

Narrative Inquiry into English PPG Students' Experiences in Implementing Teaching Strategies in Classrooms

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Abstract

This study analyzes the actual experiences of two English Teacher Professional Education Program (PPG) participants utilizing English Language Teaching (ELT) practices in real classrooms. Using qualitative narrative inquiry, the research focuses on how these experiences influence pedagogical decision-making and professional identity development. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and document analysis of teaching materials, then analyzed using thematic narrative analysis involving narrative reconstruction and coding. The results show a dramatic shift from idealized instructional expectations to the reality of classroom praxis shock. Contextual limitations, such as unstable internet, varying student motivation, and infrastructural limitations, were weighed against theoretical knowledge. Through these difficulties, identities developed: one participant showed a pragmatic, robust identity centered on emotional control and instructional effectiveness, while the other created a reflective practitioner identity marked by contextual sensitivity. According to the study's findings, the application of ELT strategies in the PPG setting is a non-linear, adaptive process that is mediated by contextual awareness and reflection rather than just methodological conformity. According to these findings, the PPG program should prioritize guided mentoring and narrative reflection in order to better prepare instructors for uncertainty in the classroom.

Keywords – Narrative Inquiry, PPG Program, English Teaching Strategies, Teacher Professional Identity, ELT.

Introduction

The Teacher Professional Education Program (*Pendidikan Profesi Guru/PPG*) plays a crucial role in enhancing teachers' pedagogical competence in Indonesia. As a professional preparation program, PPG is designed to bridge theoretical knowledge acquired at universities with practical teaching skills required in real classroom contexts. However, many pre-service teachers experience what is commonly referred to as *reality shock*, a condition where idealized pedagogical theories conflict with the complex realities of school environments (Farrell, 2016).

In the context of English Language Teaching (ELT), this challenge becomes more pronounced. PPG students are expected to implement innovative teaching strategies such as Communicative Language Teaching

(CLT), Task-Based Learning (TBL), role play, and gamification in classrooms that are often heterogeneous in terms of students' proficiency levels, motivation, and socio-cultural backgrounds. As a result, teaching becomes a dynamic process of negotiation rather than a linear application of theory (Abdul Rahman & Kurniawan, 2022).

Previous studies suggest that effective language teaching is not determined solely by the methods used, but also by how teachers interpret and make sense of their teaching experiences (Farrell, 2016). Teaching experiences contribute significantly to the development of teachers' professional identity, as teachers reflect on successes, failures, emotions, and contextual constraints encountered during practice.

Despite the growing number of studies evaluating the effectiveness of the PPG program, most existing research adopts quantitative or evaluative approaches. There is still limited research that deeply explores the personal and professional experiences of Propesional Education Program (PPG) students through narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry allows researchers to uncover the “stories behind practice,” including emotions, beliefs, pedagogical dilemmas, and identity formation that are often invisible in observational or survey-based studies (Barkhuizen, 2011). Therefore, this study employs a narrative inquiry approach to explore the lived experiences of two English PPG participants in implementing English language teaching strategies in real classroom settings. By focusing on their narratives, this study seeks to understand how teaching experiences influence pedagogical decision-making and the development of professional identity as emerging English teachers. This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do PPG English students narrate their experiences of implementing English language teaching strategies in real classroom settings?
2. How do these narrated experiences shape their pedagogical decision-making and professional identity as emerging English teachers?

Based on the research questions, the objectives of this study are:

1. To explore and describe in depth the narratives of PPG English students regarding their experiences in implementing English language teaching strategies.

2. To interpret how these experiences influence their pedagogical decisions and contribute to the development of their professional identity as English teachers.

This study is expected to contribute in several ways:

This research makes significant contributions across theoretical, practical, and professional dimensions. Theoretically, it enriches the literature on narrative inquiry within teacher education, particularly focusing on the ELT and PPG program contexts. Practically, the findings offer valuable insights for PPG organizers, educators, and mentors to refine curriculum design and enhance support for teaching practica. Furthermore, in terms of professional development, the study provides a critical reflective space for PPG students and novice teachers to examine their teaching practices and ongoing professional growth.

The transition from teacher education programs to actual classroom practice often triggers a 'praxis shock,' where novice teachers encounter a significant gap between theoretical ideals and school realities. This phenomenon is frequently exacerbated by epistemic injustice, where the practical wisdom of teachers is undervalued compared to academic theory (Ding et al., 2026). In the Indonesian context, this gap is further widened by institutional barriers and a lack of resources, making the implementation of innovative strategies like Differentiated Instruction (DI) particularly challenging (Jufrianto et al., 2025; Suprayogi et al., 2025). Consequently, teacher education must be viewed not as a static knowledge transfer but as a dynamic process of knowledge translation, where pre-service teachers select and adapt academic concepts to fit

localized, resource-constrained environments (Eriksen et al., 2026).

Building upon these perspectives, this study employs a narrative inquiry to delve into the lived experiences of pre-service teachers as they navigate these systemic complexities. By centering their personal stories, this research aims to illuminate how novice educators negotiate their professional identity and exercise agency while grappling with the tensions between theoretical training and the practical constraints of Indonesian classrooms.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach using narrative inquiry as its primary methodological framework. Narrative inquiry is grounded in the assumption that human experience is best understood through stories, as individuals construct meaning by narrating and reflecting on their lived experiences (Williams et al., 2026). This approach is particularly appropriate for exploring how teachers interpret, negotiate, and make sense of their professional practice within specific educational contexts.

