



## Staying Agentic in Times of Crisis: A Literature Review for a Narrative Inquiry on Female EFL Teachers

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**Abstract:** *Female English teachers make significant contributions to their field, yet stories about them are under-researched. This paper presents the framework of an ongoing narrative inquiry aimed at understanding female teachers' agency and its role in their professional identity construction during the Covid-19 pandemic. Based on a systematic review of relevant research, the framework displays several key themes, including the significance of active learning and digital literacies, and the scarcity of narrative inquiries into female teachers. We thus argue that in order to gain insights into post-pandemic pedagogy, there is a need for studies that depict female English teachers' agency in enacting their pedagogical competencies and showcase their continuous efforts in constructing their professional identities, despite the challenges that they face. Against the backdrop of our review, the teacher education curriculum must include course(s) on agency and identity construction.*

**Keywords:** *Identity construction; literature review; narrative inquiry; professional identity; teacher agency*

### INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic has greatly affected our education field. A sudden switch to remote teaching brought myriad challenges to most educators. Farrell (2021) explains why it was the case in most contexts: "No language teacher education or development programme could have truly prepared any teacher (or student) for this sudden and emotionally stressful transition" (p.126). Hence, stories of teachers' strenuous experiences matter. We need the narratives to understand how to reimagine, reshape, and navigate post-pandemic teacher education.

We are interested in diving into the stories of Indonesian female teachers' agency in their professional identity construction during the pandemic for the following reasons. Long before the pandemic, female teachers were at the forefront of Indonesian education. In terms of numbers, they take up 70% of the total population of teachers (Kemendikbudristek, 2023; Kull, 2009). Their drive to engage with the profession is multi-faceted, from intrinsic motives (e.g., intellectual mission) to altruistic motives (e.g., contributing to the formation of a better-future

society) (Afrianto, 2014; Mukminin et al., 2017; Suryani, 2016). The number and virtuous drives tell us about their significance in our education system.

As with most women in Indonesia, female teachers are likely in charge of most domestic responsibilities (Afrianto, 2014). During the pandemic, most of them were the primary educators for their children (e.g., Arsendy et al., 2020). In a nutshell, Indonesian female teachers are likely to face complex challenges in enacting roles embedded in their multiple identities (e.g., Aldossari & Chaudhry, 2021). Against this backdrop, their agency is significant. Nonetheless, it appears that their practices were little understood prior to and during the pandemic.

## **AN OVERVIEW OF OUR ONGOING NARRATIVE INQUIRY**

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We attempt to address the gaps mentioned earlier by conducting a narrative inquiry, which is ongoing as we write this paper. As our participants, we involve female teachers from our context, Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in Indonesia. Our probe into the literature informed our decision to employ narrative inquiry for the research design. Narratives allow us to reveal points of tension rooted in the personal, experiential, and concrete (Rodriguez & Polat, 2012). Narratives can encourage teachers to engage in ‘borderland discourses,’ in which they can meta-cognitively negotiate conflicts between their personal and professional selves (p. 364). The pandemic appears to have exacerbated the tensions and conflicts, which are worth telling and to learn from.

Our narrative inquiry looks at the interconnection of pedagogical practices, teacher agency, and professional identity construction, along with their complexities (Sisson, 2016). The study allows us – participants (i.e., teachers) and researchers (i.e., teacher educators) – to interact and engage in the process of collaborative meaning-making (Hendry, 2010). The meanings of our gathered stories empower both parties due to a collective construction of identities. Also, through this collective meaning-making, we address a call from Beijaard et al. (2004) for building a permanent dialogue between all actors in the field to gain a better insight into what counts as professional in teachers’ professional identity.

Four areas become the focus of our narrative inquiry: active learning, digital literacies, teacher agency, and professional identity construction. Both active learning and digital literacies have been ministerial mandates for Indonesian teachers prior to the pandemic, with the purpose of developing students’ potential. Active learning underscores students doing their learning, and they are at centre stage in the meaning-making process (Daouk et al., 2016). This works fittingly with digital literacies in classroom practice, especially in today’s digital age and accentuated by the pandemic. With students being in charge of their learning as their venture’s catchphrase, they have the space needed to elevate their abilities and use technologies for doing, creating, relating, thinking, and becoming – digital literacies (Jones & Hafner, 2012). Also, with the ever-changing nature of digital literacies (see Tour, 2020), i.e., always situated in our social and cultural contexts (e.g., the pandemic and its impacts in our society), students will find their learning meaningful when their digital literacies are recognised, utilised, and elevated.

