

Pre-Service English Teachers' Professional Identity Development: A Case Study

Sry Mora Yuni Siahaan¹, Adaninggar Septi Subekti^{2*}

Universitas Kristen Duta Wacana

Jalan dr. Wahidin Sudirohudoso, 5-25, Yogyakarta,
55224, Indonesia

srimorasiahaan16@gmail.com¹,

adaninggar@staff.ukdw.ac.id^{2*}

*corresponding author

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Abstract

The study was conducted to investigate the development of the professional identity of Indonesian pre-service teachers of English as they served as lecturer assistants through a qualitative case study. The participants were five lecturer assistants and five students taught by these assistants at an English Education major in the first semester of the 2020/2021 academic year. The study was to fill the gap in the literature currently overwhelmed with studies in teaching practicum settings. Researching an under-researched assistantship setting involving both the lecturer assistants and the students they taught possibly provided a more holistic account of the development of teachers' professional identity. The method was online semi-structured interviews. Through Thematic Analysis, the study found that the lecturer assistant participants trained their communication skills by experiencing teaching first-hand. The experience of being lecturer assistants facilitated them to realise the importance of building rapport with their students and have more insights into the teaching profession. In a similar vein, the student participants also agreed that their lecturer assistants had successfully, albeit gradually, built rapport with them. The assistant participants were also reported to have better classroom management as the semester progressed. Conclusion includes possible implications, limitations and suggested directions for future studies.

Keywords: Pre-service teachers, lecturer assistants, professional identity development, case study, thematic analysis

Introduction

Teaching is an emotional endeavour and the process of embracing this profession could be tricky and tedious involving frustration, anger, disappointment, and anxiety (Sutton et al., 2009). In this process, teachers continuously develop their professional identity (Zare-ee & Ghasedi, 2014). Zare-ee and Ghasedi (2014) mentioned that teacher professional identity involves how teachers see themselves as teachers, how they define their professional roles, as well as what role they would take as teachers. Ezer et al. (2010) mentioned that from broader perceptions,



developing professional identity involves several intertwining factors, the examples of which are beliefs and perceptions, past experiences, abilities, motivation and commitment, and teachers' personalities (Ezer et al., 2010; Harun, 2019; Zare-ee & Ghasedi, 2014). Harun (2019) added that teachers might learn or be inspired by their successful teachers in the past or their teacher parents.

As a fundamental aspect of being a teacher is the development of professional identity (Timošćuk & Ugaste, 2010), developing the professional identity of pre-service teachers is a crucial goal (Aisyah & Wicaksono, 2018). In this process, teachers continually improve their understanding of their professional practices involving skills, values, and knowledge (Harun, 2019). For example, in a study by Aisyah and Wicaksono (2018) in an Indonesian English Language Teaching (ELT) context, their pre-service teacher participants believed that engaging and motivating students to learn through fun and interesting material delivery became one of their professional responsibilities. Other perceived responsibilities reported included providing activities promoting learning and having inclusive attitudes (Aisyah & Wicaksono, 2018).

The plethora of literature on teacher education seems to converge on the important role of pre-service teachers experiencing teaching to develop their skills in the profession (Flórez & Basto, 2017; Ivanova & Skara-Mincane, 2016; Kabilan, 2013; Kandilla et al., 2011; Zare-ee & Ghasedi, 2014). Yunus et al. (2010) argued that teaching experiences bridge theories and practice. When teaching, pre-service teachers apply into practice the theories they have learned in their study (Ivanova & Skara-Mincane, 2016). In line with that, Aisyah and Wicaksono (2018) found that as pre-service teachers taught more, they taught better. A study involving Malaysian pre-service teachers of English by Kabilan (2013) found that international teaching practicum in the Maldives facilitated the pre-service teacher participants to have better classroom management and teaching confidence. In a Colombian ELT context, furthermore, it was found that through teaching experiences, pre-service teacher participants had reflection about teaching helping them to realise what had run well and what they needed to improve in their teaching (Flórez & Basto, 2017).

