Two English Teachers' Narratives of Professional Growth:
Major Stories and Critical Events

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Abstract

The academic journey for advanced degree is challenging. It reflects the professional endeavours of those who take the route. This study explored life-stories of two EFL teachers who were pursuing their advanced degree (doctoral degree) for their career advancement. The guiding question for this inquiry is related to the stories and challenges and the impacts of the challenges on the participants' professional growth. The data were collected in the form of narratives from interviews with the two participants. Supporting documents related to the participants' experiences were also collected. The data were analysed in the framework of critical event analysis. Thus, the life-stories of the participants were identified in terms of episodes and events. The major stories of challenges were identified by looking at the emerging themes. The transformation and changes in their professional identities were identified by looking at the critical events intertwining in the narratives. The narratives of the two participants indicated that the challenges they faced have contributed to their professional transformation as teachers and researchers.

Introduction

The academic journey of studying for advanced degree is challenging and reflecting the professional endeavor of those who take the route. This study explored the life-long learning stories of two EFL teachers at the university level to understand their professional growth through their stories. This narrative exploration was meant to understand the meaning of teachers' experiences while they were completing their advanced studies for the career advancement. Understanding teachers' stories could shed light on how teachers navigate their career and their lives in the profession (Mattos, 2009; Richert, 2002; Watson, 2006). In this way, we can see how their professional identity changes through their important event in their lives.

In the contexts of Indonesia, the government has encouraged teachers and educators to study for advanced degrees in

relevant fields. The formal advanced education is considered an avenue for their professional development and career advancement. This is especially true for those who pursue academic career in higher education institutions. University instructors and lecturers must have at least master's degrees in relevant fields. Doctoral degrees are also required for pursuing the career ladder in higher education.

Studies on professional growth of teachers at higher educations in Indonesia are still limited (Yumarnamto, 2016). Therefore, this study is an effort to contribute to the pool of knowledge on Indonesian English teachers' professional identity formation at higher education level. This area is important in that it can shed light on the trajectory of English teachers' professional growth and career as well as providing relevant clues on needed teacher professional development to enhance the professional growth. Therefore, the pedagogical implications of understanding the professional identity formation in this current study are relevant for teacher education and for continuing professional development of teachers.

There are two guiding questions in this study: (1) What are the major stories of challenges shared by the two participants as graduate students? (2) How did the challenges transform their professional identities?

Teacher Professional Growth

Becoming an English teacher is life-long endeavor, especially for those of non-native speakers. To begin with, teacher education is the formal gate to the profession (Freeman, 2009). In a teacher education program, students are prepared for the profession by exploring the pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987, 2000, 2005). At this stage, teachers learn the essentials of their field to prepare for the profession.

The next stage of professional education is when teachers enter the profession, starting from the preservice learning, to junior teachers and to become expert teachers in their fields (Shulman, 1986, 1987). The pre-service teaching is essential in preparing teacher candidates with teaching principal skills and techniques in real world of school and classrooms (Richards et al., 2005). In addition, during the pre-service teaching, teacher candidates are exposed with the professional world of teaching and they can imagine their future profession based on their experiences—to determine whether they will commit themselves and stay in the profession or not (Barkhuizen, 2010). Once they decide to commit themselves in the profession, they can grow as professionals. In Shulman's conceptions (2009), learning in the profession is the determining factor of professional growth. When a teacher learned from their practices as a teacher, they will develop "the wisdom of practice" – the knowledge and skills as an expert teacher that separate them from novice ones.

The growth trajectory in teaching profession is outlined by Freeman (2009) and confirmed by (Yumarnamto, 2016) that teachers grow from the knowledge and skills gained in their formal education and training, to honing their expertise in the profession, and to expanding their influence in the profession and the wider social sphere. Eventually, expert teachers are the ones who claim their professional identity and are recognized as being so in their profession and in public.