The launch of Merdeka Belajar (the Emancipated Learning, i.e., a national policy that underscores schools' freedom for independence, creativity, and innovation in learning) in 2019 also means the termination of the controversial and high-stakes national examination in the Indonesian education system. We see that the policy plus the inevitable emergency remote learning due to the pandemic has underpinned the use of digital literacies and online space for our students to explore and experience throughout their education years.

In Indonesia, active learning and digital literacies are among the domains of pedagogical competencies required from and to be performed by teachers, especially those who are certified (i.e., passed their certification programme) or the so-called *pendidik profesional* (professional educators). However, several multifaceted factors contribute to their absence in our classrooms. It takes agency on teachers' part to unceasingly enact active learning and digital literacies in their instruction. The agency is significant in enacting and developing their competencies as well as constructing their identity as professional educators. Hence, the purpose of our ongoing narrative inquiry is twofold: (1) to explore Indonesian female teachers' agency in implementing active learning and using digital literacies in their EFL instruction during the pandemic, and (2) to explain the role of this agency in constructing their identities as professional educators.

## **OUR BACKGROUND LITERATURE REVIEW**

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Presented in this paper, our literature review serves as a framework for establishing the importance of our narrative inquiry (Creswell, 2014). It is categorised as a background of an empirical study that is “commonly used as justification for decisions made in research design, provide theoretical context, or identify a gap in the literature the study intends to fill” (Levy & Ellis, 2006; Templier & Paré, 2015 in Xiao & Watson, 2019, p. 94). This form of a literature review is different from standalone reviews (see Templier & Paré, 2015) which are usually conducted for the following purposes: (a) to analyse the progress of a specific stream of research, (b) to aggregate findings or reconcile equivocal results of prior studies, (c) to review the application of a theoretical model or a methodological approach, (d) to develop a new theory or research model, or (e) to provide a critical account of prior research on a particular topic (Cooper, 1988 in Templier & Paré 2015, p. 114). In light of these categorisations, in our background literature review, we explicate the justification for our research decisions and theoretical contexts. We also identify gaps in the literature that we intend to fill through our narrative inquiry.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS**

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Using Coldron and Smith's (1999) postulation of professional identity construction as our lens, in our narrative inquiry we view agency as its key element. Teachers with agency are vigorous actors who shape and transform their world (Bamberg, 2016). With their agency, teachers are active in their professional learning and/or professional development journey (e.g., Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2011), in their practices, and in using their professional identity to make sense of themselves as teachers.

In understanding how agency intertwines with professional identity, we also draw on Holland et al.'s (1998) concepts of identity and agency in cultural worlds. Specifically, our narrative inquiry departs from an understanding that “identities are lived in and through activity and must be conceptualised as they develop in social practice” (p. 5). With that said, we do not see agency as an innate trait. We see agency as a result of one’s interaction with their sociocultural-sociohistorical contexts, practice with perspective, or both.

Additionally, since the Covid-19 pandemic is our narrative inquiry’s focused context, we regard it as a critical incident (see Sisson, 2016) for our research participants with the justification elaborated in the previous section. We align with Sisson’s proposition that critical incidents and voice are significant to agency and identity construction. Through our inquiry, we document the female EFL teachers’ voices and experiences – stories – regarding their implementation of active learning and use of digital literacies during the critical incident, i.e., the pandemic. We then collaboratively make meanings out of their stories with the help of the concepts of agency and professional identity. Narrative inquiry enables us to understand how the critical incident shapes their growing professional identity and how their agency plays a significant role in the process.

## **SELECTION CRITERIA**

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Our search and review of the existing studies (from 2019-2023) concentrated on the following pertinent areas during the pandemic: active learning, digital literacies, teacher agency, and professional identity construction, which intersect with the field of teacher education. We included over 100 sources in our review. Most of them are from journals with quartile indexes to help ensure that our background review attains its goals, especially for identifying gaps in the literature, and that our ongoing narrative inquiry will result in impactful findings.

