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## International Teacher Identity Construction: A Story of An Afghan International Student

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### Abstract

Foreign language plays important role in constructing a new identity for an international student. This paper explored the role of English for an international student studying in an Indonesian institute in constructing a new identity as an international teacher in Indonesia. This research used qualitative as the method and narrative inquiry became the research design. The participant of this research was an Afghan international student pursuing a master's degree in an Indonesian institute. The data were obtained through semi-structured interviews and documentation. The findings of this research showed that English skills were needed to show that the participant was an international teacher and English was beneficial for the participant in constructing a new identity as an international teacher in Indonesia. The participant had started learning English in his Junior High School and practiced using it intensively when the participant went abroad to continue his study for bachelor's and master's degrees. This research also revealed that having good speaking skills opened an opportunity for the participant to apply for a job as an English international teacher in Indonesia. Moreover, the speaking skills and international English teacher identity created a bridge for the participant to be a speaker for some events such as seminars and English-based events held by schools and institutes. This research was limited to a participant from a country and focused on teacher identity. It is suggested for future research to conduct similar research with more various participants from various countries and focus on another kind of identity construction.

**Keywords:** Identity Construction; International Teacher; Language.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the modern era, internationalization is a way to develop, including in the field of education. Educational institutions strive to develop and have international standards (Soudien, 2011; Syarif, 2019). One way to raise international standards is by recruiting educators from abroad. Foreign educators who are generally recruited are educators for the task of teaching English (Alqahtani, 2019; Kramadibrata, 2016; Moneer & Shewaiter, 2019; Tosuncuoglu, 2017). In this case, there are two types of English educators for educational institutions, namely foreign educators who are native speakers and non-native speakers. This is also because these institutions want to increase their attractiveness and promotion of these institutions.

Recruitment of educators who are native speakers is the main goal because teacher recruitment is crucial for improving the quality of the institution (Darling-Hammond, 2004; See et al., 2020). However, when it is not possible to recruit English language educators who are native speakers, another alternative is to recruit English language educators who are foreign nationals even though the educators are non-native speakers. This is still a positive thing for the English class, especially for the motivation of students (Adara, 2018; Mangendre, 2020; Pratama & Fridolini, 2021). It is because they are required not to use their mother tongue and use English. After all, they communicate with educators who are foreign nationals even though the educator is a non-native speaker.

The use of foreign languages cannot be separated from the status of an international teacher, both native and non-native. As a teacher who has the status of an international teacher and teaches English, of course, the use of a foreign language in this case English is very important. The use of English is used both inside and outside the classroom. It is because English is important for education (Dutta, 2020; Irma, 2020; Rao, 2019). In other words, an international teacher is very important to have good English skills.

Regarding the English language skills that a foreign or international English teacher must possess, a teacher can have English language skills from various events such as having worked as an English teacher in his home country before becoming an English teacher in another country, the teacher has undergone education related to English language skills, or also because the teacher gains English language skills from the activities he or she does in cross-country activities and interacting with people from other countries, or when a foreign national becomes a student at an international campus (Baro & Serrano, 2011; Isabelli-García et al., 2018).

In carrying out their duties as an educator, a non-native speaker will form a professional identity that the educator needs to show and be known as an educator or teacher. From the other side of the educator's life, he may have another identity, for example, a businessman, trader, student, and so on. The process of forming an identity as a foreign teacher is very interesting to review. This research leads to an effort to answer four research questions that become problems that must be resolved, namely (1) What does a non-native foreign teacher need to form an identity as an English teacher? (2) What is the role of English in the identity formation process as a foreign educator? (3) How does an English teacher who is a non-native speaker acquire English language skills that play a role in the formation of identity as a foreign teacher? and (4) What are the benefits of English skills for a foreign educator who is a non-native speaker?