Studies in various teacher education contexts, though not exclusively in ELT, have also consistently reported pre-service teachers' realisations about their professions through various teaching experiences. Several studies, for example, reported pre-service teachers' realisations on the importance of teacher-student rapport in positively influencing students' motivation and the success of learning (Frisby & Martin, 2010; Granitz et al., 2009; Kiefer et al., 2014; Lammers & Gillasp, 2013). Frisby and Martin (2010) reported that rapport could facilitate a positive atmosphere conducive for learning to take place. In a similar vein, Eisenhardt et al. (2012) commented that building rapport with students facilitates teachers to know their students better, and makes them be more open and have more motivation to learn. In a Turkish context, Tok (2010) found that pre-service teachers, albeit still struggling in planning for their teaching, realised the importance of teachers' preparation before class. These pre-service teacher participants also needed to improve their teaching methods and communication with students (Tok, 2010).

Several other studies highlighted the communication aspect of teaching. A quantitative study in Pakistan by Khan et al. (2017) suggested that teachers'



communication skills had a significant role in affecting students' academic achievement. The tricky part, however, was that students taught by pre-service teachers may not view them as 'real' teachers, which could double the pre-service teachers' challenge to build communications with them (Tok, 2010). Sutton et al. (2009) previously argued that a teaching job can involve various feelings, including the negative ones such as frustration, disappointment, and anxiety. Pre-service teachers could be susceptible to these feelings if confronted with unpleasant situations, such as students' low efforts, their misbehaviours, as well as them 'challenging' the pre-service teachers' teaching competence in class. In such situations, Sutton et al. (2009) argued that teachers should manage their negative emotions and sustain positive attitudes to sustain a conducive atmosphere for learning. On a positive note, in a South African context, Heeralal and Bayaga (2011) reported their pre-service teacher participants had better classroom management as they progressed in their teaching practice as seen in more flexibility in instructional approaches and learning materials, course content, and course delivery.

Rationales

In the ELT field, a context where English is not the medium of communication, the construction of the professional identity of English teachers, including Indonesian pre-service teachers of English, could be more complex (Abednia, 2012). Besides, Indonesian students learning English in such context may face challenges as the English uses are mainly constrained to classroom context (Gultom, 2015). Hence, English teachers' role becomes even more important for the success of these students' learning process (Widiati et al., 2018). Accordingly, Indonesian pre-service teachers of English as the ones prepared to teach English need to develop their professional identity to be able to conduct effective teaching. Their professional identity would determine the kind of teachers these pre-service teachers want to be (Lamote & Engels, 2010).

Additionally, several studies in the field have been conducted in Indonesia suggesting the ELT practitioners' and researchers' interest (Aisyah & Wicaksono, 2018; Kandilla et al., 2011). A mixed-method study by Aisyah and Wicaksono (2018) involving 15 Indonesian English language teachers pursuing postgraduate studies found that the participants' beliefs in being professional teachers. These included understanding teachers' roles, having inclusive behaviours, creatively designing materials, and being reflective. Earlier, a case study by Kandilla et al. (2011) involving one pre-service teachers of English found the dynamic of her realisation on being a teacher through interviews and analysis of the participant' reflective journal. It was found that as she experienced teaching, she obtained new realisations about teaching. As having teaching experiences is often mentioned as a way to develop pre-service teachers' professional identity (Flórez & Basto, 2017; Heeralal & Bayaga, 2011; Kabilan, 2013; Yunus et al., 2010), becoming lecturer assistants could be one of the opportunities for pre-service teachers to develop their professional identity. Research studies in the field have so far been dominated by those using teaching practicum as the research setting (Aisyah & Wicaksono, 2018; Flórez & Basto, 2017; Ivanova & Skara-Mincane, 2016; Kabilan, 2013; Yunus et al., 2010). Hence, involving participants from different



settings could provide new insights into English teachers' professional identity. Considering that the phenomenon of assigning students to be lecturer assistants is probably quite widespread in Indonesia and considering that involving lecturer assistants as participants in studies about English teachers' professional identity may be quite rare, investigating Indonesian pre-service English teachers serving as lecturer assistants could be worthwhile. A study involving students taught by these lecturer assistants could also provide more holistic accounts about these lecturer assistants' development of professional identity manifested in their day-to-day teaching.

Based on the rationales mentioned, the present study has two objectives. The first objective is to investigate lecturer assistants' views on the effects of being facilitators in lab classes towards their professional identity development. The second is to investigate the lecturer assistants' students' views on the lecturer assistants' teaching performance in class. Other than serving the aforementioned purposes, the present study's findings can potentially inform lecturers at any English Education Departments about the widely practiced assistantship by pre-service teachers concerning the development of the lecturer assistants' professional identity.

