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## POTENCIES OF EXERCISING AGENCY AMONGST PRE-SERVICE ENGLISH TEACHERS IN MICRO TEACHING CLASS

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### ABSTRACT

The role of teachers as agents of learning has been echoed for decades. As a driving force in an educational institute, teachers with high agency can be analogous to critical enzymes in the body of education. However, whether or not a sense of agency has been introduced, promoted, or facilitated amongst students studying to become teachers still receives little attention. This study seeks for evidence of potencies and typology of agency amongst final year pre-service English teachers (PSETs). 199 students were facilitated to explore English learning problems in high schools and constructed problem-based lesson plans from which their agency was identified. 24 PSETs with a high degree of agency were involved in a focus group discussion. The study reveals potencies of exercising agency which were greatly informed by the PSETs' past and present learning experiences. The agentive actions were related to the implementation of technology, better engagement, and project-based learning. By doing so, the PSETs have shown their future professional identity which is important for pre-service teacher educators and institutions. This study has important implications for pre-service teacher educators to instill and further the development of agency during their teacher education program taking into account their students' ecological capitals and capabilities.

**Key Words:** Assisted agency; English learning problems; agency potencies; agency typology

### ABSTRAK

Peran guru sebagai agen pembelajaran telah digaungkan sejak lama. Sebagai penggerak di institusi pendidikan, guru dengan tingkat agensi yang tinggi dapat dianalogikan sebagai sebuah enzim krusial di dunia pendidikan. Namun, masih sangat sedikit penelitian yang mengkaji bagaimana agensi ini dapat diperkenalkan, didorong atau difasilitasi untuk berkembang pada calon guru Bahasa Inggris. Penelitian ini dilaksanakan untuk mengetahui potensi-potensi dan jenis-jenis agensi pada mahasiswa calon guru tingkat akhir. 199 mahasiswa calon guru terlibat di penelitian ini. Mereka difasilitasi untuk dapat mengeksplorasi permasalahan-permasalahan pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris sebagai dasar penyusunan rencana proses pembelajaran (RPP). 24 dari 199 dengan potensi agensi yang tinggi di RPP mereka kemudian diundang pada diskusi kelompok terfokus untuk mengklarifikasi rencana-rencana agentif mereka dalam memecahkan permasalahan pembelajaran. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa terdapat beberapa potensi agensi pada mahasiswa calon guru Bahasa Inggris yang berorientasi pada pemanfaatan teknologi, keterlibatan aktif dalam pembelajaran dan pembelajaran berbasis proyek. Hasil penelitian ini mempunyai implikasi penting terhadap model pembelajaran calon guru di lembaga pendidik tenaga kependidikan (LPTK) untuk menanamkan dan mengembangkan agensi guru sedini mungkin dengan memberikan stimuli-stimuli yang sesuai dengan kondisi ekologi dan kapasitas mahasiswa calon guru.

**Kata Kunci:** Agensi terbimbing; permasalahan pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris; potensi agensi, jenis agensi

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## INTRODUCTION

Learning involves a complex and dynamic process (Smagorinsky et al., 2012) according to the social dynamics of the people involved in it. This complex and dynamic process requires the agentive actions of teachers who can adapt, accommodate, and respond to changes and learning problems that can arise at any time. Agency amongst teachers is usually defined as the capacity of teachers to initiate a change or solution of problems that occur in the learning environment (Priestley et al., 2013). Although the term teacher agency has been widely debated since the end of the 18th century due to its very diverse definitions (Chisholm et al., 2019) and implications for the theory and concept of teacher agency (Farmasari, 2020), as well as implications for research on teacher agency (Farmasari, 2021), experts use the term autonomy (Tao & Gao, 2017), initiative (Vaughn & Faircloth, 2011), capacity (Verberg et al., 2016), and efficacy (Biesta et al., 2015) as keywords to describe teacher agency. In this vein, studies on teacher agency also focus on how teachers use their autonomy, capacity, initiative, and efficacy when dealing with learning problems in their educational ecological environment and emphasize the role of a teacher as an agent in their social environment (Priestley et al., 2016). Teacher agencies in learning have the potential to improve the ability to consistently seek

or strive for the things necessary to improve the professionalism and quality of learning so that it has a great impact on success in facilitating the learning of its learners (Simpson et al. 2018). This is because teachers continue to reflect and improve themselves so that their learning goals are achieved (Ryder, 2018). Thus, agencies are used by teachers to facilitate change as well as demand to be agents of change in school improvement, curriculum development, and teaching and learning in the classroom.

