentioned by my English teacher. When I made the mistake. All the class laughed at me. What an annoying experience was!

Mr. Anton also expresses his positive attitude toward English, despite facing challenges in their learning environment. However, although he likes English, he found the atmosphere at school unsupportive, which led him to take matters into their own hands. He decided to learn English independently, attending an English course and putting in extra effort to improve their skills. He also points out that their formal school classes were not helpful or effective in fostering their English learning, suggesting that the school environment lacked the necessary support or resources for successful language acquisition. This reflects a sense of frustration with the English learning system but also highlights his determination to learn on their own. He shared that:

Excerpt 3

I like English actually. However, because of unsupportive environments, I preferred learning English independently. I attended an English course and tried hard to master English. My formal class at school did not support me in learning English effectively.

In the next interview, Mr. Anton describes a positive turning point in his language learning experience. When he entered senior high school, a new English teacher started teaching their Grade 11 class. The teacher was highly proficient in English and created a friendly and welcoming atmosphere for all the students. He notes that it was during this time that they began to enjoy learning English at school. The teacher's proficiency and approachable demeanor likely helped foster a more supportive and encouraging environment, which led to the speaker developing a greater appreciation for English. This shift contrasts with earlier negative experiences, highlighting how a positive teacher-student relationship can inspire a love for learning. It is depicted in the following excerpt:

Excerpt 4

When I began my senior high school level, there was a new English teacher teaching Grade 11. I was there in the class. This teacher was very proficient in English and she was so friendly to all the class. At that time, I began to love learning English at school.

Mr. Anton also highlights his active involvement in English competitions, which was largely inspired by their English teacher's encouragement during senior high school. The teacher's motivation led the speaker to participate in many competitions, ultimately resulting in his winning an English speech contest. As a reward for their success, Mr. Anton had the opportunity to represent their school at the provincial level. This demonstrates how the teacher's support and motivation helped boost his confidence and drive, leading to tangible achievements in their English learning journey. Mr. Anton conveyed that:

Excerpt 5

I participated actively in many English competitions because of my English teacher's motivation at this senior high school. I even won an English speech contest and represented my school at the provincial level.

Mr. Anton reveals how his passion for teaching English was inspired by their senior high school English teacher. Motivated by this teacher, Mr. Anton decided to major in English at university with the goal of becoming an English teacher. Initially, he envisioned working as a school teacher, but after graduating, they were unexpectedly offered a position as an English lecturer by the head of their university's English department. This shift in career path reflects both his dedication to English and the influence of their teacher's encouragement, leading to an opportunity that exceeded their initial expectations. He said that:

Excerpt 6

At my university level, I took an English major and wanted to be an English teacher. This was all because of motivation from my English teacher at the senior high school level. I thought I would be an English teacher at schools, but luckily, my head of the English department asked me to apply for a teaching position as an English lecturer shortly after my university graduation.

Eventually, when asked about how his past narratives shape Mr. Anton's present identity, he reflects on his personal growth and transformation in his relationship with English. Initially, he disliked learning English and had no interest in teaching the language. However, over time, his perspective changed, and they eventually became an English lecturer. He attributes this shift to their previous learning experiences, particularly the contrast between his junior high school English teacher, who was unresponsive, and his senior high school English teacher, who was motivating and encouraging. This change in support and environment played a significant role in his decision to pursue a career in teaching English. Mr. Anton narrated that:

Excerpt 7

Yeah my previous experience was very influential to me now. I did not like learning English and did not want to teach this language before. But now I become an English lecturer. It is because of the changes in

my previous learning. As I told you that my junior high school English teacher was not supportive, but my senior high school English teacher was.

In conclusion, this finding reveals that Mr. Anton's journey with learning and teaching English reflects a significant transformation shaped by his experiences with different teachers throughout their educational career. Initially, he struggled with English, facing an unsupportive environment in junior high school that hindered his motivation. However, a positive turning point occurred in senior high school, when a supportive and proficient English teacher inspired him to actively engage in the language and participate in competitions, leading to notable achievements. This newfound passion for English ultimately influenced his decision to pursue an English major at university and aspire to become an English teacher. His career path further evolved when they were offered a teaching position as an English lecturer, an opportunity he attributes to the support and encouragement of his senior high school teacher. This narrative underscores the powerful role that teachers play in shaping students' identities and aspirations, demonstrating how a positive and motivating teacher can have a lasting impact on a student's educational and professional journey.

