

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the background of the research and outlines the research problems and questions. It also describes the purpose and significance of the study, introduces the conceptual framework, and reviews relevant previous studies.

1.1 Background of the Research

Professional experiences play a central role in shaping teachers' professional learning and development. In recent years, increasing attention has been directed toward how teachers develop not only pedagogical competence but also their professional identity through meaningful teaching experiences. Teacher Professional Development is no longer viewed as confined to formal training programs. It is increasingly understood as a continuous process that emerges from teachers' engagement in authentic teaching contexts, where reflection and adaptation occur over time (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). In this regard, professional experiences serve as a critical foundation through which teachers construct, negotiate, and refine their understanding of their roles as educators.

Building on this perspective, the growing demand for teachers to operate within global and intercultural educational environments has become a pressing issue in contemporary education. Within the field of English language education, teachers are increasingly required to navigate cross-cultural and multilingual classrooms, where they interact with learners from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Xu, 2023; Farrell & Macapinlac, 2021). The expansion of global education and international mobility has further positioned English teachers in unfamiliar teaching contexts that require adaptability and intercultural awareness. International teaching environments, such as Thai classrooms, present distinct educational systems, classroom norms, and cultural expectations that may differ considerably from those in teachers' home contexts. These conditions create complex teaching situations that demand not only pedagogical adjustment but also sensitivity to cultural differences, making international teaching experiences a significant site for professional learning.

In relation to these professional and intercultural experiences, teacher identity has emerged as a central concept in understanding teachers' professional development. Teacher identity refers to how teachers perceive themselves as professionals and how they interpret their roles within specific educational contexts (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). Rather than being fixed, teacher identity is widely recognized as dynamic and continuously evolving through experiences, interactions, and reflective processes. In the context of language education, teacher identity is shaped through the interplay between teachers' beliefs, agency, and the environments in which they teach (Li & Xu, 2023). Therefore, engagement in diverse teaching contexts, particularly international settings, may significantly influence how teachers construct and reconstruct their professional identities.

The significance of this topic lies in the role of international teaching experiences in providing valuable opportunities for teachers to engage in reflective practice and to develop broader perspectives on language education in intercultural contexts. For early career teachers, such experiences are particularly influential, as they are still in the process of constructing their professional identities. At this stage, teachers often encounter uncertainty, experimentation, and negotiation as they transition from teacher education into actual teaching practice (Seyri & Nazariabbasbolaghi, 2023). Exposure to new teaching environments may therefore play a crucial role in shaping how they perceive themselves as professionals. Understanding this process is essential not only for advancing theoretical discussions on teacher identity but also for informing the design of teacher education and professional development programs.

Teacher identity has been extensively examined in the existing body of literature. Previous studies have explored how teacher identity develops through teaching practicum, classroom experiences, and professional learning contexts. For instance, research has demonstrated that teacher identity is shaped through the interaction between personal beliefs, professional experiences, and contextual factors (Beijaard et al., 2004; Li & Xu, 2023). In addition, studies on international teaching have highlighted how teaching abroad can influence teachers' pedagogical perspectives and intercultural awareness (Trent, 2020). Some studies have also

focused on teacher identity development among pre-service teachers participating in international teaching practicum (Triyoga, 2024). These studies provide valuable insights into how teaching experiences contribute to identity formation, particularly during the early stages of teacher preparation.

However, despite the growing body of research, several aspects remain underexplored. Most existing studies tend to focus on pre-service teachers or participants in formal teacher education programs, while relatively limited attention has been given to in-service teachers who have already entered the profession. In particular, there is a lack of research examining how international teaching experiences shape the professional identities of Indonesian early career English teachers who are actively engaged in teaching practice. Furthermore, prior studies have rarely addressed this phenomenon within Southeast Asian international teaching contexts, such as Thai classrooms, which involve distinct intercultural dynamics. This indicates a clear gap in terms of participant focus (early-career in-service teachers), research setting (Thai classrooms), and experiential context (international teaching beyond practicum).

Therefore, this study seeks to explore how Indonesian early-career English teachers interpret and make sense of their international teaching experiences and how these experiences contribute to the shaping of their professional identities. To achieve this, the study adopts narrative inquiry as an approach to capture teachers' lived experiences and the meanings they construct from their professional journeys (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Teacher identity in this study is conceptualized as a dynamic and evolving construct, continuously shaped through experiences, interactions, and reflective processes within specific educational contexts (Beijaard et al., 2004; Li & Xu, 2023). By situating teacher identity within the context of international teaching experiences, this study aims to offer a more nuanced understanding of how professional identity is constructed and negotiated across cultural boundaries.

