

An EFL Teacher's Metaphor as a Window into Teacher's Professional Identity

Yeni Arlius

English Department, Universitas Negeri Padang, Indonesia

Corresponding author's email: ummiyazidfwz@gmail.com

Abstract

One increasingly common method to elicit beliefs and conceptualizations is metaphor analysis, whereby participants create metaphors for relevant activities/concepts and then actively engage with them. This study analyzed EFL teachers' metaphors related to their professional identity (TPI). The participants were 13 EFL teachers who worked in the various educational institutions. Data were collected through the Metaphor Questionnaire about the concept of teacher's professional identity and followed by semi-structured interview to explore the reason for using those metaphors. Content analysis was used in analyzing the responses turned in by the EFL teachers. On analysis, results revealed that EFL teachers use diverse metaphors that are related to their everyday lived experiences. On categorizing the metaphors, four themes emerged namely profession, animal, amusement park attraction and infrastructure. The most prominent metaphor in this study is profession. Lastly, the metaphors revealed that the EFL teachers had fair understanding about their professional identity. The implications of the findings for teacher education were discussed.

Keywords: EFL teacher; metaphors; teacher's professional identity

INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian education system aims to produce a well-educated generation of young people to face the present and future challenges. This requires quality teachers who express a high level of professional to implement the Indonesian education policies. As emphasized by Oyetoro & Kareem (2022) that the quality of teachers determines the quality of the educational system of a society. The quality of teachers on the other hand, other things remaining the same, depends on the quality of instruction they received during their training period. They are not simply knowledge carriers; they are also learning coordinators and facilitators. Teachers are the key to raising educational standards, and they are at the center of initiatives to reform education for qualitative changes. (Pribudhiana et al., 2021). Teachers must be aware with their roles while teaching and learning process happened. Teachers and students collaborate each other to improve the quality of education.

The quality of teachers also depends on their professional identity. Zhao (2022) states that teachers' professional identity frames teachers' explanation of their functions, academic changes, and alterations in syllabi, class exercises, utilization of approaches and strategies, and their connection to other problems in the academic setting. The students need teachers who are responsible and confident with their job. Teachers who are well-perceived their professional identity will likely to be more successful than others who not. As Kamil (2022) states that teachers' beliefs about their identity impact on their thoughts and actions. Teachers must be well-understood in order to comprehend language teaching and learning (Varghese, Morgan, Johnston and Johnson, 2005). To do this, they must have a better understanding of the professional, cultural, political, and personal identities that teachers claim or are assigned. This will mirror on how they teach, guide and facilitate their students during the process of learning English.

There are various ways in which researchers can elicit beliefs and conceptualizations, but one increasingly common method is metaphor analysis, whereby participants create metaphors for relevant activities/concepts and then actively engage with them (Villamil and de Guerrero, 2005). In other words, the way English teachers perceived their professional identity can be explored by using metaphors. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), metaphors have a fundamental role in how humans relate to the world, and these foundational and archetypal patterns help us interpret events and reach conclusions. Metaphors provide helpful insights into teachers' professional thinking and cognition in teacher education (Saban, 2006). Moreover, it is hoped that generally that engagement with the metaphors will raise consciousness about differing conceptualizations or beliefs between different participant groups or about any teaching/learning problems, and as a result lead to changes in behavior (Wan et al., 2011). An interaction that involves 'teacher' metaphors between students and teachers can lead to willingness for changes in teaching practice.

In the existed research literature, metaphor is an area of semantics that has gained the attention of many scholars and linguists in the past few decades. It is a rhetorical device that takes into account the comparison of two distinct items that are made in reference to one another based on their inherent characteristics (Harara, 2022). This type of figure of speech is an analogy approach that greatly benefits the various facets of language learning. Through metaphors, Saban & Özcan (2020) looked into the perspectives of creativity among preschool teachers. The findings showed that 78 metaphors about creativity were generated by the teachers. The teachers attempted to explain creativity using metaphors like freedom and imagination, which are essential for creativity. Related to English language learning, Kamil (2022) conducted the research aimed to explore Indonesian EFL teachers' professional identity metaphors. Findings showed that three different metaphors: artist, nurturer, and the sun, along with five themes in the reasons for the metaphors: uniqueness of each English lesson, limited sources of learning, students' negative stigma about English learning, low student input, and fun English learning. However, both studies concern with teachers that have owned their great experience in teaching, not the teachers who are going to teach later at school. Examining both of these types of respondents will explore more teachers' metaphor related to their professional identity.

