

RECONSTRUCTING AN EFL PRE-SERVICE TEACHER' IDENTITY: A SELF-NARRATIVE

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Abstract

The experiences of English language education students significantly shape language learning practices and pedagogical approaches globally. Despite the growing interest in these experiences, research on the intersection of identity and language teacher development remains limited, particularly among Indonesian English education students. This study employed James Paul Gee's Identity Theory (2000) to explore the construction and reconstruction of my identity as an English education student during a study exchange at Osaka University (2023–2024). Using a narrative self-study approach, I carefully examine up to the present moment, the struggles, development, and successes that have reshaped my formerly shaped identity as an English language learner and English education student. Moreover, a collection of reflective writings such as documents, pamphlet notes, tables, and journals were adopted to critically review my identity through constant comparative method of data analysis which led to the revelation of multiple stages of my identity formation and then its further reconstruction. The findings reveal that student and teachers' narrations provide insightful and enlightening clues for each and every engaged member of the learning cycle to learn how to deal with members within their communities, and reminds policy-makers and higher-order authorities of the value in recognizing and appreciating each and every one of an individual's voice.

Keywords: *English education, identity formation, cultural competence, narrative self-study, teacher development*

1. INTRODUCTION

English language education student's experience plays a crucial role in shaping and determining language learning practices and pedagogical approaches worldwide. Student engagement in language learning is crucial for all language programs. Peng (2023) writes that reflective practices, task-based learning, and immersive teaching enhance students' language acquisition and enable teachers to adapt their methodologies to meet diverse learning needs. Studies in English education has examined the obstacles

and opportunities encountered by students and educators in managing identity transformations. Gandara and Romero (2023) emphasized the intersection of trainee teachers' experiences as non-native English speakers with identity concerns, frequently exposing sentiments of disenfranchisement within global academic contexts. Tavakol & Tavakoli (2022) investigated the impact of master narratives and societal expectations on the professional identities of English instructors, highlighting the essential importance of cultural competency in

reconciling institutional standards with personal convictions. These studies jointly underscore the significance of cultural awareness and reflective techniques in facilitating identity formation.

Despite these advancements, the exploration of language teachers' experiences as speakers, and how these experiences intersect with identity issues, has limited studies conducted on them (G' andara & Romero, 2023), particularly amongst Indonesian English Education students. This disparity is especially notable considering Indonesia's distinctive status as a multicultural society balancing traditional and globalized educational systems.

Additionally, the Indonesian educational system, characterized by its hierarchical and conventional classroom dynamics Marmet (2023) frequently juxtaposes with the more egalitarian and discourse-oriented methodologies prevalent in global academic settings. Eden, Chisom, and Adeniyi (2024) assert that cultural competence is fundamental to effective education in a globalized society, highlighting the necessity of inclusive teaching techniques and different curricula to promote intercultural understanding. Majewska (2022) emphasizes the significance of internationalized curricula in preparing students with global competencies, advocating for novel frameworks to improve intercultural collaboration and communication in higher education.

Narrative inquiry and self-study approaches have emerged as effective instruments for examining identity transformations. Phipps (2022) highlighted how narrative analysis reveals the progression of learners' self-efficacy over time, highlighting the significance of reflective techniques in enhancing engagement with language

teaching. Likewise, Safari (2017) employed critical reflection to analyze her identity transformation as an English teacher, providing insights into how personal narratives might reveal the relationship between cultural experiences and professional development. These approaches correspond effectively with the objectives of this study, which aims to examine the formation and reformation of identity through reflective practices during a study exchange program.

This study expands upon established frameworks by investigating the distinct experiences of an Indonesian English education student as they navigate cultural, institutional, and personal transformations. This study integrates Gee's Identity Theory with a narrative self-study approach, enhancing the knowledge of identity development influenced by cultural interaction and reflective practices, and providing practical implications for teacher education programs worldwide.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Identity formation has been a crucial emphasis in educational study, especially in examining how individuals view themselves within distinct sociocultural and institutional frameworks. In recent years, study on the topic of identity formation in English language education students has gained an increased interest. These goals underscore the importance of influencing pedagogical approaches and, more generally, professional development. Gee's Identity Theory (2000) delineates four identity categories: Nature, Institutional, Discourse, and Affinity, and has been extensively utilized to examine the impact of sociocultural and institutional elements on an individual's self-perception in particular circumstances.