There are several previous studies related to international educators and identity formation. The first one is entitled *Identity Construction of Novice English Language Teachers: A Narrative Inquiry* (Moktan, 2021). The research used six participants interviewed by using in-depth interviews. The findings of the research showed that novice English teachers (re)construct their identity through their nature and discourse when they are included in different institutions. Moreover, they also construct bilingual identity, seeking, reader, writer, trainee, rapporteur, discourse, co-teacher, and academic coordinators. Moreover, novice English language teachers construct multiple identities within a short time from interactions made among colleges, seniors, juniors, and students. This research did not explore the identity construction of international non-native English teachers. Therefore, research on international non-native English teachers related to the identity construction as international teachers was needed to conduct.

The second previous research was entitled *Professional identity construction of EFL teachers as autonomous learners* (Rachmajanti et al., 2021). The study used a survey method involving 129 English teachers in East Java. Using an online questionnaire. The findings of this study indicate that these teachers have tried to be professional as they have expected and also these teachers had the knowledge and professional and pedagogical abilities related to being professional English teachers. This research focused on EFL teachers in East Java. This research did not explore non-native international teachers related to identity construction in Indonesia. Therefore, research on the identity construction of a non-native international teacher in Indonesia was needed to conduct.

The third previous research was entitled Understanding Teacher Identity Construction: Professional Experiences of Becoming Indonesian Montessori Teachers (Siswanto & Kuswando, 2020). The findings showed that salient principles were influencing the identity formation of the teachers. The principles were movement and cognition, choice, interest, and teacher ways and child ways. Moreover, the teachers entailed building communication essence between teachers and parents, the significance of community support, and the importance of being well-prepared teachers. However, this research focused on Montessori teachers and did not explore the identity formation of international teachers. Therefore, research on international teachers' identity formation needs to be conducted.

Based on these previous studies, there is a research gap, namely, there is no research that examines the formation of the identity of an international English teacher who is a non-native speaker regarding the use of English to form an identity as a teacher. Therefore, this study aims to examine this matter, and later the findings of this study will increase knowledge in the field of language related to the identity of international teachers.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

This research used a qualitative method while the design of the research was a narrative inquiry. The method was chosen since it was simple to gain in-depth data from people's stories from the people's self-account and reflections (Barkhuizen & Consoli, 2021; Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007; Suryana et al., 2021). The participant of this research was an Afghan teacher teaching English in an Indonesian junior high school. He was considered the participant of this research since he was teaching in the school for one year and he was also a student of master's degree in the university in the same foundation as the junior high school he was working at.

The main data were obtained through semi-structured interviews while the supporting data was obtained through documentation. A semi-structured interview is considered to be used because this method can provide information as in-depth data because it has been planned before the interview but can be expanded to collect more data if needed (Al Balushi, 2016; Kakilla, 2021). Related to the supporting data, documentation was chosen as supporting data from interview data so that the data obtained will be more valid (Bowen, 2009; Chanda, 2022). The interview was conducted offline by having a conversation with the participant. Related the documentation, was conducted by taking pictures, videos, and

screenshots of the participant's activities related to the teacher identity construction. The data was then analyzed in four stages namely recapitulating the told in the telling, reconstructing the told from the telling, imposing a told on the telling, and making a telling from a told. After the data were analyzed, they were presented in narration as the findings of the research (Jeong-Hee, 2016).

### 3. FINDINGS

Based on the first research question about what a non-native foreign teacher needs to form an identity as an English teacher, it was found that the non-native foreign teacher needed English skills to be recognized as an international teacher because not only as an international teacher but also as the English teacher at the school. The word international was closed to English communication.

*“The first thing I need as an international teacher in English. I come from Afghanistan and I become an English teacher here. So, I need to show people that I can speak and teach using English. Even though my language is not English but my students know that I come from outside Indonesia. They think everyone outside Indonesia will speak English”*

From the statement, it could be concluded that to be an international teacher, the participant of this research needed English as the identity formation since the students thought that someone from another country (outside Indonesia) should be able to speak English. Moreover, as the English teacher at their school.

The next finding based on the second research question showed that English played an important role in constructing identity as an international English teacher. The participant shared his story about how he used English as communication not only in the class with the students but also for mostly daily communication in the workplace as an English teacher. He used English to communicate with other teachers -Indonesian teachers- at school even when the talking was not about the work.