The main purpose of this study is to examine the post graduate majoring in English and EFL teachers' metaphors about their professional identity. In line with this main purpose, the study sought answers to the following questions:

- (1) What are the EFL teachers' metaphors about professional identity?
- (2) Which categories do these metaphors belong to in terms of their common features?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teacher's Professional Identity (TPI)

Teacher identity may greatly impact teacher education and language education in that it plays an important role in an individual's teaching not only in terms of how he/she teaches but also how he/she presents themselves and the materials for teaching and learning. Kadel (2022) claims that a teacher's identity is shaped by their academic background and range of experiences. Professional identities are intimately related to how teachers view educational reform, as well as their self-image, motivation at work, sense of responsibility, and self-worth (Kang, Shen, & Zheng, 2022). A teacher's view on the present and future is reflected in their self-image (Kadel, 2022). The collection of traits, convictions, values, motivations, and experiences that people use to define themselves in a professional capacity is known as their professional identity (Ibarra, 1999). The development of a teacher's professional identity, according to Tsui (2007), also entails an ongoing, formative, transformative, and dynamic process of understanding and reinterpreting one's own values and experiences through reflexive and expressive negotiation of the teacher's subjectivity, which is subject to change as a result of social, affective, personal, and cognitive factors. The examples of professional identity given by Beijaard and Meijer (2017) also include the person's instructional values, beliefs, aspirations, and professional competences and commitments. Therefore, teachers' professional identities also comprise their personal values and beliefs, professional values and beliefs, as well as the cultural experiences they learned about as children and incorporated into their everyday lives.

The professional identity of EFL teachers has been widely studied by many experts. The first study by Bukor (2015) investigated how three language instructors' personal and professional experiences affected the formation of their sense of self as language teachers. The findings showed that a teacher's personal biography plays a significant role in shaping their professional identity. Another study by Nguyen (2016) found that Vietnamese teachers found self-learning and learning from their colleagues to be insufficient for professional development when they first started teaching. As a result, their professional development grew to include engagement in multiple communities and exposure to other pedagogical practices and discourses in other communities. More current study by Cosgun & Savas (2023) that explore the professional identity development of English teachers through the lens of the Possible Selves Theory, focusing on the experiences of three distinct groups of educators. Findings revealed that the participants placed a significant emphasis on factors such as professional development, language proficiency, professional competence, personal attributes and recognition in relation to their ideal language teacher selves. The major fears related to their professional identity included language incompetence, inadequate

professional development, undesirable personal attributes, undesired professional tendencies and a lack of recognition.

Metaphor is a window into TPI

Metaphors are one of the forms of figurative language that have been defined variously by the experts from the different perspectives. Such definition from Lakoff and Johnson (1980) conceptualizes metaphors as “understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another”. This definition is quite similar to Ritchie (2013) that “metaphor” is defined as seeing, experiencing, or talking about something in terms of something else. Semino (2008) defines metaphor as “the phenomenon whereby we talk and, potentially, think about something in terms of something else”. Simply, it can be said that metaphor is a comparison between two things that are otherwise unrelated. With metaphor, the qualities of one thing are figuratively carried over to another.

In this regard, metaphors can be effectively employed as a study method to expose and understand views and conceptualizations that stakeholders in the educational field hold associated to a foreign language and the related concepts, according to Cortazzi & Jin (2020) and Geeraerts & Cuyckens (2007). In the discipline of teaching languages and among language instructors, metaphors are frequently utilized. Studies using metaphor are frequently concerned with how students view issues associated to education, such as teachers, textbooks, and the teaching and learning process (Alarcón et al., 2018b). Effectively used metaphors in educational contexts aid in comprehending complex and challenging concepts, contrast abstract facts with more physical or experienced facts, and provide understanding of strange occurrences (Lakoff & Johnson 2007 cited in Cuhadar 2022).