Teachers as agents not only convey information to students, but also have the potential to become facilitators who are in charge of providing ease of learning (facilitate of learning) to all students, so that they can learn in a pleasant, joyful, energetic, not anxious atmosphere, and dare to express opinions openly so that it becomes the basic capital for students to grow and develop into humans who are ready to adapt, facing various possibilities, and entering an era of globalization full of various challenges (Hökkä at; al, 2017).

The role of the teacher as a learning agent even now underlies one of the programs of the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia (MECRI) to improve the quality of learning in schools, namely the *Guru Penggerak* or driving teacher (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2022). As a driving force in an educational institute, teachers

with high agency are the driving force in the educational institution (Hattie, 2012). The emphasis on increasing teacher agency is a response to the complexity of learning problems that must be anticipated and resolved by teachers as learning agents. This is one of the reasons why teachers are widely supported by studies on improving teacher professionalism and through many training programs and seminars (Ashadi & Rice, 2016; Buchanan, 2015).

However, the foci of studies and trainings are still mostly given to in-service teachers. Little attention has been given to how agency can be instilled and grown before during teacher education program. In fact, the learning process carried out by teachers (in office) is influenced by the experience of the learning process during their teacher education program (Braund & Campbell, 2010). Williams (2018) also highlighted that the approaches, methods, strategies and learning techniques used by teachers in the classroom were influenced by the approaches, methods, strategies and learning techniques used by their previous teachers or lecturers. This is in line with Priestley et al's teacher agency model (2016) where the past learning experience of teachers is one of the important aspects that can shape their current and future agency.

As the PSETs were learning to develop their skills at every stage of a teaching cycle (Arshal, 2015), the opening, implementation and closing during which sense of agency can be identified (Rubin & Land, 2017) and the effectiveness of the teaching approaches leading to agency may be observed (Pandey, 2019; Msimangga, 2021). The potencies of agency exercises will later become important inputs in developing approaches, methods and learning materials so that students as prospective teachers are more adaptive, accommodative, and responsive (AAR) to learning situations and problems (Chisholm et al., 2019; Williams, 2018).

Therefore, introducing and training teacher candidates to identify and exercise their agency is becoming imperative. As a starting point, we believe that identifying student teachers' agencies can be used as a basis for further teacher development programs. This study aimed to identify the potencies and typology of teacher agency amongst pre-service English teachers (PSETs). This research was guided by two research questions: (1) what are the agency potencies amongst the PSETs in micro-teaching classes? and (2) what are the types of teacher agency (typology of agency) that the PSETs exercise?. The findings would contribute to relevant theories of teacher agency such as theories from

Biesta et al. (2017); Buchanan (2015); and Priestley et al. (2016). This study would specifically provide novel insights about how agency can be facilitated amongst pre-service teachers and suggest a research framework for studying it. The study would also suggest how pre-service teachers moderate their learning context, apply logical, critical, and innovative thinking in their micro-teaching processes and analyze them by referring to the principles of micro-teaching (Kumar, 2016), learning English as a Foreign Language (Freeman, 2016), and teacher agency theory (Priestley et al., 2016).

## METHOD

### Research design

This research is descriptive qualitative because verbal and descriptive data are used to reveal the

meaning and social phenomena in a certain situation (Satori & Komariah, 2014; Silverman, 2016). We propose a research methodology framework of researching the potencies of agency amongst the PSETs in the following figure 1.

### Research site and participants

199 (out of 221 students), 121 female and 78 male students enrolled in eight micro-teaching classes were involved after they consent their participation as the study participants. The study was conducted in a micro-teaching class in a state university located in southeastern part of Indonesia. In the micro teaching class, the PSETs had to plan, implement, and evaluate their teaching practices. Prior to teaching, each PSETs was facilitated to explore one English problem in a high school from which a lesson plan for the micro teaching was constructed respectively.