*“I speak to everyone using English during my work. That is how I show people that I am an international teacher. So, by using English for communication, people recognize me as an international teacher because I do not speak Bahasa well and people around me do not understand Pashto, Afghanistan language. Therefore, I use English”*

The function of English as a communication tool with everyone in the workplace was the way to show that the participant was an international English teacher. The mutual language that could be used in communication was English because the participant -An Afghan- could not use Bahasa Indonesia well and the Indonesian co-workers and students did not understand Pashto. In this case, The English plays a big role in constructing an identity for the participant of this research as an International English teacher.

The next finding answered the third research question about how an English teacher who is a non-native speaker acquired English language skills that play a role in the formation of identity as a foreign teacher. It was found that the participant acquired English skills through several stages. First, he learned English in his Junior High School and practiced using it intensively when the participant went abroad to continue his study for bachelor's and master's degrees. During his studies in Indonesia, he also took English classes on the campus.

*“I learned English at my senior high school. I did not use it a lot but when I continued my study abroad, here, I had to use English because I cannot speak Indonesian and Indonesian people cannot speak my language. Then I used google translate, and other applications to learn English. I also learned English in my subject at campus”*

So, going abroad to continue studying for bachelor's and master's degrees became the way the participants acquired English skills besides the learning from their senior high school. The participant learned and practiced English a lot when he had to use it because he went abroad.

Related to the fourth research question about the benefits of English skills for a foreign educator who is a non-native speaker, it was found that the participant got several benefits. The first benefit was the participant successfully applied for a job and was accepted as an English teacher at an Islamic Junior High School. Having a job was beneficial since the participant could earn money to support his living during his study.

*“As an international student, I tried to speak English in my communication. I think it opened a chance for me to apply for a job as an English teacher. I was accepted and as you see, I am an English teacher here. English speaking skills helped me find a job”*

English skills were very beneficial for the participant especially speaking skills. Someone with English speaking skills got a priority when applying for a job compared to those who could not speak English well. In addition, the job opportunity was for an English teacher. By having good English-speaking skills, the participant got a chance to be a judge

for English competitions and was invited to be a public speaker at seminars held by schools and institutions.

*“I also got some invitations as judges of English competitions and public speaker in seminars held by schools and institutions. English speaking skill was beneficial for me”*

English skills especially speaking opened the opportunity to be a more professional person not only as an international English teacher but also in other jobs such as a judge for English competitions and public speakers for seminars. This case proved that the participant took benefits from having good English skills, especially speaking skills.

#### **4. DISCUSSION**

The results of this study add to the results of previous studies which revealed that a language is a form of identity as a teacher (Kiss, 2020; Upa & Mbato, 2020; Varghese et al., 2005). The results of this study reveal that English is needed by foreign teachers, specifically from Afghanistan to form an identity as a foreign or international teacher. By using English, the foreign teacher has succeeded in forming his identity as a teacher who is known as an international teacher.

In addition, the results of this study also show that a person can master a foreign language (English) through the experience of going abroad (Isabelli-García et al., 2018; Kim & Cha, 2017; Pinar, 2016). A person may learn English at school, but the experience of going abroad provides tremendous benefits because the person seems to be getting more demands to use English considering that he and his foreign environment both do not know each other's native language so they must use English. This corroborates the findings from previous studies regarding mastery of the English language with the experience of going abroad. The results of this study add from a more specific point of view, namely the experience of an Afghan citizen who learns English at school and practices it when he goes abroad and it is proven by this experience, that person can improve his English skills.

#### **5. CONCLUSION**

The formation of identity as an international teacher in Indonesia is influenced by the use of English. English plays an important role for a teacher from abroad who teaches English in Indonesia. When someone comes from abroad and teaches English in Indonesia, that person needs English language skills. Using English either for teaching purposes or not can help the formation of identity as a foreign teacher. Regarding the ability to speak English, one can learn it from other schools or institutions. In addition, the experience of going and

living abroad can help a person in improving his or her mastery of the English language. When someone gains good English skills, it can open up opportunities for career development so that their abilities can also develop better. This study was limited to the number of participants and the type of country of origin. It is recommended for future research to be able to conduct similar research by increasing the variety of participants and the type of country.

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