In teacher education, metaphors offer ‘useful windows into teachers’ professional thinking and cognition’ (Saban 2006). It is also noted that metaphors serve as ‘vehicles for reflection and consciousness rising among educators’ (de Guerrero and Villamil, 2002). Metaphors have been employed extensively in research to investigate teacher identity and TPI in general as well as EFL TPI. It has been discovered that pre-service and in-service teachers identify as democrats, moms, trial judges, artists, and intercultural promoters (Nguyen, 2016). Another study by Zhu & Zhu (2018) shows that the shift in embodied metaphors revolves around four areas: (1) from idealistic expectations of teachers’ roles to authentic perceptions; (2) from the perceived lack of professional knowledge and ability in teaching to varying professional growth; (3) from transition shock to professional identity adjustment; and (4) the dynamic relationship with school-based mentors. To sum up, all of the findings are dealing with the positive impacts to every aspect of learning and do some changes in teaching practice.

METHOD

This study used qualitative approach involving thirteen participants from teachers and teachers will be. Based on Creswell (2015), some stages in qualitative research include collecting data from words (e.g., interviews) from a small number of individuals so that the participants’ views are obtained and analyzing the data for description and themes using text analysis and interpreting the larger meaning of the findings. The participants were all

English teachers with bachelor's degrees. All of them are pursuing their master degree in one of state universities in Padang. By a formal invitation made via WhatsApp inquiring for their availability for participating in the study, they were purposefully chosen for the study.

Two sorts of data were gathered to provide a complete grasp of the phenomenon in question. First, the teachers' TPI metaphors were compiled using an English open-ended Google form questionnaire that was emailed to them via WhatsApp and asked them to complete the statement "An EFL teacher is a/an ..." by choosing the metaphor that best reflected their TPI. With some instances, a quick explanation of what a metaphor was given. Moreover, demographic data on educational background, teaching setting, and teaching experience were gathered using the questionnaire. Second, data were also collected through audio recorded, semi-structured, in-depth interviews with three participants as representatives that were conducted face-to-face in Indonesian, at the time and place agreed by the participants. The interviews sought to explore the reasons for the metaphors they constructed in the questionnaire.

Content analysis was used in analyzing the responses turned in by the EFL teachers. The processes involved included sorting out the responses to see which of the metaphors were relevant and which were not. This was done in accordance to the work of Eren and Tekinarlson (2013) where the metaphors were interpreted in terms of coherence to see where there was a level of compatibility between metaphor and reason for using the metaphor.

FINDINGS

From the questionnaire that have been fulfilled by the respondents, there were some metaphors found related to teacher's professional identity. **Table 1** revealed that EFL teachers in the study used 9 different metaphors to represent their professional identity and 2 results were not included because they were not related to TPI.

Table 1 EFL teachers' metaphors about their professional identity

No	Metaphor	Themes	Occurrence
1	An EFL teacher is a repairer	Profession	2
2	An EFL teacher is an artist	Profession	2
3	An EFL teacher is an architect	Profession	1
4	An EFL teacher is a soldier	Profession	1
5	An EFL teacher is a guardian	Profession	1
6	An EFL teacher is a bridge	Infrastructure	1
7	An EFL teacher is a butterfly	Animal	1
8	An EFL teacher is a tour guide	Profession	1
9	An EFL teacher is a roller coaster	Amusement Park attraction	1

DISCUSSION

In this section, the researcher randomly selected only two metaphors that have higher occurrence from others and two metaphors that were unique and meaningful in which the researcher conducted interview to know the reason why the participants chose those kinds of metaphors to describe their TPI.

Respondent 1

Translation of the transcript in English version:

In my opinion ... a teacher is a repairer because a teacher can make someone to change their knowledge from unknow to know. Well, ... actually it's not easy to handle the students' behavior, to motivate them to learn English and to help them in understanding the material, but those are teachers' duty and responsibility. Therefore, we must be eager to become professional teacher. We provide the useful and meaningful knowledge to them while teaching them with the good moral values.