Past Narratives of Mrs. Evi

Mrs. Evi is a Javanese-born woman who lives and teaches English to undergraduate students in the eastern province of Indonesia. When the principal investigator of this study contacted her and invited her for interview sessions, Evi had been escaping from her teaching position due to conflicts with colleagues and pursuing her doctoral education.

At first, Mrs. Evi reflects on her early experiences with learning English. Despite having access to many English books in elementary school, she didn't start actively learning the language until junior high school. Mrs. Evi admired people who could speak English, which motivated them to put in extra effort, such as reading English books at school. Additionally, she attended evening English classes, partly due to her mother's insistence. She recalls a moment of achievement when they scored a 9 on an English test, but her mother didn't believe the result, expressing doubt about her English skills. This skepticism from her mother frustrated Mrs. Evi, especially since she had worked hard to improve her English skills. This passage highlights Mrs. Evi's determination to learn English despite external challenges, including her mother's lack of trust in their progress. It also reflects the emotional impact that such doubts can have on a learner's motivation. She narrated that:

Excerpt 8

I first started learning English in junior high school, even though my elementary school had many English books available. Back then, I admired people who could speak English and thought they were amazing. Motivated by this, I made an effort to read the English books at school. During junior high, I also attended evening English classes regularly because my mother insisted on it. I remember scoring a 9 on one of my

English tests, but my mom didn't believe it and even doubted my abilities. Her skepticism was frustrating, especially since I had worked hard to improve my English.

When asked deeper about her past narratives, Mrs. Evi highlights her positive experiences and achievements in learning English, which shaped her academic and personal development. Winning an English speech contest not only boosted her confidence but also led her aunt to recognize her potential in English, encouraging them to pursue further studies in the language at university. During their vocational high school years in Denpasar, Bali, Mrs. Evi continued to develop her English skills. English was a mandatory extracurricular activity, and Mrs. Evi actively engaged in speaking classes and participated in various competitions. These experiences provided valuable practice and contributed significantly to her improvement in English proficiency, reinforcing her passion and commitment to mastering the language. Mrs. Evi discussed that:

Excerpt 9

Once, I had the opportunity to represent my school in an English speech contest, and I won. That achievement made my aunt realize my potential to excel in English and encouraged me to pursue it further, even suggesting I take an English program at university. Later, during my vocational high school years in Denpasar, Bali, English was a mandatory extracurricular activity. We had speaking classes, and I actively participated in them as well as various English competitions. Those experiences taught me a lot and significantly improved my skills.

In the next interview, Mrs. Evi emphasizes her positive experiences in learning English, which were influenced by supportive environments both in and out of school. These encouraging settings played a key role in fostering her enjoyment of learning the language. Motivated by this positive foundation, she chose to major in English education at university with the goal of becoming an English lecturer. Her aspiration is to teach and inspire future English teachers, passing on the support and encouragement she once received to the next generation of educators. It is depicted in the following excerpt:

Excerpt 10

I enjoyed my English language learning experiences because of the supportive environments I had inside and outside the school. This is why I chose an English education department as my major at the university. I was so motivated to be an English lecturer so that I could teach English to those who aspire to be future English teachers.

Mrs. Evi is an English lecturer at the Eastern University in Indonesia. When asked about her experience of teaching English there, Mrs. Evi conveyed her challenges and observations during her teaching and learning journey. While teaching English in a remote town in that province, Mrs. Evi faced unmotivated students who found the

subject difficult, making it hard to implement effective teaching strategies. This highlights the difficulties of teaching in under-resourced or less supportive environments. Reflecting on her university experience, she observed that some lecturers used Bahasa Indonesia to teach English, which she found problematic, particularly because the students were trained to become future English teachers. Mrs. Evi implies that this practice might limit students' exposure to and immersion in English, which are critical for developing proficiency and teaching skills. These experiences underscore her awareness of the importance of effective teaching methods and the need for immersive English learning environments. She said that:

Excerpt 11

I once taught English in a remote town in NTT, where the students lacked motivation to learn the language. Even worse, they found the English lessons I taught to be very difficult. This made it challenging for me to figure out effective teaching methods. During my time at the university, I noticed that three of my lecturers primarily used Bahasa Indonesia while teaching English. I felt this was not ideal, especially since they were teaching future English teachers.