The trajectory of professional growth indicates the nature of continuing teacher learning from their engagement with the students and with the professional community and with the wider contexts of the society (Burns, Freeman, & Edwards, 2015; Freeman, 2009). In Indonesia, a similar trajectory has been identified and the government has provided guidance and regulations for such development. The four teacher competencies as determined by Indonesian government (professional, pedagogical, social, and personal competencies), for example, are

based on the reality that in the profession, teacher should teach effectively in the classroom, collaborate with colleagues, engage in their communities, and become an example of good characters for their students (n.a, 2005). For the formal education, the requirements have been set up higher. Public school teachers must have completed the teacher professional education program (Pendidikan Profesi Guru/PPG) and for lecturers at higher education institution, at least they must hold a master's degree in the relevant field.

Teacher Professional Identity

Teacher professional identity (TPI) and professional growth are closely related as the growth provides the path for the professional identity formation. Therefore, as outline by Freeman (2009, 2013), language teacher learning and education is basically the process of forming TPI. In this case TPI can be understood in terms of how teachers want to be known and want to be affiliated with certain professional communities. To be known as a professional teacher, a teacher must have certain characteristics and qualities. Under the Indonesian Teachers' Law (n.a, 2005) professional teachers are known to have pedagogical knowledge and skills, to master the subject matters, to have adequate social skills to collaborate with others, and to become an example of strong moral character for their students. These characteristics have become the core characteristics of the ideal teachers in Indonesia and the government has put its efforts to develop such professional teachers.

The latter reference of TPI is related to affiliation with certain teacher professional communities—real and imagined ones (Yumarnamto, 2017; Yumarnamto & Prijambodo, 2020). Real professional communities for English teachers in Indonesia are the ones in which the teacher holds a membership such as TEFLIN (Teachers of English Language in Indonesia)

or other international organizations of English language teachers. Imagined communities are the imagined ones, in which the teacher wants to be affiliated with and to be member of. These communities are not real organizations established with statutes and issued membership cards. These imagined communities are the ones existing in our minds—perceived as communities of professionals and expertise. The community of teacher-researchers can be an imagined professional community for English teachers and the membership claims of belonging to the community can shape TPI. A teacher-researcher identity, for example, can be a manifestation of a teacher's membership claim to an imagined community which has dual sociocultural settings—the practitioners' communities and the researchers' ones. The engagement with both communities shape TPI in the forms of being known as good teachers in one hand and as good researchers in the other hands.

In short, TPI can be shaped and formed with the engagements with various professional communities, real and imagined ones, in which the teachers want to be affiliated with and to be known as. These engagements may lead to TPI formation of teachers where teachers claim their TPI and the communities acknowledge their claims—the dances of TPI negotiation.

Critical Events in Narratives and TPI of English Teachers

Teacher professional growth can be seen as the path of TPI formation and the path can be understood in narratives and chronologically and reflectively can be seen as the past milestones of teachers (Barkhuizen, 2016, 2019, 2021). These milestones are critical events in teachers' experiences embodied in their life stories (Mertova & Webster, 2019; Webster & Mertova, 2007) because they are determinant factors in shaping the trajectory of TPI and professional growth. Critical events are told in narratives

and they are the core of the stories as they are important and influential in the formation of TPI as well as determining the trajectory of professional growth.

An event can be seen as critical because of its importance and its impact on the story teller – the person undergoing the event. It is often a life changing event that can bring about changes in the person's life, career, and beliefs. A critical event can only be identified post-facto – afterwards as reflected and narrated by the story teller. So, it is unpredictable and unplanned and its impact can be felt beyond the immediate time surrounding the event (Mertova & Webster, 2019). In a teacher's career, a critical event may impact the decision to stay or leave the profession. It may also impact the changes in teachers' beliefs such as English teachers' beliefs in teaching grammar explicitly while in pressure of teaching using communicative approach (Tsui, 2007). Therefore, the following definition by Mertova and Webster can subsume the importance of critical events in narratives.

"*Critical events are 'critical' because of their impact and profound effect on whoever experiences such an event. They often bring about radical change in the person. These events are unplanned, unanticipated and uncontrolled. To the researcher, the opportunity to 'access' such profound effects holistically is an avenue to making sense of complex and human-centred information.*" (Mertova & Webster, 2019, p. 63)

As Mertova and Webster (2019) suggested, critical events can be used as an analytical tool as well as the subject of analysis in narrative inquiry. As an analytical tool, critical event provide a framework for the analysis of story development as a narrative can be seen as sequence of events. As the subject of analysis critical events provide a starting point for narrative development. Identified critical events can be used to interpret current events experienced by individuals.