1.2 Research Problem

The present study addresses a critical issue in the field of English language education, namely the limited understanding of how international teaching

experiences shape the professional identity of Indonesian early-career English teachers. While teacher identity has been widely examined, existing research has predominantly focused on pre-service teachers or participants in formal teacher education programs. Consequently, there remains insufficient insight into how in-service teachers, particularly those at the early stage of their careers, construct and negotiate their professional identities through real teaching experiences.

This issue becomes more complex in the context of international teaching, where teachers are required to navigate intercultural environments, adapt to unfamiliar educational systems, and engage with diverse student backgrounds. Such experiences may challenge teachers' existing beliefs, practices, and self-perceptions, potentially leading them to reconsider how they understand their professional roles. However, how early-career teachers experience and make sense of these changes in their professional identities remains underexplored.

Furthermore, international teaching in Southeast Asia, particularly in Thai classrooms, presents intercultural conditions that may shape teachers' professional experiences in particular ways. Despite this, limited research has examined how Indonesian early-career English teachers interpret and make sense of their teaching experiences in this context. Previous studies on international teaching have largely examined pre-service teachers and formal teaching practicum or exchange contexts, leaving less attention to early-career in-service teachers who engage in international teaching as part of their professional experience (Trent, 2013; Yuan & Lee, 2015). The Indonesian and Thai educational contexts may also involve both similarities and differences that influence teachers' cultural negotiation, classroom adaptation, and professional reflection. Therefore, examining these experiences can provide a more contextualized understanding of teacher identity development within the Southeast Asian educational context.

The central problem of this study, therefore, is the limited understanding of how Indonesian early-career English teachers develop their teacher identity through international teaching experiences in Thai classrooms and how they recontextualize their teaching practices after these experiences. Addressing this problem is important for understanding how international teaching experiences may contribute

to teacher identity development and continued professional learning among early-career English teachers.

1.3 Research Question

Based on the problems identified above, this study is guided by the following research questions.

1. How do Indonesian early-career English teachers develop their teacher identity through international teaching experiences in Thai classrooms?
2. How do Indonesian early-career English teachers recontextualize their teaching practices in developing their teacher identity after international teaching experiences?

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The purposes of this study are:

1. To explore how Indonesian early-career English teachers develop their teacher identity through international teaching experiences in Thai classrooms.
2. To explore how Indonesian early-career English teachers recontextualize their teaching practices in developing their teacher identity after international teaching experiences.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This section examines the overall significance of the study from three key perspectives: theoretical, practical, and empirical. Each dimension reflects how this research contributes not only to the existing body of knowledge but also to teacher practice and future investigations in the field of English language education.

1.5.1 Theoretical Significance

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on teacher identity in English language education. While teacher identity has been widely discussed in teacher education research, relatively limited attention has been given to the role of international teaching experiences in shaping the identities of early career teachers, particularly in the Indonesian context. By examining teachers' narratives of teaching in international environments, this study provides further insight into how professional experiences across cultural contexts

contribute to the development of teachers' professional identities. The findings are expected to enrich discussions on teacher identity, experiential professional learning, and the role of international mobility in teacher development.

1.5.2 Practical Significance

Practically, the findings of this study may provide valuable insights for teacher education institutions, program organizers, and English teachers who are interested in international teaching programs. Understanding how international teaching experiences influence teachers' professional identities may help educators design professional development programs that encourage reflective learning and intercultural engagement. For early career teachers, the study may also highlight the potential professional benefits of participating in international teaching experiences in developing confidence, adaptability, and broader perspectives in language teaching.

1.5.3 Empirical Significance

Empirically, this research contributes to the limited body of studies that examine Indonesian teachers' experiences in international teaching contexts. By presenting teachers' narratives and interpretations of their professional experiences, this study provides empirical evidence on how international teaching experiences may influence the shaping of teacher identity among early career English teachers. The findings may also serve as a reference for future research examining teacher identity development in cross-cultural educational contexts.