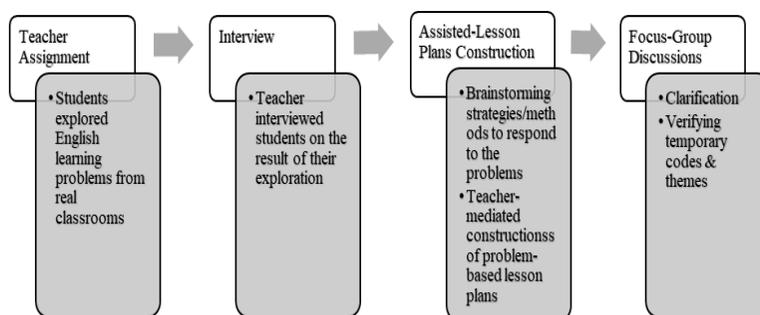


Figure 1: Proposed research methodology

## Data collection and analysis

The data of this research were in the forms of (1) interview transcripts, (2) students' lesson plans for micro-teaching, and (3) recording and notes from the focus group discussions. 24 students, three from each class, with prominent teacher agency potencies were invited to the focus-group discussion (FGD). With a limited number of discussion participants, focus group discussions are expected to produce confirmation, additional explanations, and answers to research questions and other matters that support the achievement of research objectives (Yin, 2014). After the interview, two-session meetings were conducted to assist PSETs with strategic solutions to solve the problems they have identified. The research team

brainstormed strategies, techniques, and methods to promote better learning processes and outcomes. The participants were also instructed to navigate literature related to the feasibility of the potential solutions. Having decided on the strategies, techniques, or methods, the PSETs constructed a lesson plan for the micro-teaching practices. The interview transcripts and the solutions proposed in the lesson plans were tabulated to assist the thematic data analysis. In the micro-teaching classes, the problem-based strategies were observed when implemented and notes were taken on the pre-prepared lesson plans. The data were then analyzed by adopting the six stages of thematic analysis from Braun and Clarke (2013) as shown in figure 2 and sample of data analysis is provided in table 1.

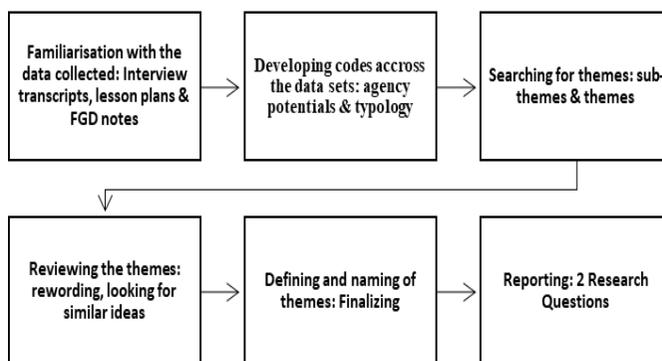


Figure 2: Data analysis stages

**Tabel 1.** Sample of thematic data analysis

Sample of Excerpts	Themes	Sub-Themes
The teacher reported that his students have very limited vocabulary to start speaking or writing	Teaching strategy/methodology	Promoting better learning processes and outcomes
I plan to use colourful vocabulary cards to show different parts of speech, also Picture Series where students can see series of events and combine them into one complete story	Pedagogic agency	
The teacher mentioned a lot of problems, but I think the main problem is students' low motivation to learn English	Students' wellbeing/Motivation problem	Needs for more motivational learning processes/facilities
As a teacher, we have to understand what our students like to do or how they like to learn. If they like to play games, I will use games	Professional, Pegagogic agency	
The teacher said her students do not know the meaning of the texts in reading class; she has to translate the texts	Classroom management	Variative activity management
If I were the teacher, I would ask them to work in group and help each other understand the text	Pedagogical related agency	

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Findings

#### Potencies of exercising Teacher agency in English micro-teaching classes

The micro-teaching carried out by the PSETs has gone through three stages, namely (1) the stage of exploring problems or cases of learning English in secondary schools, (2) the planning stage or preparation of a problem or case-based learning class in the lesson plans, and (3) the implementation of the lesson plans in the English micro-

teaching classes. At the first stage, each respondent student carried out an exploration of problems or cases of English learning in secondary schools by interviewing one English teacher. In total, there were 199 English teachers who were interviewed. This exploration was carried out in the first week of Micro-teaching lectures. Semi-structured interviews were conducted by students using the interview protocol prepared. The foci were to identify the learning problems and students' strategic plans to solve the problems that they would propose in

their lesson plans. The following table reads the map of the learning problems explored, codes and themes derived from them.

English Learning Problems	Themes	Sub-Themes (agency potentials)	(N)
Students' wellbeing/Motivation problem	Needs for more motivational learning processes/facilities	Using appropriate teaching media Varying communication activities	151 137
Teaching strategy/methodology	Needs for better learning processes and outcomes	Applying engaging teaching strategy	199
Student' low grammar & vocabulary knowledge	Linguistics insufficiency	Applying engaging teaching strategy	199
English learning facilities/resources	Insufficient facilities	Facilities for students' self-learning	125
Literacy problems	Literacy development stages	Scaffolding activities	199

The problems or cases that have been explored by the PSETs are situated as triggering conditions or conditions that can stimulate their sense of agency. The English learning problems or cases are used to plan the lesson for the micro-teaching class.

