



CONSTRUCTING IDENTITY AND CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A SUCCESSFUL EFL IN-SERVICE TEACHER'S STORY

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abstract

This research aims to reflect stories of an EFL in-service teacher (Ms. Camelia, pseudonym) about her teacher professional development experience. Assigned in a secondary school with limited facilities in a small town, she has proven to excel in her professional development and get the ultimate appreciation of an award from the Ministry of Education in 2019. Nine year-teaching experiences enriched with dozens of workshops, seminars, and being an invited guest speaker in prestigious academic forums has considerably made her an outstanding teacher. This study explores stories of her career and struggle towards crafting her identities. Data were collected from in-depth interviews and documents. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and thematic analysis was employed. This study finds that professional development requires high commitment on self-development, attitudes, competency, and sustaining motivational drives. Filled with varied emotional moments, Ms. Camelia has succeeded in embracing the persistence and keeping the awareness that propel her get through signified turning points of her professional development. Those commitment and emotional aspects have built Ms. Camelia's self-actualization towards high achievement and recognition in teaching field.

INTRODUCTION

Updating teaching theories and methodology and developing teaching skills through varied trainings could be a way for EFL in-service teachers to develop their professional careers (Alibakhsi & Dehvari, 2015). Attending international conferences and peer monitoring can also be beneficial for them (Alshumaimeri & Almohaisen, 2017). Hung and Yeh (2013) claim that in the past few years most of the Taiwanese EFL teachers were capable to deal with the essential classroom-based matters and encounter their teaching requirements. Meanwhile in Indonesia, even though in-service teachers are regularly trained since the past few years, teacher professional development programs are still inadequate to improve teachers' competence (Rahman *et al*, 2015). Exploration of professional development through face-to-face and online modes (Widodo & Riandi, 2013), online learning community in the 21st century (Sari, 2012), in rural and urban areas (Soebari & Aldridge, 2016), and social media Facebook (Patahuddin & Logan, 2018) is to mention a few. However, little is known as to how an in-service teacher constructs the teacher identity, struggle within the field, and becomes one of the most inspiring teachers from rural areas. This study aims to reveal the successful stories of an in-service teacher from a rural area throughout her professional development pathways.

METHOD

Research Design

Following Barkhuizen (2016), his research was designed as a narrative study which aims to retell the stories of an EFL teacher's professional development journey and how she gave meanings of them.

Research Participant

The participant in this research is an EFL in-service teacher in one of the schools in Gunungkidul regency which is the southern part of the province of Yogyakarta Special Region named Ms. Camelia. She is currently teaching in a Junior High School and she has had many activities that helped her in professional development. Besides, she also often called by the government to be the speaker in the teachers' workshop. Ms. Camelia has been a teacher for more than 9 years and had participated in many trainings, workshop, and many conferences either as a participant, speaker, and presenter. Besides, she is a creative teacher who often creates learning tools and won many teacher championships. She also got a scholarship from Indonesia Endowment Fund for Education or *Lembaga Pengelola Dana Pendidikan* (LPDP) for her master and doctoral degree study in one of the state universities in Yogyakarta. Therefore, one of the most outstanding achievements that Ms. Camelia has is being an awardee of the Indonesian highest award for educators. Ms. Camelia has achieved an excellent merit during her professional development due to her experience, persistence, creativity, and diligence.

Data Analysis

To assure research ethical code, a consent form was sent and signed by the participant. Data were collected through observations and semi-structured interviews. The thematic analysis of Barkhuizen *et al* (2014) was employed in this study. Interviews were transcribed, coded, and thematized. Data reading was conducted between 5-10 times to ensure that themes were appropriately assigned. Next, the assigned themes were categorized and analyzed to generate stories and build arguments for the discussions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Ms. Camelia's participation in this research is the proof of her desire in helping another researcher. Likewise, the data collecting process was conducted in Ms. Camelia's place through a one-session interview. We contacted Ms. Camelia before and after some consideration upon her availability due to her activity as a doctoral degree student, we made an appointment. While preparing for the interview questions, We also prepared the consent form to be filled as the agreement of doing this interview. Prior to doing the interview, Ms. Camelia provided some additional documents related to her professional development such as photos while she was receiving the award, and scanned-certificates of her achievements that we copied. Hence, the interview was done in only one session and then we did transcribe the interview. Afterward, the transcript of the interview which was in Indonesian language was translated into English and was thematized. We found 7 big themes and more than 50 sub-themes from the transcript.