Method

Research design

This present study employed a qualitative case study using interviews as the method of data collection. Employing a case study, the study aimed to obtain in-depth and rich descriptions of a phenomenon focusing on its uniqueness (Basit, 2010). In this case, the participants' perspectives were deeply explored through online semi-structured interviews, exploring their subjective beliefs on the development of their professional identity and the teaching performance of the lecturer assistants teaching them. The present study used an interview checklist as the instrument of data collection through semi-structured interviews. The checklist for lecturer assistant participants, for example, included among others questions such as "Why did you want to be a lecturer assistant?" and "Are there any new things you have learnt from being a lecturer assistant?" The checklist for the student participants included such questions as "What is your opinion about the lecturer assistant's teaching?" and "Is there anything you like or dislike related to the lecturer assistant's teaching? Why is that?"

Participants and ethical considerations

The participants of the present study were five lecturer assistants assisting in five different classes and five students enrolling in the five lecturer assistants' respective classes in the first semester of the 2020/2021 academic year. There were one male assistant and four female assistants, all of whom were pre-service teachers of English. Next, there were two male students, and three female students enrolling in classes where the lecturer assistants taught. The student participants were randomly selected. A student was randomly selected from each of the five classes that the assistant participants taught. The setting of the study was an English Language Education Department (ELED) at a university in Java, Indonesia. The lecturer assistants' responsibility was to facilitate a lab class, the main class of which was taught by an ELED lecturer. Table 1 summarised the participants' names (pseudonyms) and the lab classes they were from.



Table 1. The participants' details

No	Lab classes (initials)	Lecturer assistant participants (pseudonyms)	Student participants (pseudonyms)
1	RR	Liem	Ester
2	ER	Lidia	Cista
3	EL	Silvia	Surya
4	EW	Mariam	Vano
5	TEAP	Ratih	Rina

Access to conduct the study was granted by the Head of the ELED as the gatekeeper (Creswell, 2014). However, the participants had the autonomy to decide whether to be involved in the study through an informed consent form distributed before the interviews. That was the implementation of the autonomy principle (Ramrathan et al., 2016). The study also implemented the anonymity principle where the participants' real names were changed into pseudonyms throughout the report (Gray, 2014). Lastly, the participants' needs were more prioritised, for example in interview scheduling, suggesting the principle of justice (Gray, 2014).

Data collection and data analysis

The interviews in the Indonesian language were conducted in November 2020 for the lecturer assistant participants and in January 2021 for the student participants. After the interviews were conducted, the recordings were transcribed verbatim. The Indonesian language transcripts were then translated into English. Next, the English transcripts were coded and analysed further using Thematic Analysis (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The goal was to identify themes, important or interesting patterns in the dataset, and to use them "to address the research or say something about an issue" (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017, p. 3353), in this case, the present study's two research objectives. The study employed the six steps of Thematic Analysis suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). These were becoming familiar with the data through reading and rereading, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing the themes, defining the themes, and writing up (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These steps were conducted through writing annotations on the Microsoft Word documents and writing separate notes as necessary. The sequence of data collection and analysis could be seen in Figure 1.



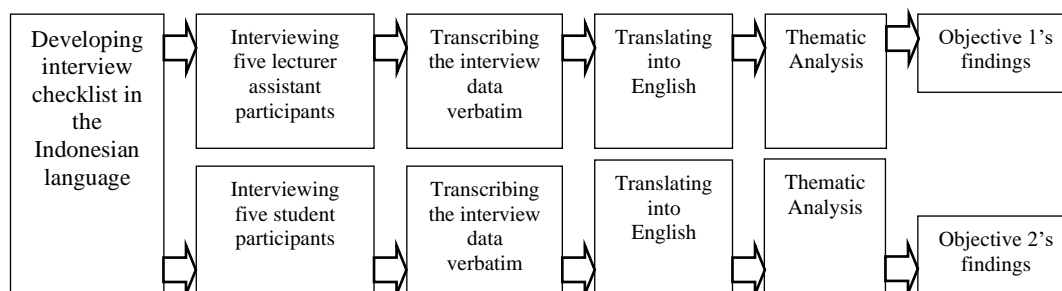


Figure 1. The sequence of data collection and analysis

Findings and discussion

For the presentation of interview excerpts, to facilitate reference-tracing, the following codes were used: LA = Lecturer Assistant, S = Student, F = Female, and M = Male. For example, “(Lidia, F/LA)” indicated that the excerpts were from Lidia, a female lecturer assistant whilst “(Surya, M/S)” indicated that the excerpts were from Surya, a male student.