At the outset of our study, we deliberately directed our attention to the extant studies that portrayed Indonesian female EFL teachers, although in the literature these studies were limited in number. Methodology-wise, we closely watched the existing studies that employed narrative inquiry and found that they were also scant. Since our search did not yield a substantial number of studies from these two areas, we thus acknowledge it as our review’s inherent weakness.

## **REVIEW METHODS**

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Since the present paper is categorised as a background literature review of an empirical study, our goals are establishing contexts for our research, justifying our research methodology, and identifying gaps in the literature. In reading each relevant study (with particular attention to its findings and conclusions), we kept in mind these goals, the theoretical framework, and the purposes of our narrative inquiry. We then categorised the studies under several themes constructed throughout the review process. Each theme appears to exhibit the attainment of a particular goal of our background literature review. For example, a theme that we named The Scarcity of Narrative Inquiries on Female EFL Teachers built a justification for using narrative inquiry as the design model for our ongoing empirical study. That and the other intertwined themes are presented and explicated in the following section.

## KEY THEMES

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We present here key themes constructed throughout our literature review, and which form its cumulative results. We embed in each theme a claim that built up the reasoning behind our ongoing narrative inquiry. Additionally, in elaborating on each claim, we establish the contexts of our study, justify our methodology, indicate voids in the literature, and explain how our empirical work would address them. Based on these claims, we argue that to advance the progress of our field, we need studies that document female teachers' agency in implementing active learning and using digital literacies in their instruction that disclose their unceasing striving to construct their professional identities.

### *The Dominance of Research on Pre-Service EFL Teachers*

Between 2013 and 2021, research focusing on pre-service teachers (teacher candidates or student teachers – we use the terms interchangeably) dominated most studies in the field. The first line of studies identified was narrative inquiry. Through narratives written by pre-service EFL teachers, Kuswandro (2013) investigated how they made sense of their teacher candidate identity and made meaning of their learning experience. Similarly, Mambu (2015) documented narratives written by pre-service EFL teachers and identified the philosophical themes, which were then used to understand the process of developing pre-service teachers' pedagogical competencies. Likewise, through their narrative inquiry, Nababan and Amalia (2021) revealed challenges faced by EFL teacher candidates in their teaching practice, including difficulties finding suitable materials and boosting students' motivation. These studies showcase the importance of narratives written by teacher candidates for meaning-making.

The next line of inquiry classified was similar to the previous one, but the studies employed research designs other than narrative inquiry. Azizah et al.'s (2018) study highlighted how the quantity of teaching impacts pre-service teachers' critical thinking while reflecting. Nurfaidah et al. (2017) discovered that the level of reflectivity of pre-service teachers was mainly within the range of dialogic reflection, which means they can describe, analyse and evaluate their instructional practices. Widodo and Ferdiansyah (2018) found that pre-service teachers' self-reflection (re)constructed their sense of agency as English teachers and increased their confidence, autonomy, and understanding of praxis in context. Apriliani's (2020) study stressed the significant role of teaching practicum for constructing teacher candidate identity. Triastuti's (2020) study, however, demonstrated that pre-service teachers' reflections did not comprehensively elaborate on the implementation of teacher knowledge base in their actual microteaching practices. Overall, we see that this line of inquiry stresses teaching practice as an essential component of pre-service teacher education and as a source of materials for reflection, emphasising its significance for enhancing teaching quality and constructing professional identities.

The last line of inquiry identified was to review portraits of teacher candidates' teaching practice realities. Abrar et al. (2018) revealed Indonesian pre-service EFL teachers' challenges in using English in their teaching practice and revealed intertwined contributing factors, e.g., linguistic, psychological, and

environmental. Student teachers also received insufficient support, guidance, and feedback in developing their instructional documents and conducting lessons (Kusumarasdyati & Retnaningdyah, 2020). Similarly, Drajadi et al. (2021) found English pre-service teachers still need more support, knowledge, and experience to improve their use of technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge (TPACK) and 21st century learning. In essence, these studies underscore the challenges pre-service teachers face being associated with and the support needed during teaching practice.