Ms. Camelia's stories of 'being an in-service teacher'

Ms. Camelia holds an important role for her family as she becomes a mother, a housewife, and definitely a working-mom at the same time despite her business while studying in one of the state universities in Yogyakarta. Ms. Camelia's career as a teacher itself started when she was accepted for being a civil servant candidate (CPNS) and a teacher in one of Junior High School in Gunungkidul in 2010. After that, she joined Jogja English Teacher Association (JETA) in 2013 and started to be a participant in conference held by one of the state universities in Yogyakarta. Her participation in conferences was because she wanted to learn more and practice what she got into her teaching as she knew that her school was still new and there were many things that need to be improved.

Ms. Camelia's career as a teacher and presenter was excellent. Her first journey in her professional development was as a presenter in a conference when she presented her Classroom Action Research results (PTK). Ms. Camelia was motivated by one of the supervisors and after the first presentation, she participated in another conference in the same year. However, she failed to present in the National Symposium in 2015. Her other achievements were the winner of the National Teacher Olympiad held by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2018. She received awards in a form of trip to from The Netherlands and had a training program in one of the universities in Leiden, The Netherlands from the ministry. Also, as a result of her achievement, she was nominated for an award called *Satyalencana Pendidikan* (Education Merit) which was given for dedicated teachers that have incredible achievements in the field.

Though receiving a lot of achievement, she does not feel of being a successful teacher yet. Therefore, she continues to do lots of useful things as a teacher. Her identity development is much influenced by her social relationship in her study, her professional community, and her involvement in academic meetings such as conferences and teacher Olympiad. In line with Ye and Zhao (2018), teachers' identities develop along with their relationship and interaction with the profession and environment. It can be concluded that teachers' identity can be nurtured through their experiences in teaching, teacher community, and professional development activities.

Ms. Camelia's stories on knowledge, skills, and attitudes for professional development

Knowledge, skills, and attitudes are important aspects in teacher professional development. Realizing the problems of lack of school facilities and students' characteristic, Ms. Camelia applied her knowledge of how to develop suitable teaching material in her classroom.

“Those problems, shortcomings and challenges forced me to think about its solutions and find the way out.” (Interview, External Drive, line 19)

Due to those problems, Ms. Camelia had the initiative to change her condition. Ms. Camelia has never joined any professional organization and there was one day when she had not been informed about basic competence to be included in the exam. She contacted the head of the subject teacher association and since then she began to actively participate in corresponding activities. Ms. Camelia stated that she met many seniors in her field in the organization and gain new experience. She also mentioned that it can recharge her energy as well as increase her motivation to be a better teacher.

Ms. Camelia's passion for creative thinking brought her into the addiction of writing a paper and doing research. Her struggle to deal with the condition in her school also motivate her to do better. Therefore, Ms. Camelia's inspiring story began when she modified her thesis

which was for Senior High School level into Junior High School level. The research was presented at a conference in Korea and share her ideas on researching Korean drama for learning.

“I gave her idea, ‘why don’t you research about the English subtitle used in the Korean drama? It has an effect on our vocabulary building, right?’” (Interview, Creativity, line 15)

Teachers’ attitude towards their profession relates with their emotions, ideas, and behaviors which plays important roles in their career lives (Kiralp & Bolkan, 2016). Teachers’ struggle and motivation to prove themselves in the profession particularly when facing problems help shape their identities and become parts of their career paths.

Ms. Camelia’s stories on meaningful teaching experience

One of the most valuable experiences was when she taught students with special needs. As Ms. Camelia has mentioned, she was placed in a new school that had a lot of challenges and struggled with not only the condition of the school but also the students with special needs. Ms. Camelia felt stressful in dealing with them at first because she had no experience at all and she did not have the knowledge on how to teach them properly and this caused her emotional feelings turned down at that time. Ms. Camelia tried to be patient and consulted it with her supervisor. Ms. Camelia needed to imagine how it felt like if she had a kid with special need.