Methods

To understand the professional growth and TPI of two English language teachers who were studying for their doctoral degree, this study was designed as a narrative inquiry. The two teacher participants share similarities in that they were both English language lecturers at different universities in East Java. The first teacher participant was male, aged 36 and he had been teaching English for 10 years during this study in 2022. He taught Reading, Writing, and ELT Curriculum. The second participant was a female teacher aged 47. She had been teaching English for 12 years and she taught various courses related to English language skills and research methods.

Table 1

Forms of Data Collected from the Participants

NO	Forms of data	Descriptions
1	Documents	Biographical documents (vitae), documents from the narrative frames, publications
2	The results of in-depth interview	Biographical interviews (confirming the vitae and getting more narratives), in-depth interviews (getting the narratives related to experiences and professional challenges

The data collected from the two participants were documents (biographical information, information from the narrative frames) and the results of the in-depth interviews. Both forms of data were the bases of the co-constructed narratives of their lives and their experiences as students pursuing advanced degrees in ELT. Table 1 describes the forms of data collected for this study.

The data were reconstructed for more meaningful and chronological narratives. From the reconstructed narratives, the data were analyzed further in terms of critical event analysis (Johnson & Golombek, 2002; Mertova & Webster, 2019; Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022; Yumarnamto, 2016). The critical events were events which affected the participants and events which brought about changes in the participants. The events also involved challenges undergone by the participants and how they engaged with the challenges. The narratives were also analyzed in terms of identifying emerging themes to understand the professional transformation of the participants.

Results and Discussions

In this section, the narratives of the two participants were presented and discussed. Joan and Steven's narratives and the critical events were central in their career growth and personal changes.

Joan's Narratives and Major Stories

Joan's family members were not well educated as she was the only one who graduated from university. In the beginning, she did not imagined to be an English teacher as she learned English because she wanted to be a tour guide to allow her to go around the world. However, her original motivation to learn English changed and she enjoyed to become an English teacher and to pursue further studies. Table 2 outlines Joan's major story related to her professional growth, and it describes the major critical events that she underwent.

Table 2
Joan's Major Stories and Critical Events

JOAN'S MAJOR STORIES	PROFESSIONAL GROWTH
Realizing that her English was not good	Motivating her to improve her English by taking English Courses
Becoming an English teacher as a role model	Motivating her to broaden her knowledge and to hone her skills in ELT.

JOAN'S CRITICAL EVENTS	PROFESSIONAL GROWTH
Presenting paper in International Conference	Motivating her to work more for her community and for her career (writing and publishing).
Writing Journal article	Motivating her to graduate her advance degree program immediately
Writing dissertation	Motivating her to graduate her advance degree program immediately and involving her institution pride

The major stories and the critical events identified from Joan's narratives indicated the professional growth she felt as she reflected on her past experiences. Joan's narratives were developed from two major stories: (1) the realization that her English was not good an (2) the importance of becoming an English teacher with advanced degrees. The former was the major story that led her to become an English teacher. The latter was the major story line of her becoming an English teacher and how she navigated her career in the profession.

Realizing that her English was not Good

Joan was from uneducated family. When she learned English at school she found it challenging. She remembered the first time she learned English was in junior high school. The first sentence she noticed from her teacher was, "Open the book". Every time her teacher came in the classroom, he always gave instructions in English—which she did not understand. Because her English was very limited, she easily got confused whenever her teacher spoke in English.

"My opinion and impression at that time about English lessons from that experience were that I did not like English because I could not understand it. From junior high school to high school, I got a teacher who did not understand the way I studied English and I always struggled to follow the lessons." (Co-constructed Narrative from the Interview with Joan)

Realizing that she was struggling in English, she finally decided to take English course outside the school. In the English course she caught up the lessons the teacher taught her in the classroom. She realized that to be a tour guide, she needed to be good in English so that she could go abroad and visit various interesting places around the world. So, finishing her high school, she decided to study English Education as her major. She did not care that by entering the program she was expected to an English teacher. What she wanted was that she learned English and she would be a tour guide.