Gee (2000) characterises nature identity as "a state derived from natural forces." He expressly attributes nature identity as a predetermined character feature, rather than something that may be pursued or achieved. Gee cited his experience of being born a twin. His condition is inherent; he did not take any action to become a twin; he was simply born as one.

Institutional Identity as defined by Gee (2000), refers to one's self-perception, essentially posing the question, "Who am I?" The distinguishing feature of this identity, in contrast to his other identities, is that institutional identity must be a position rather than a naturally occurring state. Gee illustrates through personal experience that he perceives himself as a professor at a specific university. This identity is maintained by interaction with colleagues, pupils, and administrative systems that affirm his professional status as a professor.

Discourse identity as defined by Gee (2000), as a feature of your identity derived from your own characteristics and interpersonal interactions. It is neither an inherent feature given to you at birth nor a designation given by an organisation or entity. It relates to how your distinctive features, such as charisma, self-discipline, or shyness, manifest in your interactions and are acknowledged by those in around you. Gee states that discourse identity cannot be fully established or achieved solely by the individual. Discourse identity depends on individuals' perceptions and interactions with you. In other words, my self-perception as a diligent worker could not be considered my discourse identity if others do not perceive me as such.

Finally, affinity identity as characterized by Gee (2000), refers to one's self-concept formed by

participation in a collective of individuals with shared interests and activities. This differs with previous ideas of identity, as it is not innate, assigned by an institution, or solely derived from external perceptions. It pertains to belonging to an "affinity group" that shares and supports certain interests and behaviours alongside you.

Gee's paradigm underscores the fluid and contextually contingent essence of identity, rendering it particularly pertinent for study exploring the convergence of education, culture, and holistic personal development.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study utilized a narrative self-study methodology to explore the construction and reconstruction of identity as an English education student. The use of narrative self-study allowed for a detailed, introspective examination of personal experiences, emphasizing how identity evolved in specific sociocultural and institutional contexts (Barkhuizen, 2016). This approach has been recognized as a trustworthy tool for understanding the dynamic interplay between individual experiences and broader cultural frameworks, as it enabled deep reflection on the complexities of identity construction and professional development (Marvasti & Gubrium, 2021)

Participants and Context

This study focused on the experiences of an English education student at Universitas Islam Indonesia (UII) and during a semester-long academic exchange at Osaka University, Japan (2023–2024). The context included traditional and international educational settings, characterized by contrasting pedagogical styles and cultural environments.

Data Collection

Data were collected through various reflective writings, including:

1. **Journals:** Weekly entries documented thoughts, challenges, and realizations.
2. **Class Notes:** Notes and Observations from lectures and group discussions were compiled at Osaka University.
3. **Artifacts:** Visual materials such as identity tables, cultural exchange pamphlets, and signed items from peers, captured moments of intercultural engagement.

These materials were compiled over the entire duration of the academic exchange and retrospectively analyzed to identify key themes related to identity formation and reconstruction overtime (Barkhuizen, 2016).

Data Analysis

This study utilized Braun & Clarke (2006) thematic analysis, a widely accepted approach for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns within qualitative data (Nowell et al., 2017). The analysis went through six different stages:

1. **Familiarization with the data:** Journals, notes, and artifacts were reviewed, allowing for immersion in the reflective writings.
2. **Generating Initial Codes:** Key phrases, recurring ideas, and noteworthy events were systematically coded to document significant aspects of the data.
3. **Searching for Themes:** The codes were categorized into initial themes within Gee's (2000) four identity domains that matched the objectives of the study, with a special emphasis on identity development.
4. **Reviewing Themes:** The consistency of themes across the dataset was assessed, and refinements were made to ensure coherence in the findings.