Respondent 2

Translation of the transcript in English version:

Hmm ... what do we mean by repairers? Of course, they repair something. But... what I mean here the repairer is not the same when we repair our motorcycle for instance. Our students are human. We cannot ask them to follow what we want. We must handle them with care and empathy especially for those who are naughty. We guide them to fix their moral value. I'm sure with our religion "Islam" we can help our students for having a good attitude and behavior. So, teacher's job is not only teaching but also "repairing".

- **An EFL teacher is a repairer**

From the results of the interview, both teachers value their students within their strengths and weaknesses. Both of them stated that "an English teacher is repairer". They fix something, but in this context, the thing to be fixed is human behavior and knowledge. Besides, many students do not like learning English because it's too difficult for them. Teacher's job is to make students become interested and motivated to learn English from the beginning with his/her instruction. Martin (2023) argued that motivation and instruction are two major substantive domains in educational psychology. Therefore, teachers must be able to improve their approaches, methods, techniques and also medias to assist students in learning English.

Based on definition written in Cambridge Dictionary, the meaning of repairer is a person or company that is paid to repair things. Their job is to restore machinery, equipment, or other products to working order. Many repairers also provide routine and general maintenance, and some install the products that they fix. Sometimes these jobs are physically demanding and require heavy lifting or working in awkward positions. The teacher's job is the same with repairer. They are not going to stay away from the students even teachers are dissatisfied and upset with them. Restoring means to return the students to an earlier good condition or position. Providing routine and general maintenance means do counseling to

the students regularly. Installing means to put students in a comfortable and higher position of useful knowledge. All of these jobs are done by teacher with patience and sincere.

Respondent 3

Translation of the transcript in English version:

“Then there are some characteristics that make a teacher an artist. You strive to motivate kids to learn the language, especially while teaching them a language. It doesn't frighten them. Teaching physics or math is not the same. To teach language, umm... I desire a welcoming and stimulating environment. Thus, entertainment should also play a role. Students can learn well if they are interested in learning. I am conscious of these elements. I also occasionally use music. The major goal is to make the learning environment engaging. This reminds me of an artist”.

Respondent 4

Translation of the transcript in English version:

“For me, an EFL teacher is an artist because the teacher needs to have creativity to make their students enthusiasm in teaching and learning process. Teacher is like an artist who attracts the sympathy of many people. Sometimes you are angry, sometimes you are happy, sometimes you are crying. Teachers act every day to make the students interested with them. You can update your teaching activities in social media, share the students' work, and ask students to utilize technology to help them in learning English. Whenever your students like you, they will also like your subject definitely”.

- **An EFL teacher is an artist**

The next participants saw her professional identity resembled an artist. Based on Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, an artist refers to a person who creates works of art, especially paintings or drawings. Based on the interview's result, she revealed the reason why she chose an EFL teacher is an artist because the teacher needs to have creativity to make their students enthusiasms in teaching and learning process. It is not rare to see students feel unmotivated when learning English due to many reasons behind it like limited vocabulary, grammatical problem and even lack of confidence to use English orally. With teacher's metaphor, it helps instructors to create a classroom environment in which students with individual differences, diverse and different ideas come together (Nikitina & Furuoka, 2008). Therefore, an EFL teacher must be able to create the learning atmosphere that will make the students feel enjoy and free to express their own feeling without intimidation. In other words, EFL teachers are skilled at creating a joyful learning atmosphere by using all the possible learning sources and teaching media that are integrated with technology.

Respondent 5

Translation of the transcript in English version:

“Why I choose architect? Because teacher teachers’ job is same with architect. I think it’s more difficult than architect’s job. Architects just deal with maybe like building construction. They plan, design, and control so that the building construction is appropriate with what they want. But it is different with teachers’ job. They can do all jobs like what have been done by the architect but they cannot make the students become what they want. Why? Because they are human. They have brain, sense, and passion with them. Teaching human needs a lot of patience. And then, the other reason why teacher is an architect because he must be computer literacy. Teaching English with the technology assistance. That’s a must!”