"The main reason why I majored in English as a foreign language for my undergraduate study was that I wanted to be a tour guide and to be able to travel around the world." (Co-constructed Narrative from the Interview with Joan)

Realizing the financial issues faced by her parents, she studied hard and completed the program on time. She proved herself as an excellent student and she was good at English. In addition, she found her passion in teaching. So, instead of pursuing his childhood dream of being a tour guide who could go around the world, she taught English in a private university in her hometown.

An English Teacher with Advanced Degrees: A Role Model for Colleagues

As per government regulations, the minimum requirement to become a lecturer at a university was holding a master's degree in a relevant field. As Joan held only a bachelor degree in education, she needed to pursue a graduate one. So, she decided to study for a master's degree in English Language and Literature Education in 2011. At that time, she held the leadership position in one study program in her campus. She realized, without a graduate degree, she would not be able to pursue her career any further. More importantly, she wanted to be an example for her colleagues, especially those who were reluctant to study for advanced degrees. In this way, she could maintain a good image of leadership. She acknowledged that by saying, *"My main reason for continuing my study was because of the demand of profession and I was lucky I got full scholarship for my study."*

(Co-constructed Narrative from the Interview with Joan)

Working as an English teacher and studying for her master's degree was challenging. She found that the program was competitive and her classmates were difficult to collaborate. She was in a competitive atmosphere as her classmates were reluctant to help each other related to the academic tasks and responsibility as graduate students. She described them as more individualistic as they like competing than helping and collaborating. She acknowledged that it was a tense competitive atmosphere in her class when saying, "*When I took courses for my master's program (S2), I can say, I felt much pressure and competition among friends.*"

Completing her master's program, Joan was back to full time teaching at her campus. While she felt that she was not young any more, she realized the importance of formal education for her career and she decided to pursue the doctoral degree in the same program and the same university, in which she conferred her bachelor and master's degree. She successfully secured funding from the state scholarship to complete her new journey as a doctoral student. Her motivation was still the same. She wanted to be a good example for her colleagues and her students as she was the chair of a study program at her university. In addition, there were more opportunities for lecturers with a doctorate degree to compete for research grants and other government funding, which would help her advance her career.

Her plan was clear; she wanted to contribute more to her institution with her degree: competing for government grants and funding for her department. Confidently she claimed:

"*With my graduation, I plan to return soon to participate in competitive grant and funding to uplift my department and my institution.*" (Co-constructed Narrative from the Interview with Joan)

Joan's Critical Events

As seen in Table 2, Joan's critical events developed around the her career as an English teacher at a higher education level, which required her to pursue advanced degrees and to engage with the academic community by writing and presenting academic papers for conferences and publications.

Presenting a Paper in an International Conference

Receiving government's grant for social services, Joan had an opportunity to attend an international conference and to present a paper in front of international audience. As this was the first time for her to attend an international conference in Hong Kong, she was nervous but she felt confidence. She acknowledged the importance of presenting the paper abroad when she said:

"*We went to Hong Kong supported by the government grant. We received the grant prior to my application for my doctoral program. That was why with the research and community service grant, I could write an article for the international seminar in Hong Kong.*" (Co-constructed Narrative from the Interview with Joan)

This event was critical to her because she proved herself her academic credential that motivated her even more to write and to publish. Although it was a team work, she felt that she contributed to the success of her team. This critical event strongly contributed to her success to secure her scholarship for her doctorate program.

Writing a journal article for international publication

For her career advancement and for the requirement to graduate Joan needed to publish an academic article in a reputable international journal. For her, it was a challenging task as she never published in an international journal and she realized her limitation. However, she managed to complete the journal article and published it in a reputable international journal. It was a great achievement for her and it was a critical event as since then, she developed her confidence and she felt that she could claim her professional identity as a teacher-researcher. Recalling her experience, she said: "*When I write, I can't do it fast because it is typical for me to think carefully here and there while writing. It was surprising that I could complete the article in one month—which impressed me.*" (Co-constructed Narrative from the Interview with Joan)

Completing the dissertation

For Joan, it was challenging to study full time and to work at the same time. While she studied for her doctoral degree, she also held her position as the department chair in her campus. The challenges mounted when she had to complete to write her dissertation as it consumed her energy and her mind. She often got frustrated and she almost gave up her ambition:

"*So, the most demanding challenge was when I had to write a dissertation. I often thought that I would never graduate from the program as I indeed left my dissertation behind.*" (Co-constructed Narrative from the Interview with Joan)

Steven's Narratives and Major Stories

Steven felt that he was special because he was different from other family members. He was the only one in the family who became an English teacher. His siblings and relatives owned

Table 3

Steven's Major Stories and Critical Events

STEVEN'S MAJOR NARRATIVES	PROFESSIONAL GROWTH
Realizing the importance of teaching approach	Motivating him to use collaborative materials in teaching English to attract learners' involvement and achievement.
Becoming a new Researcher	Motivating him to enroll the doctoral program
STEVEN'S CRITICAL EVENTS	**PROFESSIONAL GROWTH**
Changing Students' Grades	Motivating him to improve the teacher's role in education by pursuing a master's program.
Writing dissertation	Motivating him to become more productive researcher as well as a good English teacher. Motivating him to use technology and applications for better writing.

their businesses. He thought that being an English teacher was an incredible job. He found one of his English teachers was incredible. She encouraged and motivated him to learn English. She was his inspiration to become an English teacher. In addition, he realized the importance of an English teacher as he could pursue further studies. Now, he was the only one in the family holding a graduate degree.

Table 3 shows the outline of Steven's major stories and the critical events that led to his professional growth. Steven's major stories developed around his experiences in teaching English, which was initiated by his experience as an English learner. He realized the importance to make English classes fun and enjoyable. The second major story was related to becoming a researcher as part of advancing his career as an English teacher at a higher education institution.

Realizing the Importance of Teaching Approach and Methods

Recalling his experience in learning English, Steven remembered when he was in the 4th grade of elementary school. He could not forget his blue-covered book which he got from his room teacher. The book covered some introduction to pronouns and nouns in English. As this was the first time he had an English lesson, he thought it was easy as everything was described clearly in the blue book. That was why he fell in love with English.

"*I remember the first time I learned English in 4th grade using a blue-covered book distributed by my class teacher (Bu Pur). The book provided an introduction to very simple pronouns and nouns. I really liked it because it was easy.*" (Co-constructed Narrative from the Interview with Steven)

His good impression about learning English continued to his junior high school. It strengthened his curiosity to explore more about English. He was amused by his English teachers, who were creative in teaching. They used songs in in the classroom to introduce various topics and to draw students' interest in learning the language. The English lessons made fall in love with English. One of his teachers used to play English songs from famous singers. He still remembered the songs played in the classroom such as one from Back Street Boys, Bon Jovi, and Britney Spears. At that time, learning English was fun. "*Meeting English teachers who are very creative, namely combining songs in teaching English, made me like them even more. Even some singers or bands who sang English songs that I learned at that time are still remembered today.*" (Co-constructed Narrative from the Interview with Steven)

Finishing his high school, he did not go straight to college. Four two years he had not stayed in a permanent position as he went around to improve his English and his social skills. After two years going around without a clear career and direction, he decided to continue his studies majoring in English as he loved English and he wanted to pursue his career related to English education. He recalled that he saw great opportunities to become an English teacher:

"*I saw English courses everywhere. In crowded areas in my hometown, I saw English courses. Various institutions offered English classes. Since, I liked to teach, I saw opportunities everywhere if I became an English teacher. I realized becoming an English teacher would be great my future.*"

(Co-constructed Narrative from the Interview with Steven)

Reflecting on his college years, he realized that his lecturers used different approaches and methods in teaching English. Some of his lecturers were boring while others were interesting. He reflected on what made English classes interesting. When the classroom was full of joy and relaxed atmosphere, the students were happy and he, as a student, learned better. It helped him improve his English knowledge and skills. However, when the class was dull, tense, and serious, he was discouraged to learn and he got bored easily. He believed that the teacher was central in creating a favorable atmosphere for learning. It was his belief that fun and enjoyable class was important. Therefore, he proudly claimed:

"I apply fun English learning strategies in the classroom, starting with music, like when I was in junior high school, using films with different genres that teenagers generally like. At that time, to use Games or, like Simon says, puzzles, others." (Co-constructed Narrative from the Interview with Steven)

Becoming a Novice Researcher

After graduating from college with an English degree, he secured a position as an English teacher in a public school. He found that being a teacher at the public school did not satisfy him as he intended to become an English teacher at a university. That's why he pursued further study for a master's degree in English education and he secured the position as an English instructor at a university in his home town. Now he was not only teaching English but he also required to do research and to publish his research in academic journals for his career advancement.