The three lines of inquiry suggest the complexities of pre-service teacher education. They agree on the significance of pre-service teachers' narratives or reflections and call for support and feedback needed during their teaching practice. However, to be balanced, drawing on the availability of research-based information, knowledge, and wisdom for improving the quality of EFL teacher education, we need research that involves in-service teachers, especially certified, professional educators. They are the actors who carry out the responsibilities and play significant roles in elevating youth's communicative competence in English, mentoring teacher candidates, and shaping meaningful practices. We need to understand how they make sense of their actions and experiences, including challenges faced during the pandemic. Through our ongoing study, we empirically make this important call.

#### ***A Neglected Area: The Competencies of Certified Teachers as Professional Educators***

We made the above claim (i.e., stated in the subheading) based on the following. The existing research within the same period involving in-service teachers as participants appeared not to focus heavily on their competencies as certified teachers—professional educators. As written in the certificates, this identity is established in teachers who passed their certification program. Indonesia started the program in 2007, yet little is known concerning how the professional identity is constructed sustainably. Much of the focused problems of the existing studies on in-service teachers were around the teaching of English in the underdeveloped regions (Saiful & Triyono, 2018), reflection as a medium in professional development (Cirocki & Widodo, 2019; Hermagustiana et al., 2017; Lubis, 2018; Tosriadi et al., 2018), adaptation to the profession (Mahmud, 2020), teacher cognition in professional development (Hermagustiana et al., 2017; Saputra et al., 2020), teacher identity construction (Swanti, 2020), and critical pedagogy in English teaching (Sulistiyowardani et al., 2020).

The areas above indicate a lack of exploration of the competencies of in-service teachers, especially the certified ones, i.e., as professional educators. Meanwhile, extant reviews and studies show that teacher certification programmes have not yet escalated our teachers' instruction quality (e.g., Halim, 2011; Napitupulu, 2012). The impact of the certification programme on teacher outcomes and students' learning was in question (De Ree, et al., 2018; Kusumawardhani, 2017).

Of the four categories of teacher competencies stated in the Law (Number 14 Year 2005), i.e., pedagogic, professional, social, and personality, pedagogical competencies need close attention from teacher educators and stakeholders. These

competencies comprise knowledge and skills that enable teachers to run effective instruction (Richards, 2010; Sulistyono, 2015) and create meaningful learning environments for all students (Guerrero, 2014). König et al.'s (2021) empirical study underlines the significant roles of teachers' pedagogical competencies for the quality of their instruction and student learning. In TEFL contexts, teachers' pedagogical competence is significant in helping to foster learners' proficiency (e.g., Aghajanzadeh Kiasi, 2020). Pedagogical competencies are also conditions for use of ICT in their instruction (e.g., Suárez-Rodríguez et al., 2018). We also see in-service teachers' pedagogical competencies as the most vital, especially when they mentor teacher candidates' teaching practice (e.g., Bello & Egunsola, 2020).

Previous reviews and research on Indonesian EFL teachers' competencies showed that professional development programmes helped build pedagogical competencies (see Sulistyono & Haswindy, 2018). These competencies were significant for implementing the curriculum (Firman et al., 2019). Unfortunately, there is little research exploring a collaboration of teacher educators and in-service teachers to develop the competencies. An existing study (Nugroho et al., 2020), for example, depicted a mentoring programme designed for in-service EFL teachers, specifically for elevating their practice of constructivist pedagogy. The study showed that the programme successfully expanded the teachers' pedagogical knowledge and practice. However, the study did not portray teacher educators and in-service teachers' joint work to understand their pedagogy better. We see that teacher educators need to learn from this line of inquiry to prepare professional teachers, and teachers will learn from such studies for more effective instruction. In turn, they change the field of language teacher education (Lengeling & Wilson, 2017, para.10). Our ongoing narrative inquiry addresses the practical and knowledge gaps above.