Research objective 1: The lecturer assistants' views on the effects of being facilitators of lab classes towards their professional identity development

The present study found three themes on the perceived effects of being facilitators towards their professional identity development and these themes could be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Lecturer assistants' views on the effects of being facilitators towards their professional identity development

Theme 1	Being lecturer assistants facilitated them to realise the importance of building rapport with the students.
Theme 2	Being lecturer assistants trained them to improve their communication skills in class.
Theme 3	Being lecturer assistants facilitated them to have more insights into the teaching profession.

Theme 1: Being lecturer assistants facilitated them to realise the importance of building rapport with the students.

Based on the findings, four of the five participants reported that being lecturer assistants facilitated them to realise the importance of teacher-student rapport. Lidia, for instance, stated that rapport could help her enjoy teaching more. She stated:

“To me, my students are my friends to grow together. So, in the class, our relation is like friends. This relation helps me enjoy my class. Being a lecturer assistant, I learned that I did not only need to explain the lesson, but I also needed to be their friends.” (Lidia, F/LA)



As seen in this excerpt, Lidia stated that rapport could influence her teaching in class. This finding was consistent with a statement by Granitz et al. (2009) on the importance of rapport that it creates a positive classroom environment. The present study's finding was slightly in line with the finding of a quantitative study involving 138 university students by Lammers and Gillaspay (2013), albeit the study being conducted outside ELT context, that teacher-student rapport positively influenced the students' achievement as measured by their grades (Lammers & Gillaspay, 2013). The relatively uniform finding suggested that teachers in general needed to build rapport with students because it would positively affect the classroom's environment, conducive for learning.

Furthermore, Silvia commented that building rapport facilitated better instruction as it was good for both teachers and students. She stated:

“From the teaching process, I believe I need to build a good relationship with my students. When we have a good relation in the class, I feel more comfortable delivering the materials... The effect is not only for me, but (for) the students too. It is because the students enjoy my class more. (Silvia, F/LA)

This excerpt suggested that when Silvia built rapport with her students, both felt more comfortable in and with the class. Regarding this, Park (2003) stated that if students are comfortable with their teachers and class, they would learn more, remember more, enjoy the class more, and appreciate it more. The present study's finding also could give some kind of a qualitative confirmation of a finding of a quantitative study by Frisby and Martin (2010) in which they found that rapport and the positive classroom were positively correlated. These studies' findings suggested that rapport built a positive classroom environment.

Liem also commented that with teacher-student rapport, students could feel free to discuss something with teachers. Recalling his experience, he stated:

“At the beginning of teaching the class, I felt awkward. Then I realized that it affected the instructional process. I did not enjoy my class. Then, I thought I needed to build a relation with my students. So, my role was not only as a teacher but I was also as a friend. Now, I enjoy my teaching process. Also, my students feel freer to discuss something with me and I believe my students (can) understand materials better.” (Liem, M/LA)

As seen in the excerpt, Liem stated that rapport would decrease his students' anxiety and it made his students have more courage to discuss the materials with him, which he believed could facilitate more understanding. This finding supported a statement by Granitz et al. (2009) that teacher-student rapport could increase students' willingness and confidence to learn more. In a similar vein, pre-service teacher participants in a study by Eisenhardt et al. (2012) also believed that building relationships with students became tools through which students'



learning strategies could be identified and their motivation be increased. In line with that, a similar finding was reported in a qualitative study by Kiefer et al. (2014). Kiefer et al. (2014) found that the relation between students and teachers would influence students' achievement, academic motivation, and engagement in class.

In general, the finding reporting several positive effects of teacher-student rapport could encourage teachers to maintain good rapport with their students. This could be achieved through class activities allowing students to contribute more to the learning process, for example, group discussions, group projects, and jigsaw activities. Through such activities, students can be facilitated to realise that they can have an active and participatory role in class. This could lead to a more comfortable class atmosphere for students to construct knowledge together with others.

Theme 2: Being lecturer assistants trained them to improve their communication skills in class.