The demand of becoming a lecturer was not only teaching but also researching. He found his passion in teaching writing and he saw the opportunity to integrate information technology in his writing classes. He also saw an opportunity to conduct research on his interest: writing and integrating technology.

His interest in conducting research led him to the decision of enrolling in a doctoral program after he completed his master's degree. He spent more time on research now as he was a doctoral student.

Explaining his interest in research and publishing, he said:

"*Once completing a paper and send it to a journal, I spent more than six months to publish. It took me three months to revise the paper. After the first revision, there were more revisions I did as suggested by the reviewers. It was up to six revisions before finally it could be published—which made me proud because the journal was indexed by Scopus. ... I felt like throwing up because of the long and laborious process. Yes, but I felt very proud that the process had paid off when it was published.* (Co-constructed Narrative from the Interview with Steven)

Since the publication of his research article, he felt more confident and he enjoyed being a teacher researcher. He felt that it was the right way to advance his career.

Steven's Critical Events

While the major stories developed around teaching approaches and being a teacher-researcher, the critical events began with the moral conflict he experienced when he was a public school teacher. The conflict had brought about changes in his professional trajectory, from an English teacher in public school and English teacher at a university.

Changing Students' Grades

This critical event occurred when Steven was an English teacher in a public school. As a junior English teacher, he upheld his ideal high and he refused to change the students' grades so that the students could have better grades in English and could pass the national examination. When the principal asked him and other English teachers, he felt betrayed and his idea of a teacher who had high moral ground was shattered. It was cheating and it was against his conscience.

"After completing several exams in the semester, we, the English teachers, were asked to change students' grades. That was against my conscience. My heart told me that I did not want to be a teacher if a teacher was treated like this." (Co-constructed Narrative from the Interview with Steven)

The critical event made him thought about his career as a public school teacher. He did not want to be an English teacher in the school any more. He resigned and decided to look for a better job, as a lecturer in a university. That was the beginning of a new journey as an English teacher and a graduate student. He attended the graduate school for her master's degree. He found studying was very productive and could advance his knowledge and skills. At this period he fell in love with writing and researching. Reflecting on completing the master's program he recalled:

"*I found it challenging to meet the advisors to write the thesis and to revise it. Luckily, my supervisor was very supportive and she helped me complete the thesis in 2015."* (Co-constructed Narrative from the Interview with Steven)

While studying for the master's program, he acknowledged that he met many outstanding professors. He really impressed with one of the lecturers who inspired him to become wiser. He recalled that he used to be an inflexible person. He was easily to be frustrated with what happened around him as he saw them against his principles and his ideal things. He often became one sided and opinionated for whatever happened in his life. In the past, he was angry when the principal asked him and other teacher to change the students' grades. Currently, he could see the critical event from different perspectives.

"Now I could see that I could not blame the school and the principal for what happened. It was not entirely their mistakes. The school district and the sub-district were also responsible because they forced schools to have good achievements so that not many students failed the national exams." (Co-constructed Narrative from the Interview with Steven)

Steven acknowledged that the changes were rooted in the discussion with one of his lecturer. He realized that he could not see things just black and white and there were many grey areas he could see now. He said:

"From that time, when I had the discussions with my professors about education issues, religions and life, I felt I became wiser. The discussion might have changed the way I see things and it might have affected my personality—in a better way."(Co-connstructed Narrative from the Interview with Steven)

Steven felt that in the past, he practiced his religion fervently and he was inflexible and intolerant toward people from other religions because he saw them as pagan. So,

he did not like to make friends with people of other religions. Recalling his intolerant views with regrets he said:

"*What kind of person was I in the past? The doctrine of my spiritual teachers taught me not to make friends with people of different religions. So, I did not. I was afraid I would pick up bad influences. I could get infected with bad teachings and I could become evil myself.*" (Co-constructed Narrative from the Interview with Steven)

In the graduate program when he pursued his master's degree he felt enlightened and he could accept different ideas and beliefs and he claimed that he became more tolerant.