- **An EFL teacher is an architect**

The first participant saw her professional identity resembled an architect. However, the result of the questionnaire she did not give the reasons why she chose that kind of metaphor to describe her professional identity. The reasons had been answered after the researcher conducted the interview to her. Based on Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries, it was found that the most basic definition of an architect is a person whose job is designing buildings. Yet, from educational point of view, this metaphor means different from its literal definition. Based on the results of interview, she described teaching is both an art and a science. Teachers design learning just as architects design structures. A structure stands firm and sturdy because architects and their teams thoughtfully designed it for both form and function. They purposefully chose materials to support the ultimate design and functional goals of the structure. They methodically constructed the building, beginning with the foundation and working their way up to the roof. Teacher assists students to gain their own knowledge started from the beginning until they achieve the higher level by seeing their progress day by day. The students are able to use English as a communicative purpose. And then they inspected every inch of the building to make sure it met all requirements and codes. This is reflected when teachers assessing and testing students’ performance in learning whether the students have reached the standard or not.

The last statement from the respondent is teaching English with technology assistance. That’s similar with the previous respondent. The results show that some benefits of integrating technology in English language learning are learners can do some coding, practice online quizzes or tests, improve speed of answering questions, improve scores in English tests, learn another foreign language, do some collaborative learning, encourage independent learning, have opportunities to write, speak, listen, and read in English, do online learning, get online references, use of multiple computer application, obtain the latest information, translate, have opportunities to use multi-media presentation as well as demonstrate new method of teaching (Rintaningrum, 2023). Therefore, computer literacy becomes one of the crucial skills must be mastered by teacher in this era, 21st century.

Respondent 6

Translation of the transcript in English version:

“The reason why I choose this extreme metaphor “an EFL teacher is a soldier” because teacher needs to work hard and discipline. Teachers know how to manage their own classroom because he is the leader in the class. Actually, my experience in teaching is about five months here. What I do in my class is to state my rule and my expectation from the beginning. I also ask the

students' expectation from me. There are boundaries and students must value them. And then, I don't jump to the lesson directly instead of sharing my own experience in the past. It can be others experience, if you don't have it. Students like story a lot".

- **An EFL teacher is a soldier**

The third participant saw her professional identity resembled a soldier. Based on Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, a soldier is a member of an army, especially one who is not an officer that has responsible for protecting and defending his country. The results of interview confirm the reason from this teacher metaphor that EFL teacher must work hard and be discipline to achieve the learning target from the curriculum. Students must aware with those attitudes so that they can also implement them during learning process. Besides, she elaborates this metaphor by saying that enforcement of discipline is very important to achieve an effective and efficient learning process. A disciplined teacher can guarantee the maintenance of school rules and the smooth implementation of school management. The attitude of discipline and hardworking will lead the class management. Managing class is a skill that must be owned by EFL teachers. It is a teacher's strategy to have an effective teaching and learning process.

Moreover, dealing with classroom management, teachers have to maintain it in the long term. Teachers with a good classroom management are often the most experienced, the ones who had mastered classroom management over many years. The classroom management style adopted by the teachers affects their teaching method, technique, model and teaching materials, classroom arrangements, communication with the students, etc. in the teaching learning process (Aslan, 2022). The results of the interview confirmed that the first, and most important, is establishing the boundaries early on. Not just in relation to what they can and can't do, but what kind of attitude they should bring, how they should treat other learners and how much homework they should expect. If students are mature enough, get them to offer their own thoughts and agree limits together.

Another thing that teachers can do is staying consistent. Once teachers have set their expectations, they must stick to them. If students don't comply with what teachers agreed at the start, teachers must follow up with the agreed consequences. If you don't, students will realize the expectations are meaningless. Another big part of classroom management is gaining attention when things are noisy. There are a million different techniques from clapping to mini-dance routines, call and response, etc.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the teachers identified their TPI as an EFL teacher with metaphors that were closely connected to their everyday lived experiences. The categorization revealed that metaphors related to profession are the most occurring like architect, soldier, artist, guardian, and etc. Also, it can be concluded that the respondents had fair understanding about their professional identity that reflects how they perceive themselves within their occupational context and how they communicate this to the students. Further studies with a larger number of participants and ones that combine different methods are suggested for a wider and deeper picture of Indonesian EFL teachers' TPI.

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