5. **Defining and Naming Themes:** To enhance comprehension of the four domains—Nature, Institutional, Discourse, and Affinity—each theme was given a precise definition and name.
6. **Producing the Report:** Extracts from reflective writings were integrated into the study's narrative to demonstrate the relevance of the identified themes.

Using James Paul Gee's Identity Theory (2000) as a framework, the theme analysis revealed subtle changes in identity. This combined method enabled an in-depth examination of how institutional and sociocultural settings influenced the development of identity.

Presentation of Research Findings

In accordance with Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework, the findings of this study were organized thematically. A thematic presentation allowed for a structured and comprehensive exploration of transformation across the domains of Nature, Institutional, Discourse, and Affinity Identity during the exchange. This method guaranteed that the results remained transparent, authentic, and rooted in the researcher's lived experiences (Barkhuizen, 2016). The results were presented using three key methods:

1. **Thematic Descriptions:** Detailed discussions of identity transformation patterns.
2. **Direct Quotes:** Excerpts from journals and class observations.
3. **Visual Representations:** Identity tables and artifacts demonstrated key turning points in the study exchange.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Results

This section of the journal presents the findings of the study. The findings are based on class notes, and artifacts. The results are categorized according to Gee's (2000) four identity: Nature Identity, Institutional Identity, Discourse Identity, and Affinity Identity.

4.1.1. Nature Identity: From Detachment to Connection

I was born into a family where my father was a diplomat. This circumstance came with benefits and detriments. A key advantage was my ability to travel to various places and pursue my studies there. I developed connections with both international students and local residents there. However, this also came with experiences that were quite bitter. From a social perspective one of the disbenefits comes from the direct consequences of being able to make so many friends from around the world. I lost them just as fast as I made them. Having been born in a period when smartphones were not prevalent among the general populace, particularly for a child like myself, I was unable to maintain communication with my friends upon returning to my native country, Indonesia, prompting me to develop an attitude of evading close relationships entirely.

These events, which kept occurring again at various stages of my life, ultimately led to my disinterest in forming meaningful and close friendships. What is the purpose of forming friendships if I am bound to lose them in a few years? This mentality continued for several years, resulting in limited close friendships. However, my experience at Osaka University significantly altered my outlook on the matter. For the first time in many years,

I made many friends that I could consider close.

I attribute my change of attitude significantly to the classes in which I enrolled. Most of the courses I attended incorporated many group discussions. This forced me to engage with the classroom, resulting in a deeper acquaintance with them. The group discussion sessions served as a great platform for interaction, since I would not have taken the initiative to engage with my classmates otherwise.



Figure 1. Many classes at Osaka University often employs group discussions

4.1.2. Institutional Identity: From Reluctance to Engagement

My Institutional Identity underwent significant change throughout the study exchange. At first, I regarded my enrolment at Universitas Islam Indonesia as a reluctant decision, with online learning intensifying my sense of disconnection as there were a lack of peer-to-peer interaction, giving me a negative first impression of the teaching field. This idea was well illustrated in an intercultural communications project in which we were tasked with creating a diagram that represented key elements of our identity. In the diagram (Figure 1), I positioned "English education major" at the lowest level, indicating my detachment from the field.

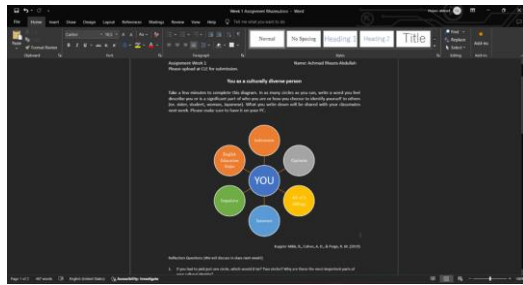


Figure 2. My table describing my identity

However, the interactive and inclusive academic environment at Osaka University redefined my perception of teaching and learning. At OU, students and professors were on more equal standing. Students were open about their thoughts and professors were not shy of criticism or an opposing of views, in fact, many of them invited them. Giving students additional points if they can challenge the professor with a solid and sound argument. The contrast between OU and UII highlighted the potential of incorporating participatory teaching approaches into Indonesian classrooms to promote active learning.