Writing Dissertation

Steven enrolled in the doctoral program mainly because he wanted to advance his career to the highest level of in the pecking order in higher education: becoming a full professor. He explained his decision to study for his doctoral degree as follows:

"*I wanted to be a full professor. A full professor required to regularly publish articles in reputable international journals. It would be easier to get funding when a professor could prove himself or herself by publishing.*" (Co-constructed Narrative from the Interview with Steven)

That was why Steven was looking forward to writing his dissertation. The topic was related to the flipped classroom. He explained his topic of interest when he said:

"*So, a flipped classroom involves the combination of online and offline activities. Outside the class, the students were exploring the topic. In the classroom the students discuss and work on tasks. This method worked great for my writing classes.*" (Co-

constructed Narrative from the Interview with Steven)

The challenges he faced were that it was often difficult to meet with the advisors. One of his advisors was very busy and he had difficulties meeting him in person. He did not like meeting online via zoom. He did not provide written feedbacks on what he had written. He wanted to meet in person and have discussions. And it was frustrating as he wanted to finish his dissertation faster.

Formal Education for Self-Transformation and Professional Growth

The narratives of Joan and Steven were developing in a similar direction as they began their career as English teachers at higher education institutions in Indonesia. The stories were progressing from formal study for advanced degrees to participations and engagement with academic communities. It was interesting that the story lines of the two teachers' narratives involved personal and professional changes. Two important points are highlighted below: the importance of formal education and the importance of professional engagement with academic communities.

Joan went to graduate school because she wanted to be a good example for her colleagues and her students. Steven, on the other hand, began his graduate education because of his dissatisfaction of becoming a teacher in a public school. Aside from the differences in their initial motivation, both teachers successfully navigated their formal education and earned the degrees they wanted for advancing their career in higher education. In the Freeman's framework (Burns et al., 2015; Freeman, 2009; Freeman, Webre, & Epperson, 2019), their formal education was the core areas of career growth as teachers.

During the time in the graduate programs, both for their master's and doctoral degrees, the two English teachers underwent changes. Their perspectives about education, research, and life changed. They could see what importance for learning and for their career was. They both saw the importance of being good teacher and researcher.

While Joan's narratives developed around being an example of a good teacher in a higher education institution, Steven narratives were developed from dissatisfaction to changes in his worldview. Indeed, the transformation could exemplify how formal education changed the persons and transformed them into better selves (Elliot, 2015; Hones, 1998; Song, 2016) as acknowledged subjectively by the actors. Steven claimed his changes as becoming wiser self as his professor influence the way he saw the world and the people from different religions. Joan's transformation was more subtle and it was more related to her self-confidence as a teacher and researcher.

Engaging with Academic Communities for Advancing Career

As the two EFL teachers enrolled in the advanced degree programs, their engagement with academic communities marked their progress in their profession. Attending conferences, presenting paper and publishing articles in academic journals were very important in shaping their professional identity as well as in advancing their career in higher education institutions. They realized that engagements with academic communities could enhance their credentials as teachers and researchers. The public acknowledgements of their expertise could bring financial rewards as well as uplifting their career. Both teachers wanted to be full professors and the engagements with the academic communities could serve their aspirations for higher positions.

In Freeman's framework (Burns et al., 2015; Freeman, 2013; Freeman & Richards, 1993; Freeman et al., 2019) the professional engagement occupies wide areas of professional growth—meaning that the engagement is an important factor for teachers to grow in their profession after they complete their formal education. Without engaging with their professional communities, teachers might not grow optimally in the profession. It was the international conference that transformed Joan to claim her professional identity as a researcher. Similarly, it was the publication in an international journal that enhanced their professional identity of English teachers working in higher education institutions.

Conclusions

The trajectory of English teachers' professional growth was influenced by their education and the subsequent engagement with the professional communities. Joan and Steven underwent such experiences in that their transformed themselves to claim their professional identity as teacher-researcher. The narratives of the two English teachers were signified with their transformation during their study and their engagements with the academic communities. The narratives were also built around critical events that influenced their professional trajectory and growth. Therefore, the revelations drawn from the narratives of the two English teachers supports Freeman framework for English teachers' professional growth.

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