Finally, Mrs. Evi conveys her commitment to professional growth and dedication to her role as an educator. She expresses a strong desire to deepen their knowledge and expertise in English language teaching, recognizing it as essential because she is responsible for teaching future English teacher candidates. Mrs. Evi also emphasizes the importance of acquiring both teaching and research skills to excel in her field. Drawing inspiration from their own positive educational experiences, she aims to provide the same level of support and impactful learning for her students, reflecting her passion for education and a desire to give back to the teaching community. Mrs. Evi shared that:

Excerpt 12

Well. I want to develop my knowledge and expertise in English language teaching. It is a must because I am now teaching future teacher candidates, so I must have the knowledge and skills of teaching and research in the field of English language teaching. I have learned so much from my previous schooling, and I want to serve my students just like what I felt in the past.

All in all, this study has learned Mrs. Evi's journey in English language learning and teaching that reflects a story of perseverance, transformation, and dedication. From her early struggles with unsupportive environments and self-doubt, she found inspiration through encouraging teachers and personal achievements, such as winning speech contests and actively participating in English activities. These experiences fueled her passion for English, leading her to pursue an English education major and later become an English lecturer. Her teaching experiences, including challenges faced while teaching in remote areas and observing less-than-ideal practices in higher education, have shaped her commitment to excellence. She is determined to enhance her expertise in English language teaching and research, motivated by a sense of responsibility to prepare future

educators effectively. Inspired by her own supportive learning experiences, Mrs. Evi strives to provide her students with the same encouragement and guidance that positively influenced her own journey.

4. DISCUSSION

The present study analyzed excerpts from two Indonesian EFL teacher educators who shared their past narratives as EFL learners. The participants seemed to reflect on every single moment they experienced during the initial journeys of learning English in formal schooling sectors. Interestingly, although the two participating teachers lived and taught English in the same areas, the eastern part of Indonesia. They experienced construct different identity as English lecturers. The following discussion details the research findings.

The main research question posed in this study concerns the contributions of the teachers' past narratives to their language teacher identity construction. The findings suggest that Mr. Anton was much inspired and motivated by his senior high school English teacher, albeit he was made upset by his previous junior high school English teacher. Mr. Anton constructed his language teacher identity from a turning point of his previous English language learning wherein he invested to be an English lecturer. The investment exercised by Mr. Anton in his teaching profession is explained earlier by [1], [18] as a concomitant construct with identity. In his excerpts, Mr. Anton understands himself as a passionate EFL teacher educator who wants to educate future English teachers. This finding elaborates on teacher agency in teaching [19]. The findings highlight the contribution of teachers' past narratives that are incompletely studied by previous studies [8], [20], [21], [22].

Unlike Mr. Anton, excerpts from Mrs. Evi highlighted a slightly different finding. Mrs. Evi seemed to transform herself from an independent English learner to a committed EFL teacher educator. The study reveals Mrs. Evi's language teacher identity is constructed through negotiated practices of her English language learning experiences. This finding corresponds to previous research that investigated learners' negotiation of their language learning through encounters and practices with the environment [23], [24]. However, unlike the previous studies that explored international students and plurilingual settings, the present findings elaborate on local participants in the context of language teachers. The study, thus, expands previous literature that discusses identity and investment as dynamic constructs.

Based on the study's findings, the present study offers a re-conceptualization of EFL teacher educators' identity through a reflective-narrative integration. Teachers' past narratives play a crucial role in constructing EFL teachers' present identity, as evidenced in the analysis. By reflecting on their past memories, teachers are able to identify their strengths and weaknesses throughout their professional careers. This idea could be better facilitated by an academic or training workshop on reflective-narrative integration by mentoring teachers to recall their past narratives. Thus, narrative-based policies not only help educators reflect on their journeys but also strengthen their professional identity, enhance their skills, and create a supportive work environment. These

measures will ensure that EFL educators in Indonesia can continue to grow both academically and professionally while making positive contributions to English language education.

5. CONCLUSION

This study explored EFL teacher educators' past narratives and to what extent these narratives contribute to their language teacher identity construction. The findings suggest that teachers' past narratives are influential in constructing professional careers of who they are in the future and what they will do. This study also implies the need to integrate past narratives in language teacher professional development and language teacher education. Despite this, the present study was conducted using interviews as a single data source. Further studies are encouraged to study this issue using multiple data sources like photovoice ethnographic design in order to gain deeper data regarding teachers' narratives.

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