Initially, my enrolment into UII felt unintentional, driven by nothing but the passing of time. The passive and hierarchical educational environment left me dissatisfied, exacerbating my sense of disconnection from the field of education. My semester at OU, however, prompted a significant change in viewpoint. In an academic environment that fostered dialogue and regarded students and professors as equals, I recognised the genuine potential of education as a dynamic, interactive process.

4.1.3. Discourse Identity: From Reserved to Expressive

The shift in my Discourse Identity was marked by a newfound confidence in self-expression and engagement in social interactions. For a long time, I personally see myself as someone who is

shy and quiet. I am confident that those acquainted with me would agree with that claim. I often remained silent in class and refrained from making noise or engaging in conversation during lessons. Some people may perceive me as unsociable. Nonetheless, this was not an issue of personal concern to me. I did not consider how others perceive me. At that moment, I believed I would likely rarely, if ever, encounter my classmates after the following three or four years.

However My experience at Osaka University transformed my self-perception, and anyone acquainted with me in Japan would likely find it hard to believe that I was once a shy and reserved person in my home country of Indonesia. I am uncertain about the reasons for the significant shift in my discursive identity throughout my time in Japan. However, I believe that it was a confluence of my impulsivity and differences in our cultures.

My approach regarding interpersonal interactions also underwent changes following my time at OU. For example, in Indonesia, invitations to acquaintances or strangers are often seen as polite gestures rather than genuine offerings. However, in Japan, I encountered a different scenario. For instance, invitations to join casual outings were met with genuine enthusiasm and active follow-ups. This was initially surprising and even anxiety-inducing. In one instance, I invited a group of acquaintance to hang out, expecting an acceptance as a polite gesture rather than actual willingness to participate. To my surprise, they not only followed through with my request, but also contributed to the planning, creating a memorable outing experience.



Figure 3. My *Ioca* card (public transportation card) signed by friends I made at Osaka

4.1.4. Affinity Identity: Cultural Exchange as a Catalyst for Growth

My Affinity Identity, shaped by my extensive exposure to cultural variety, was further enhanced throughout my time at Osaka University. My interest in the topic of culture may originate from my father's career as a diplomat, which allowed me the opportunity to live in several countries and engage with diverse cultures. I frequently engage in cultural exchanges with people from various regions of the world. My family frequently hosts overseas students, allowing me to enhance my cultural interaction skills.

At Osaka University, my enthusiasm for cultural exchange discovered new avenues for expression. At Osaka University, my IISMA (Indonesian International Students Mobility Awards) friends and I participated in several cultural events and activities. The two main cultural exchange activities were the Indonesian café, where we showcased the dish Soto and delivered a presentation on batik, and the Onohara park festival, where we established an Indonesian-style booth to sell snacks and merchandise. These events provided a platform for disseminating Indonesian culture while acquiring insights from the traditions of others, reinforcing the interrelation of language and culture.



Figure 4. One of the cultural exchange festivals that we participated in

4.2. Discussion

This section discusses the findings presented in Section 4.1, relating them to Gee's Identity Theory (2000) and supporting them with relevant literature.

4.2.1. Nature Identity: From Detachment to Connection

These experiences highlight how structured social interactions in educational settings can challenge and reshape long-standing beliefs and behaviours. Consistent with Gee's (2000) approach, my Nature Identity was significantly influenced by the sociocultural setting of Osaka University, demonstrating the transforming potential of immersive and collaborative learning environments.

4.2.2. Institutional Identity: From Reluctance to Engagement

These findings correspond with Marmet's (2023) assertion that collaborative pedagogies minimise hierarchical disparities, hence increasing student engagement. Perhaps it is due to culture, but I believe that being afraid to speak your mind because of social standing, such as at many Indonesian educational institutions, is a detriment to learning and progress.

Because of my experience as an English education student at UII and in

general Indonesia's education system, I grew detached with my position as an education student. The passive learning environment and lack of student engagement played a big factor in my lack of connection. However, After the exchange at OU, I came to realize that institutional frameworks and pedagogical methods play a critical role in shaping student motivation and professional identity development.