She tried to modify the assignment for students with special needs and made different assessments from the regular students. She explained that she made graded-task which made it easier for her to assess the students objectively. For instance, she made task 1 for the students with special needs and tasks 2 and 3 for the students who identified as smart students and so on. The students who could reach task 4 would teach other average students while students with special needs were taught by Ms. Camelia herself.

“So my teaching experience is I learn that students because my school is not a favorite school so the students have their own feature, they have their own pace of learning so I can’t force it to be the same.” (Interview, dedication, line 150)

Hence, Ms. Camelia’s meaningful teaching experience was when she learned to be patient in teaching the students with special needs. She realized the fact that every student has their own pace of learning and in order to teach the students equally, she needs to be more creative. Ms. Camelia’s positive attitudes show that she has positive responses to inclusive education. However, having such positive attitudes does not guarantee sustaining inclusive education. Teachers need information, trainings, and collaborations with education specialist, parents, and colleagues (Vanderpuye, Obosu, and Nishimuko, 2018).

Requirements for a successful in-service teacher in professional development

Ms. Camelia’s most prominent internal drive was having the awareness that students need more than knowledge about English but also life lessons. She learned that she needs to teach the students about life lesson so that the students will learn how to behave as well. Ms. Camelia has the awareness of the students’ problem and struggle, which makes her become more concerned with not only lesson plan-which is important in the classroom due to time management and the learning design (Brown, 2000)-but also her closeness and interaction with the students.

“Due to many kinds of problems so... I feel like being a teacher is not only teaching English in my school I could not only teach content itself.” (Interview, Internal Drive, line 68)

Further, she cannot stay still with the condition of her new school which is lack in terms of either facilities or human resources (teachers who teach students with special needs). She was very excited about teaching but she thought that she had no one to discuss with and she did not enjoy her class.

“I had no book, right... and it was one roof for all rooms, and it was also a lack of its facilities and then I... applied material development knowledge in the school to make a task for the students. Then I felt like it only stuck in there and there are no additional (activity) I even had a degradation on my English skill that means I do not have any friend to share something with and there were also many problems occurred in terms of the learning itself so yeah.” (Interview, Internal Drive, line 12)

Awareness came from a teacher’s mindfulness in facing the reality of someone’s needs (Benn *et al*, 2012). Aligned with this, Ms. Camelia realized that action was important in order to deal with the problem yet school facilities could influence students learning and achievement (Limon, 2016) so that it was difficult for Ms. Camelia to change that. However, what Ms. Camelia did was attempting to change the lesson in the classroom by implementing what she had known in the classroom. She applied her knowledge of material development in the classroom so that at least the students’ problem can be handled. Eventually, this kind of action that she did due to her awareness made her become what she is today.

Additionally, Ms. Camelia’s attitudes played important role for her achievement. Her diligence made her not only aware of the condition of the school, but also aware of what she is lacking. She was also keen on learning new things.

“Every day I read the book of IELTS and TOEFL try to read PKB book, a book about a kind of what professional... teacher professional development for sure.” (Interview, Attitude, line 114)

Another aspect that affected Ms. Camelia’s professional development was *competency-related aspects* and what can be highlighted from this aspect is *creativity* when Ms. Camelia changed her thesis to be adjusted in another grade as she stated,

“My thesis was also “Developing ICT-Based Task” and it was modified, and that time it was for Senior High School students and then I modified it to be taught in Junior High School around my place. I reported it later in April 2012 and that was my first presentation.” (Interview, Competency-Related, line 12)

This shows that Ms. Camelia used her creative skills to adjust her work and even to modify it to the next level. Therefore, by doing modification and implementing new knowledge in teaching, Ms. Camelia significantly carried out her work as an educator that intentionally develop her knowledge and experience as Ghanizadeh and Jahedizadeh (2016) stated that promoting creativity is one of the goals of education itself. Hence, Ms. Camelia who was also a diligent person tried to present her work in a conference for the first time in 2012. Ever since, she often did small researches based on the problems she faced in the school. Moreover, Ms. Camelia expressed,

“My hobby was also conducting small researches due to the problems that occurred in my school.” (Interview, Self-development, line 12)

Based on her statement, it shows that Ms. Camelia tried to develop her skill and made it a *hobby* of her. In this stage, we can see this finding indicates *self-development aspects* which is one of the requirements of successful professional development. Besides, Ms. Camelia who lacked experience has gained a lot of experience through her work (research). She met new people and learned many things at the same time.