1.6 Conceptual Framework

This study is grounded in the perspective of Teacher Professional Development (TPD), which views teachers' professional growth as a continuous process shaped by meaningful teaching experiences, reflection, and professional learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). Within this perspective, teacher identity is considered a central part of professional development because it reflects how teachers understand, interpret, and position themselves in their professional roles (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). Teacher identity is not fixed; rather, it develops and changes through teachers' experiences, interactions, and responses to the

contexts in which they teach (Beijaard et al., 2004; Rushton et al., 2023; Li & Xu, 2023).

In this study, international teaching experiences serve as the main professional context through which the participants encounter new teaching situations, classroom practices, cultural expectations, and interactions with students. These experiences provide opportunities for teachers to participate in unfamiliar educational settings and reconsider their existing beliefs and practices. Through participation, reflection, and meaning-making, teachers may develop new understandings of themselves as English teachers. Thus, international teaching experiences are not viewed as automatically producing changes in teacher identity. Instead, their influence depends on how teachers interpret and respond to what they experience.

The development of teacher identity is further understood through Situated Learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This perspective emphasizes that learning occurs through participation in social and cultural practices. In the context of this study, teaching in Thai classrooms provides a situated environment in which Indonesian early-career English teachers engage directly with students, classroom practices, and educational expectations that may differ from those in Indonesia. Their participation in this context becomes part of the process through which they learn, reflect, and develop their professional identities.

The study also draws on Recontextualization (Bernstein, 2000) to explain what happens when teachers bring their experiences and learning from one educational context into another. Teachers do not necessarily transfer what they have learned in Thailand directly into their Indonesian classrooms. Instead, they may reinterpret, select, modify, and adapt their teaching practices according to the needs and conditions of their new context. This process of adaptation is important because it shows how teachers make meaning from their previous experiences while continuing to negotiate their professional identities.

Based on these perspectives, the conceptual relationship in this study can be understood as follows: international teaching experiences provide the context for professional learning; participation, reflection, and meaning-making within these

experiences contribute to teacher identity development; and recontextualization explains how teachers reinterpret and adapt their experiences and teaching practices after returning to the Indonesian context. These processes are interconnected rather than strictly linear, as teachers may continue to reflect on and reconstruct their professional identities while moving between different teaching contexts.

Therefore, this study focuses on three interconnected concepts: international teaching experiences, teacher identity development, and recontextualization of teaching practices. Teacher Professional Development provides the broader perspective, Teacher Identity Development represents the central focus, Situated Learning explains the role of participation in the international teaching context, and Recontextualization explains how teachers adapt and reconstruct their professional understanding across contexts.

Based on the conceptual explanation above, the framework of this study can be illustrated as follows:

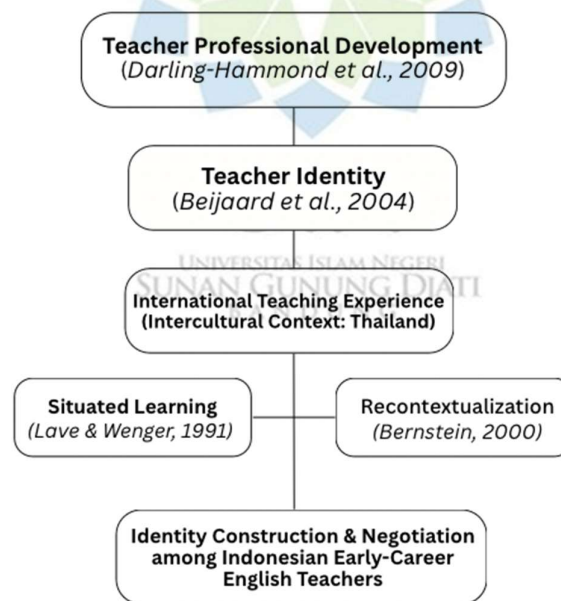


Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework of the Study

1.7 Contributions of the Study

Building on the identified gaps regarding the limited focus on in-service early-career teachers, the underexplored Southeast Asian international teaching

context, and the need for a more process-oriented understanding of teacher identity development, this study is expected to make several contributions to the field of English language education.

1.7.1 Theoretical Contribution

This study contributes to the theoretical development of teacher identity by situating it within the context of international teaching experiences among in-service early-career teachers. While prior research has largely focused on pre-service teachers, this study extends the discussion by demonstrating how teacher identity is constructed and negotiated through real professional practice in intercultural settings. Furthermore, by integrating perspectives from Teacher Professional Development, Situated Learning, and Recontextualization, this study offers a more comprehensive understanding of how identity development occurs as a dynamic, context-dependent process shaped by participation and adaptation.