### ***A Portrait in Need: EFL Teachers' Use of Active Learning***

In our contexts, a domain of pedagogical competencies that needs immediate scholarly attention is teaching methods. The field currently adopts at least two approaches to teaching the target language: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Genre-Based Approach (GBA). They share the same theoretical underpinnings, i.e., social constructivism, aligning with student-oriented instruction or active learning – a ministerial mandate in Indonesia.

Recent studies showed how active learning helped EFL learners acquire the target language in meaningful ways, such as providing opportunities for peer interaction, using the target language in this interaction, and giving and receiving vocabulary help (Astuti & Lammers, 2017; Astuti & Barratt, 2018; Astuti & Barratt, 2021). Unfortunately, most EFL teachers in Indonesia have not yet mastered and implemented this pedagogy (see Alwasilah, 2013), which is why their EFL learners have not yet taken active roles in their learning (Yulia, 2013). By exploring the relevant literature, we became more aware of the causes of the resistance to active learning and progressive education in general, such as “cultural constraints and different philosophical beliefs, from which Indonesian education is historically based” (Zulfikar, 2013, p. 124).

In the times of the pandemic, implementing active learning appeared to be challenging. Lestyanawati and Widyantoro's (2020) study reported strategies primarily used by Indonesian teachers in their remote teaching, i.e., social media chat and video conferencing. They also highlighted teachers' difficulties in delivering the learning materials. However, they did not indicate that active learning was among the teachers' methods to tackle the problems. Meanwhile, based on their study on students' voices on learning during the pandemic, Pasaribu and Dewi (2021) recommend that teachers facilitate student-student interaction in their remote learning. And social interaction is a hallmark of active learning.

In sum, the field needs studies that portray exemplary EFL teachers' pedagogical competencies in action to shed light on how to elevate them. Our ongoing narrative inquiry helps to fill this void in the literature. Studies in this area will also disclose multifaceted challenges and conundrums that will add to our current understanding of active learning, including its implementation during difficult times such as the pandemic.

### ***The Need for Research on Use of ICT and Digital Literacies in Language Learning***

Our probe into the literature shows us that the field needs research on the use of ICT and digital literacies. A ministerial mandate for the use of ICT in the educational processes received a warm welcome from students. They perceived ICT use positively, as it helped make a close connection between learning and their lives (Priyatno, 2017). Unfortunately, the experience of ICT-mediated learning was not as much as they expected, especially in their language learning (Eryansyah et al., 2019; Renandya & Jacobs, 2021). They wished to receive extra guidance for using technologies and increasing their digital literacies (Lammers & Astuti, 2021; Azhari & Fajri, 2022). Notwithstanding, previous studies indicated concerns about the readiness of our teachers to integrate ICT in their teaching (e.g., Harendita, 2013).

Several recent studies demonstrated how teachers made efforts to carry out the mandate despite various challenges facing them. The challenges include the limited ICT infrastructure in schools (Lestari, 2020; Lestyanawati & Widyantoro, 2020; Nova, 2017) and an unstable Internet connection (Rodliyah, 2018). Students face the same problems (see Williyani & Sirniawati, 2020) plus a lack of parental support (Lestyanawati & Widyantoro, 2020). Additionally, due to the policy for emergency remote learning because of the pandemic, EFL teachers capitalised on the potential of ICT and expressed the need for training on its integration in their instruction (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Fitri & Putro, 2021). Similarly, Pasaribu and Dewi (2021) stressed the importance of equipping teachers with "online communicative and digital skills to become more capable and creative when they deliver lessons, facilitate interactions, and give feedback in an online environment" (p. 420).

The studies above indicate calls for digital technologies for language learning in pre-service EFL programmes and for escalating in-service EFL teachers' TPACK through professional development held by teacher education programmes (e.g., Nugroho & Mutiaraningrum, 2020; Suárez-Rodríguez et al., 2018). Additionally, Tondeur et al. (2013), Wang et al. (2018), and Farrell (2021)



remind us that promoting ICT and TPACK should be a systemic effort. Why? In integrating ICT into teaching, active learning cannot be guaranteed. Thus, it is significant that teaching pre-service teachers how to integrate ICT should also be in line with the attempt to guide them to create and produce meaningful and realistic tasks for students (Demirtaş, 2020; Haydn, 2014). Similarly, studies from the context of in-service teachers' TPACK professional development highlight that technologies' value for student learning depends on how effectively teachers use them to support their instruction (e.g., Lehiste, 2015). This means that teacher educators themselves, including their education institutions' curriculum, need to be equipped with ICT and TPACK.