“It was very memorable either the conference or the experience of the conference itself can be an event where we meet and greet the people.” (Interview, Dedication, line 17)

In short, the *experience* that she got from the conference which is one of the activities for teacher professional development (Grosemans *et al*, 2015) can be said as one of the *dedication aspects* of professional development. Owing to her hard work, persistence (Guskey & Sparks, 2000), and creativity, she is now able to benefit all of the experiences. At last, creativity, diligence, and persistence are all that a teacher needs to have to be successful in professional development and Ms. Camelia proves that.

High achievement in a professional career

The outcome of Ms. Camelia’s professional development based on her achievement is called self-actualization aspects. These aspects implemented as the stage that Ms. Camelia has achieved through the whole process of her professional development. Ms. Camelia explained that she got many failures and victories through the process she had passed in learning and continuing her professional development and the most essential thing she learned from them is the experience itself.

Ms. Camelia’s persistence in continuing professional development has crowned her victories as she achieved an award from the Indonesian Government called *Satyalancana Pendidikan* or Education Service Medal upon her dedication for being an outstanding teacher within 8 years.

”Thank God I was the first winner and was nominated for Education Service Medal (*Satyalancana Pendidikan*).” (Interview, Self-actualization, line 121)

It can be concluded that a phase where Ms. Camelia has achieved many achievements is occurred due to her remarkable skills (Huang, 2010).

The emotion, the propeller

During Ms. Camelia’s professional development, there must be emotional aspects (drive) that propel Ms. Camelia for achievements. First, there was found one of the emotional aspects in the internal drive (the requirement for successful teacher professional development) which influenced Ms. Camelia before she became aware of the problem that occurred. Ms. Camelia explained that she had no friend to discuss the condition of the school and its lacks with. It seems like Ms. Camelia felt sad at that time due to the lack of interaction she made with others which also made her had degradation of her teaching and English skill. Besides, she felt *discomfort* with her class due to the problem occurred in the school. Therefore, Ms. Camelia also explained that there was someone who inspired her to try what she never tried before. She mentioned,

“I gave the ideas to teach description and recount. I made the video and then present it. Mrs. Lily commented that it was a good idea but who made the video and I said me. She said then why did not the students make it? I said that the students could not make it but she replied how did I know that if I never try?” (Interview, Attitude, line 23)

This shows that Ms. Camelia that never asked her students to do the task doubted the students' ability and it indicates *pessimism* that she had with them.

Furthermore, there were also found *positive emotional aspects* that appeared when Ms. Camelia got many achievements and the feeling is called *happiness*. The happiness that Ms. Camelia felt during professional development also occurred when she did the researches especially when she met her friends from teacher associations. Besides, she also felt happy when she participated in her first abroad conference in Korea. It was her first time traveling abroad she was very happy at that time.

Hence, the emotional aspects found in this research are divided into two parts; they are positive emotional aspects and negative emotional aspects that were felt by Ms. Camelia during and after her professional development. Therefore, we put sadness and happiness as the most common emotional aspects that felt by people as examples. Those two emotional aspects proved that in professional development, there are embedded emotional aspects that affect someone's process whether it is positive or negative. Following Teng (2017) a kind of feeling that changes psychologically and physically that can be alleged as emotion is essential in education and connected with teacher identity so that it is essential to know that the propeller found in Ms. Camelia's stories played an important role to her identity.

The importance of identity development during teacher professional development

Identity development

Through the stories that Ms. Camelia has shared, it seems salient that her experience formed her to be what she is today. Her starting point was when she became a civil servant who was placed in a small school and therefore, she started to participate in teacher associations as she continued her professional development which gave her a lot of experiences. The following figure shows the identity development of Ms. Camelia during her professional development.

In the past, Ms. Camelia used to be a teacher, a researcher, an activist (profession), a material designer, and also an office worker. Overall, Ms. Camelia was a teacher and a material designer in her school that actively did research and participated in many professional organizations. Other than that, she was also an assessor and office worker in Research and Education Evaluation (PEP) of Education, Youth, and Sports Office. Presently, she is a student of doctoral degree while still active in her organization. Then, Ms. Camelia described that after her doctoral study she will come back to her institute in Education, Youth, and Sports Office. Moreover, she still wants to be a teacher in the future, she expected to be placed in a bigger school than her previous school.