The present study found that the lecturer assistants' communication skills improved during the teaching process from the first meeting to the last meeting. Regarding this, Liem explained:

“At the beginning, of becoming a lecturer assistant, I had problems with my communication skills. I was not confident to speak with my students. This condition disturbed my teaching process. I did not know students' needs in my class and I had difficulty in delivering the materials. And during the teaching process, I practiced it and now I am quite confident with my communication skills.” (Liem, M/LA)

Liem's difficulty in making effective communication with his students seemed to be in line with a finding of a study in Turkey by Tok (2010). Tok (2010) found that pre-service teachers often struggled in making effective communications with students. However, as seen in the excerpts, as Liem taught more, he became more confident, suggesting the role of experiences to be familiar with his students and allow better communication (Tok, 2010).

In a similar vein, Mariam also stated that being a lecturer assistant gave her a chance to improve her communication skills. Regarding this, she reported:

“To communicate with the students is not an easy thing for me. I need a long process to make progress with my communication skills. I am blessed to get the opportunity to be a lecturer assistant because I have an opportunity to practice my skills, especially my communication skills. (Mariam, F/LA)

As seen in the excerpts, Mariam mentioned the opportunity to be a lecturer assistant led to the improvement of communication skills. Regarding this, Khan et al. (2017) explained that teachers do not only need to possess knowledge but also good communication skills because communication skills would help teachers in presenting or delivering the materials and giving understandable or clear messages to students in class. These important communication skills, as the present study



found, could be obtained from teaching experiences, in line with a finding of a previous study by Kabilan (2013) in Malaysia. Kabilan (2013) found that pre-service teachers were more confident with their communication skills when they finished the teaching practicum. In a previous study by Tok (2010), it was also found that if pre-service teachers had teaching experiences, they would have much time to develop themselves. They could find many ways to learn and to practice their communication with students in the class (Tok, 2010). The similar findings between the present study and those of several previous studies (Kabilan, 2013; Khan et al., 2017; Tok, 2010) probably suggested an old, yet still a highly relevant notion of experience being 'the best teachers' in pre-service teacher education and pre-service teachers experiencing teaching as its culmination (Tok, 2010).

Additionally, the lecturer assistants may have experienced a transition from focusing merely on what they wanted to convey to focusing on what they needed to convey to facilitate their students to understand better. By the day, they probably realised that for teachers, good communication did not simply mean that they could 'speak confidently' in front of their students but rather that they could facilitate understanding using any means necessary.

Theme 3: Being lecturer assistants facilitated them to have more insights into the teaching profession.

Three participants explained that they had more insights about the teaching profession from the process of being lecturer assistants. For example, Lidia explained:

“Being a lecturer assistant allows me to understand several new insights about the profession of a teacher. And I feel that I have changed some of my beliefs in teaching the students in my class.”
(Lidia, F/LA)

Another lecturer assistant, Silvia, explained in more specific about her beliefs on the effects of teachers' mood in her class. She commented:

“I changed my belief about the effect of my mood to the class. My mood could determine the learning process of my students. So, I should be professional to manage my mood when teaching.” (Silvia, F/LA)

Silvia's acknowledgement of the important role of teachers' mood in the instructional process was in line with a statement by Sutton et al. (2009) that mood is the part of teachers' emotion playing an important role in class. Teachers' positive mood would help teachers to increase their students' motivation and attention in class. In contrast, if teachers had negative emotions, it could disturb their students' attention and motivation to learn (Sutton et al., 2009). Other than realising the importance of regulating mood, the participants also realised the importance of teaching preparations. Regarding this, Lim commented:

“By being a lecturer assistant, I know that I need to prepare many



things for my class. Previously, I thought that teachers only 'came' to the class (and talked), but in fact, teachers do many preparations before the class. And the preparations help me to have an effective class." (Liem, M/LA)

In the beginning, Liem thought delivering materials in class would not require many preparations. Then, being a lecturer assistant changed his belief about the preparations before teaching a class. He also came to realise that teaching preparations provided him to have an effective class. This finding was in line with a finding of a study by Heeralal and Bayaga (2011). In a South African university context, Heeralal and Bayaga (2011) also found that pre-service teachers' better classroom management would be produced from more preparations. Related to the present study's finding, furthermore, previously Tok (2010) found that inadequate preparation was an issue among pre-service teachers who might also have inadequate content knowledge. Good planning, Tok (2010) argued, would allow more effective educational and instructional activities (Tok, 2010).

Overall, this finding suggested the lecturer assistants' realisation of the central role of teachers in instruction. Regardless of whether the class is conducted in a student-centred or teacher-centred way, teachers are the ones orchestrating the instruction. Hence, teachers need to have good planning and maintain their good mood whilst teaching.