We also translate Tondeur et al.'s (2013) advocacy as an invitation for a collaboration between teacher educators and in-service teachers in advancing their use of ICT, TPACK, and digital literacies for students' meaningful learning. Additionally, Harris (2016) asserts, "...in-service teachers will continue to require – and benefit from – focused, situated, authentic, and personalised ways to develop their technological pedagogical content knowledge" (p. 20). Our ongoing narrative inquiry addresses these calls. Information and knowledge generated from research such as ours will help ensure that young Indonesians master and reap the benefits of ICT and digital literacies in their life in and out of school (e.g., Lie et al., 2020).

### *An Area Worth Exploring: Teacher Agency during the Pandemic*

Agency is intertwined with professional identity construction. Research shows that teachers' agency plays a role in realising their commitment and identity as professional educators and sustaining their professional development (e.g., Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Tao & Gao, 2017). Unfortunately, especially in our field, research on teacher agency is scant. Most researchers in the field (e.g., Apriliani, 2020; Mambu, 2017; Swanti, 2020) have not yet clearly depicted and documented the closeness of agency-identity relationships.

In light of our literature review, we argue that teachers need the agency to enact their professional identity and continue developing their pedagogical competencies, not to mention during challenging times. A study from the U.S. shows that "despite teachers' inexperience and unpreparedness" for remote teaching during the pandemic, "they were moderately prepared to use various digital tools and willing to make online learning work for them and their students" (Gudmundsdottir & Hathaway, 2020, p. 239). Their study suggests that teacher agency could be activated, and is in line with what Bailey et al. (2023) found regarding Colombian foreign language instructors' display of agency during the pandemic. A similar theme, namely resilience, was found in the stories of how English teachers in Asia (Indonesia involved) dealt with the pandemic (Lee & Yin, 2021). These teachers could develop themselves professionally for emergency remote teaching and lessening the learning gap. While the theme of professional identity emerged in their study, Lee and Yin did not link it to agency, its essential element.

To inform future teacher education, we need to document how in-service teachers' proactive agency (Jenkins, 2020) plays out in the challenging learning environment. Thus, empirical research such as our ongoing narrative inquiry is

necessary. The findings will help address “the need for pre-service and in-service teacher education to move beyond providing just cognitive growth opportunities to helping educators expand their adaptability, creativity, social growth, flexibility, critical approaches, and identities as teachers” (Trust & Whalen, 2021, p. 13). Our narrative inquiry will generate findings to inform teacher education on how EFL teachers exercise their agency to grow their professional identities in the midst of crisis. We specifically look at how their agency plays a role in their implementation of active learning and use of digital literacies.

### ***The Scarcity of Narrative Inquiries on Female EFL Teachers***

To examine the interconnections between agency and identity as realised in teachers’ pedagogical competencies, in our ongoing study we employ narrative inquiry. We have indicated that several previous studies have used narrative inquiry to investigate teachers’ identity construction practices. However, most of these studies (Apriliani, 2020; Kasmiran, 2020; Mambu, 2015, 2017; Santoso et al., 2019; Swanti, 2020; Widya et al., 2020; Yanto & Pravitasari, 2020) focused on pre-service teachers and have not entirely placed them as agentive individuals who thrive in their profession. The researchers valued the pre-service teachers’ experiences and helped them become empowered through the process of meaning-making via interviews and/or reflective journals. Yet, these narrative studies did not utilise interactive and reflective dialogues between the teacher educators and the teachers, which is essentially needed in our endeavour to elevate both individual and collective agency and construct our professional identities. In our narrative inquiry, we ensure that such dialogic and reflective conversations happen in order to empower both parties.

