

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In this introductory chapter, the background of the study is presented to elaborate on the issue addressed in this study. This chapter also describes the objective of the study as well as the research question and significance of the study. In the end, the chapter provides clarification of the key terms and presents the organization of the paper.

1.1 Background

A rural school is defined as a school that is located at least five miles (8 km) from an urbanized area, and the teachers situated in this context commonly encounter more challenges compared to those in urban schools (The Rural School Community Trust, 2018; Susanti, Priebe, & Bah, 2020). The common challenges teachers mostly face in rural schools are distance, inadequate facilities, lack of teachers, and language barriers (Febriana et al., 2018; Holguin & Morales, 2016; Moulton, 2001). The first challenge is distance. In Indonesia, this is a challenge because the expansive geography of Indonesia makes many schools remote, located in rural areas and far from cities (Luschei & Zubaidah, 2011). This geographical condition has made it difficult for the government to monitor all schools in rural areas. Thus, rural schools are often neglected because of their far distances from cities and government offices (Medina & Arcilla, 2013). Meanwhile, urban schools are usually easier to be reached by people and monitored by the government because of their location.

The second challenge is inadequate facilities (McCracken & Barcinas, 1991; Sullivan, McConney, & Perry, 2018; Wang, 2013). Most rural schools have fewer facilities, especially in terms of technology, compared to urban schools. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, most rural schools struggle to do online learning because most rural students do not have the necessary gadgets. In addition, rural areas often lack adequate signals (Nugroho, 2020 cited from jawapos.com). Meanwhile, many urban schools do not seem to have as many problems as rural schools in online learning. It is because most urban students have sufficient facilities to learn online, and the internet signals in cities are more stable than in rural areas.

The third challenge is the lack of resources or teachers. In Indonesia, this problem exists in almost every province (Febriana et al., 2018). Most teachers prefer not to teach in rural schools because of the remote location and difficult access. As a result, rural schools are usually lacking in a number of teachers, and it is not a rarity to find teachers being absent during working hours (Prouty, 2012; Usman, Akhmadi, & Suryadarma, 2007). The lack of teachers has made rural teachers teach multiple classes of different grades (Myriad, 2015), multiple subjects that are not in line with their academic background (Hidayah & Marhaeni, 2016), and have dual roles in schools (Smit, Hyry-Beihammer & Raggl, 2015). Although the Indonesian government has attempted to overcome the problems by sending thousands of teachers to rural areas, the effort was considered unsuccessful (Febriana et al., 2018).

On the other hand, it is usually not difficult to recruit qualified teachers in urban schools. The disparity between rural and urban schools seems to have contributed to the widespread perception that rural schools are less favorable and more problematic than urban schools (Logan, Minca, & Adar 2012; Medina & Arcilla, 2013; Orfield & Lee 2005). Thus, it is no surprise that many teachers prefer to teach and work in urban schools.

The next challenge is language. Most rural teachers who come from areas outside of the region in which they teach usually encounter difficulties in communicating with rural students because the students usually speak in their local languages. The language problem is generally found in English classes, and this issue appears to hinder the process of teaching and learning the English language (Zein, Sukyadi, Hamied, & Lengkanawati, 2020). In Indonesia, there are more than 700 local languages, and most Indonesian people speak their local languages for daily activities (Simons & Fennig, 2017). The national language, Bahasa Indonesia, might not be often used in rural areas except in official forums; consequently, English as a foreign language is even more rarely used (Lauder, 2008). Therefore, teaching English in Indonesian rural schools will be more challenging because rural students might never hear or speak English in their daily lives (Sulistiyo, 2015). Several studies found that most teachers had to use the local languages to teach English in rural schools (Febriana et al., 2018; Ikhsanudin, 2021; Yulia, 2013).

Meanwhile, most urban students are usually used to being exposed to English. Many English courses in cities show that most urban people are aware of the importance of English. Therefore, English teachers in rural schools have to put extra effort because, besides the challenges that rural schools pose, they also need to face the fact that many rural students might have no exposure or access to the English language.

With this situation in mind, it is essential to attend to the voices of the rural school teachers if we are to improve the quality of education across the nation. Their work must be appreciated, and they need to be assisted in developing professionally. One way of doing this is by raising their awareness of their own professional identities so that they understand themselves better and know their strengths and weakness, which in turn help them to identify how to best approach their students. In other words, they must be able to understand themselves to provide the best version of themselves (Varghese et al., 2005).