Research objective 2: Students' views on the lecturer assistants' teaching performance in the class

The present study found two themes on the students' views on the lecturer assistants' teaching performance in their respective classes. These themes could be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. The students' views on the lecturer assistants' teaching performance

Theme 1	Lecturer assistants had successfully established teacher-student rapport in the class.
Theme 2	Lecturer assistants had made progress in managing their classes.

Theme 1: Lecturer assistants had successfully established teacher-student rapport in the class.

Three student participants reported that the lecturer assistants teaching in their classes had successfully established student-teacher rapport in the class. Regarding this, Cista recalled:

"To build a relation as a friend in the class, the lecturer assistant did not take much time. She [Lidia] was like my friend because the age gap was not big. Moreover, from the first meeting, she had always tried to be our friend in the class." (Cista, F/S)

Furthermore, another student, Ester, reported the effect of teacher-student rapport in his class. He explained:



“I think he [Liem] was not only a teacher for us, but she was also a friend for us last semester [2020]. And because of that, my friends and I enjoyed her class.” (Ester, M/S)

Moreover, Surya stated that the lecturer assistant in his class employed strategies to build rapport. He reported:

“In the first meeting, we felt awkward in the class. Then, she [Silvia] tried to engage us to be active in the class by asking several questions. Not only that, but she also asked the class to have individualised consultation time with her. I think more individualised consultation time made the students and the lecturer assistant have a closer relation... and that relation established a comfortable atmosphere in the class.” (Surya, M/S)

The aforementioned student excerpts confirmed the lecturer assistants' beliefs mentioned previously on the importance of building rapport to enhance the class atmosphere. This finding also further confirmed several authors' reiteration on the role of teacher-student rapport to lighten students' tension in class, improve their engagement and willingness to learn more (Frisby & Martin, 2010; Granitz et al., 2009; Lammers & Gillaspay, 2013).

Furthermore, Surya's comments that individualised consultations could make teacher-student relationships closer could be attributed to the possibility that in the individual consultations, where there were fewer interlocutors, students were less tense compared to when they had classroom discussions (Subekti, 2018). Because they were only with the assistant as the sole interlocutor, they were not or less self-conscious and thus they have more courage to ask questions and state their opinions (Subekti, 2020). Hence, a closer teacher-student relationship could be better developed during this process.

Furthermore, one of the student participants commented that the age gap which was not very wide also contributed to better teacher-student rapport. This finding could inform lecturers employing pre-service teachers as lecturer assistants in their classes. They could optimise the lecturer assistants' roles in instruction, for example by assigning them to organise consultation or tutoring activities. Students may feel more relaxed consulting their works to the assistants and the lecturer assistants will also obtain more teaching experiences necessary for the development of their professional identity as teachers.

Theme 2: Lecturer assistants had made progress in managing their classes.

The present study further found that the lecturer assistants had made progress in managing their classes during the semester. This was reported by the students they taught. Surya, for instance, mentioned:

“She [Silvia] became more communicative in the online class last semester [2020]. In the first meeting, she only came and gave the materials without any rich discussion and explanations. Then, towards the middle of last semester, she often asked questions or



discussed something with us about each topic. Because of those activities, we could pay more attention to her.” (Surya, M/S)

As seen in this excerpt, the lecturer assistant teaching Surya's class had gradual betterment in her teaching throughout the semester in a way that she provided richer discussions allowing more teacher-student communications. This finding was in line with the statement by Tok (2010) that when teachers kept their communication with students, it would help teachers to keep away students' poor responses.

In a similar tone, Rina also recalled that the teaching of the lecturer assistant in her class had transformed into more fun and relaxing towards the end of the semester. She stated:

“I saw her [Ratih] progress with the lesson delivered in the online class. [Towards the end of the semester], the lesson delivered was more fun and relaxing – very different from that of the first and the second meetings. I remember that the lesson delivered [in the first two meetings] was not interesting. I enjoyed the class more [by the day]” (Rina, F/S)

The excerpts from Surya and Rina conformed to a finding of a study by Tok (2010) in Turkey on pre-service teachers' needs to conduct more effective lesson delivery. As also seen in the excerpts, a suitable lesson delivered would improve students' learning motivation (Aisyah & Wicaksono, 2018; Tok, 2010). Regarding the present study's finding on the lecturer assistants' gradual betterment in course delivery, Aisyah and Wicaksono (2018) reported that through teaching experiences, pre-service teachers realised what students learned was more important than what they tried to teach, resulting in more engaging instruction. In a similar vein, Heeralal and Bayaga (2011) also reported that pre-service teachers tended to be less flexible in course delivery including teaching methods and materials. However, as they gained more teaching experiences, they became more flexible resulting in more engaging classes (Heeralal & Bayaga, 2011).