None of the reviewed studies purposely involved only female teacher(s) as participants. In his narrative inquiry, Yumarnamto (2013) involved a female English teacher, yet the recruitment criteria were not detailed. Additionally, the study did not touch upon the agency of the involved teacher in her professional identity construction. Nonetheless, Yumarnamto’s work (see also Kavrayici, 2020; Poedjiastutie et al., 2021) reminds us of how socio-cultural and political factors are central in forming teachers’ professional identity, which we highly anticipate in our narrative inquiry in progress.

### **PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS**

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As we have witnessed and through our literature review, in times of and post-crisis, good teaching is good teaching. Furthermore, research shows that active learning remains evergreen as a tool for realising good teaching. It needs to take place in our classrooms, remotely or in-person, to enhance students’ learning and develop virtues needed to be active citizens of the world. Thus, teachers need to continuously strengthen their beliefs in active learning. In doing so, they equip themselves with digital technologies that accommodate its effectiveness.

We now see how active learning is compatible with and accommodated by digital technologies and literacies that can work together to enhance students’ learning engagement and meaning-making. Our review of extant studies demonstrates how students in our contexts demand the incorporation of ICT and

the use of digital literacies in their English learning. Our teachers' current readiness for meeting the demand might not be ideal yet. Nevertheless, we recommend that they learn as they go and strive in their endeavour.

Through this literature review, we understand how teacher agency is predominantly invisible. And looking at teachers' stories (especially from the pandemic episodes) allows us to see their agentic selves, i.e., how their agency manifests in their contexts. Imants and Van der Wal (2020) conceptualise that individuals' agency is shown when they "make decisions, take initiatives, act proactively rather than reactively, and deliberately strive and function to reach a certain end" (p. 2). They suggest that individuals with agency interact with and within specific contexts. This implies that in facing times of crises, in meaningful ways, teachers need to have conversations with their students, like-minded colleagues, and communities of educators. Such engagement is essential to understanding the situation better, staying agentic (i.e., persistently performing agentic actions) (see Thumvichit, 2021), levelling up their agency, and staying the course. When that happens, quality instruction carries on, collective agency is activated, knowledge of pedagogy is shared, and systemic educational transformation is likely attainable. Since we see that the Covid-19 pandemic is a critical incident for teacher agency and thus for identity construction, we are hopeful that as we settle into a Covid-19 endemic world, active learning and digital literacies will take place meaningfully in our EFL classrooms.

## CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Finally, we end this paper by connecting the themes we have discussed and explicating their meanings for our ongoing narrative inquiry. The dominance of research on pre-service teachers in Indonesian EFL contexts has driven us to direct our gaze at the other significant actors, i.e., in-service teachers. Since they are the field's cooperating figures, their experiences, tacit knowledge, and practices are valuable to explore.

We learn from our literature review that in Indonesian contexts, in-service teachers' competencies are generally in question regardless of their certification status. We see this as a call for investigations into the contributing multifaceted factors. With this in mind, in our work, we look at how exemplary teachers strive to practise their pedagogical competencies. We examine how they implement active learning and use digital literacies in their instruction through their practices and stories, and how they are shaped by our contexts. We selected the two educational innovations as the focus of our inquiry because, as our literature review demonstrates, they do not seem to be fully present in our EFL classrooms. Additionally, the global Covid-19 pandemic has forced teachers to switch to emergency remote instruction. Inevitably, in times of crisis, in-service teachers need to be able to integrate active learning and digital literacies for meaningful language learning.

Our probe into the literature also gave us an understanding of the challenges and complexities of emergency remote teaching. It requires agency on the part of the teachers to carry out quality instruction during the pandemic. We confide in female teachers because the statistics suggest their significant contribution to

Indonesian education, which might be the case in other contexts. Nevertheless, their stories are not widely documented. We believe in the affordances of narrative inquiry to record, understand, and collaboratively make meanings out of their agency in enacting and constructing their professional identities amidst the pandemic.

Knowledge generated from our ongoing narrative inquiry will be beneficial for escalating the quality of active learning implementation, teaching and practices of digital literacies and TPACK in language teacher education, and mentoring pre-service teachers. Taken together, the findings of our study will give us insight into post-pandemic pedagogy. Lastly, we call for similar studies with a different focus, such as investigating in-service teachers' professional competencies. Together, we make meanings of ample stories from in-service teachers and contribute to the progress of our field.

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