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


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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 et 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 observed (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...
Bieta 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 amongsts 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](image-url)

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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.

![Data analysis stages](image)

**Figure 2: Data analysis stages**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample of Excerpts</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The teacher reported that his students have very limited vocabulary to start speaking or writing</td>
<td>Teaching strategy/methodology</td>
<td>Promoting better learning processes and outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>Pedagogic agency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teacher mentioned a lot of problems, but I think the main problem is students’ low motivation to learn English</td>
<td>Students’ wellbeing/Motivation problem</td>
<td>Needs for more motivational learning processes/facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>Professional, Pedagogic agency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teacher said her students do not know the meaning of the texts in reading class; she has to translate the texts</td>
<td>Classroom management Variative activity management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I were the teacher, I would ask them to work in group and help each other understand the text</td>
<td>Pedagogical related agency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English Learning Problems</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-Themes (agency potentials)</th>
<th>(N)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students’ wellbeing/Motivation problem</td>
<td>Needs for more motivation al learning processes/facilities</td>
<td>Using appropriate teaching media</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching strategy/methodology</td>
<td>Needs for better learning processes and outcomes</td>
<td>Varying communication activities</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Applying engaging teaching strategy</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student’s low grammar &amp; vocabulary knowledge</td>
<td>Linguistics insufficiency</td>
<td>Applying engaging teaching strategy</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English learning facilities/resources</td>
<td>Insufficiency facilities</td>
<td>Facilities for students’ self-learning</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy problems</td>
<td>Literacy development stages</td>
<td>Scaffolding activities</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English learning problems/case</th>
<th>Themes / Agency potentials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students’ low motivation &amp; enthusiasm in English learning</td>
<td>Using appropriate teaching media Accommodating students’ learning activity preferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ low grammar &amp; vocabulary knowledge</td>
<td>Applying engaging teaching strategy Accessible learning materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited English learning resources</td>
<td>Facilities for students’ self-learning Accessible learning materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ incapability in developing ideas on writing tasks</td>
<td>Scaffolding activities for literacy development Applying writing stages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ low participation in group work</td>
<td>Classroom management Varying students’ grouping</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes/Agency Potentials</th>
<th>Types of agencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Using appropriate teaching media</td>
<td>Accommodating students’ learning activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying engaging teaching strategy</td>
<td>Accessible learning materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities for students’ self-learning</td>
<td>Accessible learning materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scaffolding activities for literacy development Applying writing stages</td>
<td>Pedagogic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom management Varying students’ grouping</td>
<td>Pedagogic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.

**Acknowledgments**

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