The implications of this transformation extend beyond my personal journey. My experience highlights the significance of immersive, student-centered methodologies in teacher training programs. Integrating reflective assignments and exposure to diverse pedagogical practices could assist prospective educators in Indonesia in developing a more dynamic and engaging outlook on education.

4.2.3. Discourse Identity: From Reserved to Expressive

These experiences and changes in my beliefs highlight the significance of intercultural encounters and discourse-rich environments in altering communication styles and self-perception. Gee's (2000) Discourse Identity framework underscores the influence of social relationships and cultural norms on identity formation. Before my study exchange, my self-perception as shy and reserved was reinforced by the Indonesian educational setting, which often emphasizes teacher-centered instruction and limits student interaction. However, my experiences in Japan demonstrates that exposure to varied cultural customs allows for a more open and proactive communication approach. These changes not only gave way to strengthen my social confidence but it also emphasised the importance of creating and maintaining an active engagement and inclusive dialogue in

multicultural classrooms. These findings align with Zacharias' (2010) study on the impact of critical pedagogies on the transformation of teacher identities.

4.2.4. Affinity Identity: Cultural Exchange as a Catalyst for Growth

These Engagement in cultural exchange events, such as the presentation of Indonesian traditions as well as involvement in festivals, reinforced my Affinity Identity. According to Gee (2000), Affinity Identity is dictated when individuals associate themselves in a voluntary manner with a particular group based on shared common interests amongst each other. My involvement in cultural events at Osaka University aligns with this concept as it enhanced my understanding of diverse traditions and underscored the significance of culture in promoting successful communication between individuals.

Based on my experience, I contend that the future of language teaching would be enhanced by the integration of cultural studies. The study by Kurniawan & Syihabuddin (2023) substantiates this viewpoint, demonstrating how cultural context influences learners' comprehension of language, rendering it more significant and relevant. Through these cultural exchange events, my belief that culture significantly contributes to language acquisition, particularly English as a lingua franca, was further strengthened.

Overall Insights

The findings reveal that identity construction is an iterative process, heavily influenced by sociocultural and institutional contexts. By leveraging narrative self-study, this study provides a nuanced understanding of how identity evolves across distinct environments.

These insights suggest practical applications for teacher education, such as incorporating reflective practices and cross-cultural learning opportunities to prepare globally competent educators. Barkhoda, Azizi, and Abdulrahman (2025) supports this claim by highlighting the significance of culture-based teaching in English language education. They emphasize that integrating cultural awareness enhances teaching effectiveness and learner engagement.

5. CONCLUSION

This study looked at the formation and then reformation of my identity as an English education student. It emphasized the transformative experiences acquired during a one semester academic exchange at Osaka University. The findings, that utilized James Paul Gee's Identity Theory, highlighted the dynamic interaction within sociocultural contexts, institutional practices, and individual development across four identity domains: Nature identity, Institutional identity, Discourse identity, and Affinity identity.

The results of this narrative study demonstrates that intercultural, and collaborative environments could significantly influence an individual's identity formation. With this specific example creating an increased sense of confidence, cultural competence, and social engagement for the individual. For instance, group discussions in classrooms and cultural exchange activities helped reshape my long-standing beliefs and develop communicative and collaborative skills. These findings emphasize the need for teacher educational programs to integrate reflective practices, immersive pedagogies, and cultural studies in their classes to prepare future teachers for a diverse and globalized classroom.

While this study provides valuable insights, it is however limited to the personal reflections of one individual and may not hold true for others. Future studies could expand this work by exploring similar experiences across diverse cultural and institutional contexts. By addressing these gaps, researchers can further enrich the understanding of identity development in education.

This study highlights the importance of viewing identity formation as a dynamic construct, shaped by the interconnectedness of language, culture, and education. It calls for educational institutes to invest more in cultural competence and inclusivity among students, so that future lessons are prepared and equipped to foster a global perspective in their classroom.

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