CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This section provides the background information concerning the exploration of the issue of teacher professional identity construction. First, an overview of how the topic has gained prominence among researchers is discussed. The second part presents the research questions that formulate the research problem in the form of questions, followed by the third part, which is the purpose of the study. Finally, the section provides the clarification of key terms and the research significance that identifies the benefits of this research.

1.1.Background of the Study

Research in the field of teacher identity construction has drawn the increasing interest of many researchers in the field of language teacher education (e.g., Leigh, 2019; Prabandari, 2020; Trent, 2013). The ways teachers view themselves as professionals are believed to determine how they feel as teachers in the classroom, how well they do as teachers, and how long they stay in the profession (Hong, 2010; Lerseth, 2013; Mahan et al., 2010). Teacher identity, thus, plays a major role in teachers' learning processes and teaching practices (Yazan, 2018). It helps teachers construct and reconstruct their knowledge and competencies in teaching as they are more aware of how they come to know what they know, how certain concepts develop over time, and how their learning processes transform them and the activities of teaching (Johnson 2009, as cited in Yazan, 2018). Hence, teacher identity is considered an important component of language teachers' iterative (re)construction of their practical knowledge and competencies (Morgan & Clarke, 2011; Varghese et al., 2005) and understanding who language teachers are and how they develop as professionals can provide insight into how language education is carried out (Varghese et al., 2005).

Many scholars have drawn on the definition of teacher identity from sociocultural and post-structuralist view. From a sociocultural perspective, Rodgers and Scott (2008) defined teacher identity as a dynamic process that is constructed in social and cultural contexts. This understanding of teacher identity regarded identity as both a product (as a result of a teachers' sociocultural influences) and a process (an ongoing interaction within teacher development) (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). In addition, Beijaard et al. (2004) described that teacher identity refers not only to the influence of society but also "to what teachers themselves find important in their professional work and lives based on both their experiences in practice and their personal backgrounds" (p.108).

From the poststructuralist view, Lasky (2005) regarded teacher identity as a construct of professional self that keeps developing and can be shaped by social and political contexts. Teachers position themselves or their identity in relation to students, other teachers, teacher educators, discourses from programs, schools, and national images—all relational stances which can implicate political or power relations (Zembylas & Chubbuck, 2018). From these definitions, teacher identity can be defined not as a set of fixed characteristics but as a dynamic process of individual teachers developing conceptions of themselves, shaping, reshaping, and being shaped by social, cultural, and political contexts (Miller, 2009; Yuan & Lee, 2014).

At the end of 2019, language teachers' professional lives and practices have been profoundly impacted by educational changes worldwide due to the Covid-19 outbreak in China. It has a large impact on various sectors, including education, affected learning systems in many countries and it has transformed the teaching mode from face-to-face to online (Prestiadi, 2020). Abrupt transformation in teaching and learning processes becomes a new challenge for language teachers. They have to adapt to the new teaching pedagogy as it requires new kinds of knowledge and skills, commitment, and motivation to work effectively in a learning setting that is new and unfamiliar to them and which is likely to have a direct and significant impact on their professional identity development.

Previous studies in the global context illustrate that teachers reconstruct and renegotiate their identity to cope with new challenges in the educational reforms, particularly in the transition to online learning. Aboud (2020) involved six EFL teachers in one of the universities of Cyprus to explore the teachers' identity construction in the implementation of E-learning. Her study revealed that E-learning has a great impact on changing the traditional role of the teachers and their professional identity to become facilitators of the learning process. Fanaee & Davaribina (2021) found that the Iranian EFL teachers experienced professional identity reconstructions in their daily routines, knowledge, skills, and beliefs due to the transition to online teaching. Furthermore, Howard (2021) discovered significant teacher identity shifts and renegotiations attributed to the online or blended teaching mode related to the challenges, teachers' self-efficacy, subject expertise, roles, and relationship with students. When teaching face-to-face, teachers establish their identities by building rapport or connecting emotionally and intellectually with students, but nowadays, they face difficulty re-creating similar experiences when teaching online (Howard, 2021; Richardson & Alsup, 2015).

More research focused on exploring the emotional aspects related to teacher identity construction. For example, Teng (2017) investigated the role of emotion in the EFL pre-service teachers' identity development in the process of teaching practicum experiences in China. The findings revealed that emotional state and identity change are connected, and hidden 'emotional rules' are embedded in the teaching practicum. Negative feelings among pre-service teachers rapidly worsened due to contextual limitations, hierarchical systems, and a lack of support from their mentors. On the other hand, increased acknowledgment and development by their pupils can encourage pre-service teachers to perceive their assumed responsibilities and reconstruct their professional identity. In Indonesia, Lomi & Mbato (2020) found that EFL teachers face both internal and external struggles in constructing their identity. The internal struggles are linked to how teachers controlled their emotions self-efficacy and ability to teach, their jobs, and their personal opinions. The external challenges related to the management of the classroom, the abilities,

and attitudes of the students, the lack of resources and facilities in the school, the relationships with their colleagues and their salaries. Diasti (2021) examined the EFL novice teachers' stress factors influencing their professional identity construction. She figured out that the teachers experienced stress due to personal, interpersonal, and organizational factors. These factors and how they cope with the stress influenced their identity as teachers.