1.7.2 Empirical Contribution

Empirically, this study provides in-depth qualitative insights into the lived experiences of Indonesian early-career English teachers participating in international teaching programs, particularly within Thai classrooms. By capturing teachers' narratives before, during, and after their teaching experiences, the study generates context-rich data that illustrate the processes, challenges, and transformations involved in identity development. This contribution addresses the scarcity of empirical studies focusing on in-service teachers in Southeast Asian international teaching contexts.

1.7.3 Methodological Contribution

This study contributes methodologically by employing narrative inquiry to explore teacher identity development in international teaching contexts. Through the use of teachers' personal stories and reflective accounts, the study highlights the value of narrative approaches in uncovering the complexities of professional identity construction, particularly in intercultural settings. This approach offers an alternative to more conventional methods by emphasizing meaning-making processes rather than solely observable practices.

1.7.4 Practical Contribution

Practically, the findings of this study may inform teacher education institutions and international teaching program organizers in designing professional development initiatives that better support early-career teachers. By identifying key experiences and contextual factors that influence identity development, this study provides insights that may help teachers become more reflective, adaptive, and culturally responsive in diverse educational environments.

1.7.5 Contextual Contribution

This study contributes contextually by foregrounding the experiences of Indonesian early-career English teachers within Thai classroom settings, a context that has received relatively limited attention in existing research. By focusing on this specific intercultural setting, the study enriches the understanding of how regional dynamics within Southeast Asia shape teacher identity development, thereby offering a more localized perspective within the broader discourse of international education.

1.8 Research Scope and Limitations

This study focuses on examining the shaping of teacher identity through international teaching experiences among Indonesian early career English teachers. The research is specifically situated in Thai classroom contexts as part of international teaching programs that involve intercultural and cross-cultural teaching environments.

The participants of this study are Indonesian early career English teachers with approximately 0–5 years of teaching experience who have participated in international teaching programs in Thailand. The study explores teachers' experiences before, during, and after they participated in these programs, which took place prior to the time of data collection.

The scope of this study is limited to exploring teachers' experiences in international teaching environments and how these experiences influence their perceptions of themselves as English teachers. The research does not aim to evaluate teaching effectiveness, instructional performance, or students' learning outcomes. Instead, it focuses on understanding how teachers interpret their

experiences in international teaching contexts and how these experiences contribute to the development of their professional identities.

Furthermore, this study focuses specifically on Indonesian early-career English teachers who have already entered the teaching profession and have participated in international teaching activities. Pre-service teachers and teachers with extensive professional experience are not included in this study. By focusing on early career teachers, this research aims to capture how professional experiences during the early stage of teaching careers influence the shaping of teacher identity.

1.9 Previous Studies

Previous studies have examined teacher identity development in relation to international teaching experiences and different educational contexts. These studies provide a basis for understanding how teachers develop their professional identities through experiences beyond their usual teaching environments.

Triyoga et al. (2024) examined the identity development of two Indonesian pre-service English teachers who participated in an international teaching practicum in the Philippines. The study showed that teaching in an unfamiliar environment encouraged reflection on teaching beliefs and contributed to the participants' understanding of themselves as future teachers. However, the study focused on pre-service teachers rather than teachers who had already entered the profession.

Haryadi (2024) examined the experiences of Indonesian EFL teachers working in Thai elementary schools. The study highlighted language, cultural, and professional challenges as well as opportunities for professional growth. This study provides a relevant context for understanding Indonesian teachers' experiences in Thailand, although its main focus was on teachers' experiences and challenges rather than teacher identity development.

Phaethong et al. (2024) examined teacher identity development among non-native English teachers in a multilingual international school in Thailand. The study showed that teaching experience, professional qualifications, English proficiency, and interactions within the school context influenced teachers' professional identities. However, it focused on teachers working in Thailand rather than

Indonesian early-career English teachers participating in an international teaching program and returning to Indonesia.

These studies show the relevance of international and intercultural teaching experiences to teacher development and identity. However, limited attention has been given to how Indonesian early-career English teachers develop their teacher identity through international teaching experiences in Thai classrooms and how they recontextualize their teaching practices after returning to Indonesia. A more detailed discussion of the previous studies and the research gap is presented in Section 2.5.