Furthermore, the development of Ms. Camelia's identity has purposive goals. Based on Olsen and Bachanan (2017), professional identity is the outcome of knowledge and goals that formed by repetition that someone had been through. As well as that, the identity that Ms. Camelia has now is based on her experience of how she dealt with the problems and the difficulties. Also, it is based on how she changed the problems into something that can be useful for her teaching. Consequently, in order to evaluate the process of professional

development, it is important to highlight the identity development during professional development.

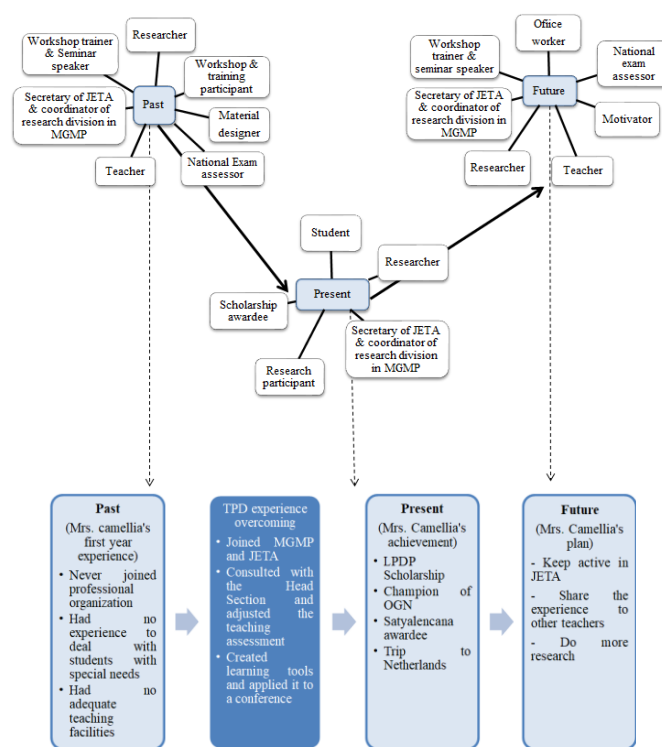


Figure 1. Ms. Camellia's identity development

Professional development trajectory

The trajectory shows Ms. Camelia's stories on professional development, starting from what she did in the past such as her experiences as a teacher and how she developed her professional career as well. Since her hobby was conducting research, she enjoyed her time to find ideas for her research and then implement the ideas into her classroom. Meanwhile, what she is doing right now is studying for her doctoral degree in one of the state universities in Yogyakarta.

Ms. Camelia wanted to continue her job as a teacher, to keep doing research, and more importantly, to share her experience with other teachers, especially which have the same problems that she has had. Thereupon, it proves that Ms. Camelia who supposes her future to be more useful by sharing her knowledge and experiences is indeed a thoughtful teacher that has outstanding character (Huang, 2010).

Lastly, professional development is a persistent process (Guskey & Sparks, 2000) and the stories of Ms. Camelia's professional development will not end when she accomplish one mission because there will be another target awaits her as long as she continues her career as a teacher. It then proves that professional development is a systemic process as we can see in Ms. Camelia's trajectory what she did in the past, what she is doing in the present, and what she will do in the future. In particular, I can tell that professional development can also be said as a purposeful process due to the goals that Ms. Camelia had achieved and will be achieved in the future. Therefore, since continuing professional development can be done as long as the teacher still being a teacher and keep learning consistently, it can be concluded

that Ms. Camelia's professional development will continue due to the long-term goals that she needs to achieve in the future.

CONCLUSION

Drive, attitude, competency, self-development, dedication, and also emotional aspects as the propellers of professional developments. Ms. Camelia has experienced identity development which is distinct to each other but surely played important roles in her success stories. The identities will continue to develop along with Ms. Camelia's professional development that will be done in the future.

Even though she has achieved many merits, Ms. Camelia expressed that she still has many targets and upcoming plans that await her and with the intention of that, she will continue to develop her professional career in the field of education. Last of all, it can be briefly concluded that achieving success is not the end of the story but it is only one milestone that helps to reach another stage, another higher place.

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