Apart from the emotional aspect, the aspect of agency emerges in the literature. The term agency has been defined as the active pursuit of professional development and learning in accordance with a teachers' goals (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Buchanan (2015) explored how primary school teachers constructed self-understandings of what it means to be a professional inside the current educational reform context in the USA in relation to their professional agency. The findings revealed that agency and identity are intertwined. Both are shaped by the macro-level discourses and historical forces, but teachers have the opportunity to actively construct themselves in particular ways. Teachers make and remake themselves by drawing on their current self-conceptions and then acting in ways that seek to match those self-conceptions. This study conceives of the act of negotiating dominant discourses in the process of identity formation as a site to locate and investigate teacher agency.

Previous studies have contributed to the understandings of EFL teachers' identity construction in relation to aspects affecting their identity construction in high school level. However, relatively little attention has been given to look at how EFL novice teachers at the higher education level construct their professional identity, especially in the COVID-19 pandemic context and how the pandemic affects teachers' professional identity construction in Indonesia. With the higher demands for online education and the quick transition to it as a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic, it is crucial to understand teachers' responses to the process and in the process. Neglecting how online teaching contributes to teachers' identity constructions is believed to result in ineffective teaching practices as teachers may find challenges and difficulties understanding and adapting to the new pedagogy in

the online teaching context. Therefore, this present study attempts to explore the professional identity construction of Indonesian EFL novice teachers and investigates how the COVID-19 pandemic affects their identity as teachers.

1.2. Research Questions

Based on the research background, this study will focus on the EFL teachers' professional identity construction by answering two research questions formulated as follow:

1. What factors significantly contribute to shaping the Indonesian EFL novice teachers' professional identity construction?
2. How does the COVID-19 pandemic affect their identities as teachers?

1.3.The Purpose of the Research

The following are the purposes of this research:
1. To explore significant factors that contribute to the Indonesian EFL novice teachers' professional identity construction

2. To investigate how COVID-19 pandemic affects the teachers' identities

1.4.Significance of the Research

Identity construction is a complex process. It evolves as teachers build up personal and professional knowledge, develop a sense of being teachers, and negotiate the cultural and contextual paradigms that frame the meaning of teaching (Castañeda, 2011). This present research expects to contribute to existing knowledge and research in the field of teacher education in several ways. Firstly, this study is expected to shed light on the process of how EFL novice teachers construct their professional identities in the COVID-19 pandemic context. It might raise awareness among teachers and teacher educators and provide them with new perspectives about the specifics of teacher professional identity during the COVID-19 pandemic context. Secondly, this study may contribute to the literature, providing a holistic account of teacher professional identity formation. Finally, the findings and data

collected in this study may help develop content for teacher education programs regarding career organization and the exploration of identity.

1.5. Clarification of Key Terms

To avoid misunderstanding in this research, several following terms are clarified:

1.5.1. Teacher Identity

Teacher identity can be defined as who we are, the different senses we perceive about ourselves, or the sense attributed by others (Beijaard et al., 2000). It is a relational phenomenon rather than a fixed quality of a person. Teacher identity is also conceived as an ongoing process and multiple, complex, and dynamic processes (Beijaard et al., 2004; Gee, 2000; Prabandari, 2020; Riyanti, 2017).

1.5.2. Teacher Professional Identity

Teacher Professional Identity indicates how teachers view themselves as professionals determine to a great extent how successful they are as teachers, how long they stay in the profession, and how they feel about themselves as teachers within their classroom and school environments (Apriliani, 2020; Lerseth, 2013).

1.5.3. Face-to-face Teaching and Learning

Face-to-face or offline teaching and learning, also well known as a traditional teaching, is a mode of teaching where student and teacher meet face-to-face, physically present, and interact directly at classroom (Karaeng & Simanjuntak, 2021).

1.5.4. Online Teaching and Learning

Online teaching and learning, also referred to distance learning, e-learning and often used interchangeably, is opposed to the traditional mode of teaching and learning (face to face) by making use of ICT (Information and Communications Technology) as a means of connecting and enabling communication between students and teachers for educational purposes (Kim, 2020; Stoian et al., 2022).

1.6. Organization of Thesis

Chapter I provides the background of the study, research questions, the purpose of the research, significance of the research, clarification of key terms, and organization of thesis. Chapter II discusses the relevant literature and research on the EFL novice teachers' professional identity construction. It consists of several parts: teacher identity and its relation to language teacher identity, language teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, novice teachers' identity, and the issue of teacher identity by reviewing several works in which the issue has been investigated and conceptualized. Chapter III discusses the methodology used in conducting the research. It covers the research design, research participants, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter IV presents the findings from the data obtained from the interviews, online classroom observation, and documents. It also presents the discussions related to the findings. Chapter V contains the research conclusion. This chapter also includes the implications and limitations of the study as well as the suggestion for future researchers in related fields.

1.7. Concluding Remarks

This chapter has presented the background of the research, research questions, the purpose of the research, significance of the research, clarification of the key terms, and organization of the paper. The chapter also mentioned that the research focuses on the significant factors that shape the EFL novice teachers' professional identity construction. Furthermore, how the COVID-19 pandemic affects their identities as teachers is also investigated in this research. In that regard, theories related to teacher professional identity, factors that construct teacher professional identity, novice teachers' identity, language teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, and previous studies on teacher identity are elaborated on in Chapter II.