Additionally, betterment in time management was also reported. Vano, a student in Mariam's class, reported:

"I think she [Mariam] learned from her mistakes. At the beginning of the semester, I felt bored and confused with her class because the time management was not good. [Towards the end of the semester] she was different; she was able to use time more effectively in the class.” (Vano, F/S)

This finding as seen in the excerpt from Vano suggested that effective time management would avoid students from feeling bored or confused in class, indicating that time management was an important aspect of classroom management. Regarding the issue of poor time management, a previous study by Kabilan (2013) reported that time management was one of the problems experienced by several Malaysian pre-service English teacher participants in his study. Kabilan (2013) further mentioned that teaching became the 'place' where pre-service teachers could improve their time management in class.



Though the finding seemed to be constrained to the lecturer assistants' gradually better in-class management, in teaching, teachers' management may involve before, during, and after class management. As teaching is such a complex and delicate act, what can be seen as 'good classroom management' may be the results of outside-class management, for example, how teachers plan the class activities by connecting the previous class' materials to the next considering such variables as students, time allocation, and the difficulty level of the materials. Day-to-day teaching can facilitate pre-service teachers to develop this skill.

In summary, several points could be emphasised regarding the present study's findings. First, the present study confirmed that experiencing teaching with all its dynamics was paramount for pre-service teachers. It was through this dynamic process that they learned, albeit perhaps the hard way, to be better teachers continuously refining their teaching skills (Flórez & Basto, 2017; Tok, 2010). Furthermore, as the findings suggested, the lecturer assistants were still lacking in several ways. In this case, the lecturers whose classes were assisted could guide the assistants to facilitate the construction of their professional identity by having several periodic meetings within a semester. In such meetings, the assistants could share their challenges and the lecturers could give them suggestions or offer possible solutions. On a positive note, pre-service teachers becoming lecturer assistants could be as strategic and beneficial for them as having formal teaching practicum typically mandated in the English Education majors' curricula in terms of a way to develop their professional identity as teachers. Hence, the practice of employing pre-service teachers as lecturer assistants where possible could be widely implemented in English education majors with careful supervision and mentoring in the process.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the present study, there are several implications. This study generally found that being lecturer assistants influenced the lecturer assistant participants' professional identity development to perform better as teachers. This suggests the importance of teaching experiences for pre-service teachers to increase their teaching performance. Concerning this finding, pre-service teachers are expected to increase their teaching experiences, facilitated by their department's curriculum or independently, to help them to improve their professional identity as future teachers. This present study also had a specific finding that as the age gap between the assistants and the students was not big, it was easier for the students to consider the lecturer assistants their friends in the class, resulting in better rapport. In this case, lecturers could optimise the role of lecturer assistants in maintaining teacher-student rapport to facilitate students' understanding. Last but not least, as studies involving lecturer assistants as the participants were quite rare in the teacher professional identity field which is thus far overwhelmed with studies from teaching practicum settings, the findings of this study can be used as a reference for further investigations.

Furthermore, the present study also had several limitations. All data obtained in the present study solely depended on the participants' responses in the interviews. Secondly, as the interviews were conducted online due to the Covid-



19 pandemic and the participants resided in various places with various internet connectivity levels, at times these interviews were interrupted due to poor internet connection. This may slightly compromise the interview data. Last but not least, the qualitative nature of the study carried the consequence that the findings of this study should be seen within their unique context. These findings may not be generalised to a wider population, albeit several replications could be possible.

Based on the aforementioned limitations and several findings of the present study, future studies could be suggested. The first was to include class observations as a triangulation method comparing what the participants reported and what could be observed in class. Additionally, this way, possibly poor data obtained from one method could be compensated through data from the other. Future studies investigating lecturer assistants' development of professional identity could also include lecturers as the participants as they are the ones directly supervising their assistants, thus possibly understanding their progress better. Future studies could also analyse lecturer assistants' reflections in a secondary document analysis to see the dynamics of how they perceive themselves as teachers.

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