The table below presents the potencies of teacher agency amongst the student respondents that we identified from their lesson plans. The data show that teacher agency potencies are limited to the selection of learning methods and learning media or techniques. When confirmed on the focus group discussion, the selection of learning methods and media are greatly influenced by the PSETs' perception and learning experience (Buchanan, 2015). They admitted that they had better learning experience when the lessons were supported by media to arouse excitement and promote better understanding. As the representation of their learning experience, the instructional media chosen are oriented to arouse students' interests, enthusiasm, and active participation.

When I was a secondary high school student, I was not motivated to learning English because the method my teachers used was not interesting. I always feel bored and tired of learning. No media used, only textbooks...but when teachers used interesting media, I liked it and I learnt better (FGD, Student 9).

Table 3: Potencies of teacher agency

English learning problems/cases	Themes / Agency potentials	
Students' low motivation & enthusiasm in English learning	Using appropriate teaching media	Accommodating students' learning activity preferences
Students' low grammar & vocabulary knowledge	Applying engaging teaching strategy	Accessible learning materials
Limited English learning resources	Facilities for students' self-learning	Accessible learning materials
Students' incapability in developing ideas on writing tasks	Scaffolding activities for literacy development	Applying writing stages
Students' low participation in group work	Classroom management	Varying students' grouping

### Types of teacher agency (typology of agency)

The study reveals that there are several agentive plans that the participants proposed to overcome the English teaching and learning problems they have explored. The plans show that there are potencies of exercising agencies amongst pre-service teachers in the realm of pedagogy, by delivering learning materials in a way that is more attractive, engaging and accessible to students. Francois (2014) theorized that pedagogic agency is influenced by the perception of a teacher that he has a

role and responsibility to influence and change the learning process for the better outcomes.

Table 4: Typology of agency

Themes/Agency Potentials		Types of agencies
Using appropriate teaching media	Accommodating students' learning activity preferences	Pedagogic
Applying engaging teaching strategy	Accessible learning materials	Pedagogic
Facilities for students' self-learning	Accessible learning materials	Pedagogic
Scaffolding activities for literacy development	Applying writing stages	Pedagogic
Classroom management	Varying students' grouping	Pedagogic

### Discussion

This study sought to identify the potencies of agency amongst pre-service English teachers (PSETs) and theories the typology of agency exercised. Through the stimulation and assistance provided, the findings of this study revealed the PSETs capability in reflecting their past and present English learning experience as part of ecological experience (Tao & Gao, 2017). The past and present learning experiences greatly inform agentive actions as the PSETs placed themselves as students who had similar problems when learning English. The study in

particular shed lights Biesta et al's. (2015) and Priestley et al's. (2016) theories on teacher agency, that agency is not only about teacher's individual capacity, but the exercises of teacher agency are greatly stimulated by the existence of problematic or given conditions and situations that require responses in the form of problem-solving thoughts and actions. In the same vein, Wu (2023) theories that agency had complex relationships between professional identity transformation within teachers' professional trajectory. Transformation from being unagentive to agentive requires enabling stimulation that can assist teachers to dig agency potentials within individuals. The English learning problems explored by the PSETs prior to the lesson plan construction were used as triggering condition to activate their sense of agency oriented to solve the problems. As current students, during agency activation, the PSETs could reflect on their past and present learning experience oriented toward the future agentive plans. The study unfolds that when facilitated, the PSETs had been able to mediate their past and present learning experience and reflect on their expectations for better learning experiences. Their exercises of agency that also endorsed the pedagogical assistance provided was agency

enabling. In addition, this present study indicates that during the teacher education program, the PSETs have represented their future identity as agentive English teachers who are reflective and responsive to students' learning problems and pedagogical needs.

## CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTION

The study confirms that the solutions taken to solve English learning problems were enabled by the assistance received and were dominantly informed by the PSETs learning experiences. The agency potentials were exercised to promote better learning experiences and outcomes by accommodating students' wellbeing, varying learning strategies, methodology, media, and resources. By so doing, the PSETs exercised pedagogic agency as they view their power and responsibility to affect better outcomes (Charteris & Smardon, 2019; Manyukhina & Wyse, 2019; Pei & Yang, 2019). The study also profounds that through appropriate stimulation and assistance, teacher agency is highly potential to be trained during teacher education program. The findings have implications on how pre-service teachers can be better assisted to penetrate their sense of agency beneficial for their future professional

teaching and for professional identity determination.

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