Understanding the professional identity of rural teachers will help to understand further the teachers' work (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Exploring teachers' professional identity is likely to reveal the kinds of a teacher they are, their positions in the teaching-learning process, and what remains to be done to enhance their practices (Djoub, 2018). It is because a teacher's professional identity construction involves several essential components: teaching context, teaching-learning experiences, teaching beliefs, knowledge, and emotions (Basalama, 2010; Djoub, 2018; Hsieh, 2010; Martin & Strom, 2016). These components are owned by each teacher in the process of their lifetime professions, which later will indicate their professional identities. Thus, teachers' professional identity is a crucial factor in understanding teachers' professional lives, career decision-making, motivation, effectiveness, retention, professional development, and their attitude toward education (Karaolis & Philippou, 2019) as it contains the essential components. Moreover, teachers' professional identity can be useful to describe, explain, and understand teachers as whole persons concerning workplaces, professional purposes, and teaching cultures (Olsen, 2008). In addition, a teacher's professional identity can define the quality of the teacher (Mingren & Shiquan, 2018)

For these reasons, investigating rural teachers' professional identity is important because it will help to amplify the rural teachers' voices as they have been long trapped in stereotypes as marginalized teachers. However, many studies on language teachers' identities have mostly been conducted in urban areas and higher education levels, concerning teachers' professional identity constructions and perceptions of their professional roles (Djoub, 2018; Tseng, 2017).

To date, there is limited research about teachers' professional identity in rural schools, especially in the Indonesian rural context (Burton & Johnson, 2010). The studies that relate to rural schools have commonly been found only to raise the issue of challenges faced by the teachers (Azano & Stewart, 2016; Downes & Roberts, 2017; Febriana, Nurkamto, Rochsantiningasih, & Muhtia, 2018; Holguin & Morales, 2015; Hossain, 2016; Luschei & Zubaidah, 2011; Peterson, McIntyre, & Heppner, 2018), but they do not focus on rural teachers' professional identity construction. Investigating further into teachers' professional identity in the rural school context can therefore add valuable insights into how teachers operate in specific contexts (Barkhuizen, 2016). Given this, the present study focuses on exploring how two teachers' professional identities are shaped by the rural school context where they teach, along with their experiences, beliefs, emotions, and knowledge.

1.2 Research Question

The research question of this study is formulated as follows:

How does teaching in a rural context shape the teachers' professional identity regarding their experiences, beliefs, emotions, and knowledge?

1.3 Aim of the Study

This study intends to explore how the professional identity of two teachers is shaped and mediated by the rural context they operate in. This study will reveal teachers' professional identity in a rural school and understand more about their daily practices. The primary concern of this study is English language teachers' professional identity in rural schools. Rural schools pose many challenges for teachers, which can affect their professional roles and identity as well as classroom practices. It is because teachers' professional identity and workplace context are interrelated. Further, teachers' professional identity is essential to bring to the fore as it is beneficial for teachers' development.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is expected to contribute in three significant ways. First, this study will enrich the literature on teacher professional identity in rural settings. Second, this study is expected to be a reference or input for the teachers in rural schools to understand and develop their own professional identity for the improvement of their pedagogical practices. Third, this study will to provide in-depth insights into the works of rural teachers, which may be of concern to education stakeholders and policymakers in improving the quality of education in the country.

1.5 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on teachers in one of the rural schools in Indonesia. The participants of this study are two English teachers of a high school (*Madrasah Aliyah Negeri*) in a rural area of Jambi Province. The teachers were chosen as participants because they teach in a rural school. The school is categorized as a rural school, based on limited access, facilities, and management. It is located far from the city, lacks adequate facilities, and lacks teachers.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

1. Teacher professional identity: a set of characteristics that construct teachers' ideas of 'how to be', 'how to act', and 'how to understand' their work. It determines the way teachers teach, the way teachers develop, and their attitude towards English language teaching.
2. Rural school: a school with fewer than 600 students, located at least five miles from an urbanized area, and has more shortages than urban schools.

1.7 Organization of the Paper

This paper is divided into five chapters.

Chapter I presents the general contents of the research, including the background, statement of the problem, research questions, aim of the study, the significance of the study, the scope of the study, the definition of key terms, and the organization of the paper.

Chapter II provides the literature review that involves related theories, frameworks, and studies regarding teachers' professional identity in rural areas.

Chapter III illustrates the research methodology, including the procedures and stages of the research.

Chapter IV describes the study's findings, involving factors that shaped the teachers' identity, how the factors connected and shaped the teachers' identity, and the comparisons with other studies.

Chapter V concludes the study.