Specifically, this study employs a narrative inquiry involving two participants, focusing on the lived experiences of two PPG English participants as they implement English language teaching strategies in real classroom settings. Rather than aiming for generalization, the research seeks to generate in-depth, context-sensitive insights into how pedagogical knowledge is enacted, adapted, and reinterpreted through teaching practice.

The choice of narrative inquiry allows the researcher to capture the temporal, social, and contextual dimensions of participants' experiences. Temporally, the study examines how participants' past expectations, present

classroom challenges, and future professional aspirations are interconnected. Socially, it explores the influence of relationships with students, mentor teachers, and school communities. Contextually, it considers how institutional conditions and classroom environments shape instructional decisions.

By involving two participants, this study enables a cross-narrative perspective that highlights both shared patterns and individual variations in teaching experiences. This design strengthens the analytical depth of the study while maintaining the core principle of narrative inquiry namely, prioritizing depth of understanding over breadth of representation (Barkhuizen, 2011).

Overall, this research design is well suited to addressing the research questions, as it foregrounds participants' voices and emphasizes meaning-making processes related to pedagogical decision-making and professional identity development within the PPG context (Zhang et al., 2026).

The study involves two English teachers who were selected through a purposive sampling technique to ensure that the data gathered aligns closely with the research objectives. These participants were chosen based on specific inclusion criteria: being either current students or alumni of the Teacher Professional Education Program (PPG), possessing practical teaching experience in authentic classroom environments, and demonstrating a readiness to provide transparent accounts of their professional journeys. To uphold ethical research protocols and ensure anonymity, the participants are identified throughout the narrative using the pseudonyms P1 and P2.

Data collection was facilitated through a dual-method approach involving in-depth, semi-structured interviews and comprehensive document analysis. Each participant engaged in two to three interview sessions, which allowed for a detailed exploration of their personal backgrounds, classroom encounters, pedagogical obstacles, and critical reflections. To strengthen the narrative reconstruction and achieve data triangulation, the researcher examined primary teaching artifacts, including lesson plans (RPP/Modul Ajar) and associated instructional materials.

The analytical phase utilized Riessman's (2025) framework for thematic narrative analysis. This involved a systematic process of "restorying" or narrative reconstruction to organize raw data into a coherent sequence, followed by the coding of significant life events and reflective moments. These codes were then synthesized into thematic categories that directly address the core research questions. To establish the trustworthiness of the findings, the study integrated member checking for credibility, the cross-referencing of interviews and documents for triangulation, and the maintenance of a detailed audit trail to ensure the dependability of the entire research process.

Participants provide informed consent. Their identities are anonymized, and all data are securely stored. This study adhered to established ethical standards in qualitative educational research. Prior to data collection, all participants provided informed consent after receiving clear information regarding the purpose of the study, research procedures, potential risks, and their rights as participants, including the right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. To protect confidentiality, participants' identities were anonymized

through the use of pseudonyms and initials, and no identifying institutional or personal information was disclosed in the reporting of findings. All interview recordings, transcripts, and supporting documents were securely stored in password-protected digital folders accessible only to the researcher. The data were used solely for academic purposes and handled with respect for participants' privacy, ensuring that their narratives were represented ethically and responsibly.

Finding and Discussion

The narratives of P1 and P2 illustrate the complex enactment of teacher agency within the Indonesian classroom context. Theoretically, teacher agency is a temporally evolving and relational phenomenon, serving as a core pillar for educational reform (Pan & Chen, 2026). It is not merely an individual capacity but is deeply mediated by socio-material factors such as classroom infrastructure and the teacher's own self-positioning within hierarchical systems (Gu, 2026). Furthermore, exercising agency involves a purposeful negotiation of moral, ethical, and care-related values, especially when navigating constraining university or school structures (Kusters et al., 2026). For novice teachers, this process is often intertwined with emotional labour, as they struggle to balance professional expectations with the exhausting reality of classroom management (Wu & Liu, 2026). By applying this lens, we can see how the participants' divergent reactions to classroom constraints were not merely accidental, but rooted in their evolving professional identities.

Overview of the Participants

This study involved two participants who were pre-service English teachers enrolled in the Teacher Professional Education Program (PPG) with different teaching contexts. The first participant (P1/FUP) was a PPG graduate in 2025

with approximately one year of teaching experience at the junior secondary school (SMP) level in Malang City. P1 implemented Problem-Based Learning, differentiated instruction, and gamification strategies in classroom practice. The second participant (P2/A) was a PPG participant/alumnus in 2025 with approximately 2.5 years of teaching experience at a vocational high school (SMK) in Rembang Regency. P2 predominantly employed Project-Based Learning, Task-Based Learning, and gamification using digital platforms such as Kahoot.

The contrasting teaching contexts of the two participants provided rich narrative data, enabling this study to explore how English teaching strategies learned during the PPG program were implemented, adapted, and reinterpreted across different school settings.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do PPG English students narrate their experiences of implementing English language teaching strategies in real classroom settings?
2. What factors influence the implementation of English language teaching strategies and the development of professional identity based on PPG students' experiences?

Findings Related to RQ 1: Narrated Experiences of Strategy Implementation From Idealized Expectations to Classroom Reality

Both participants indicated that their classroom practices were initially guided by idealized expectations constructed during the PPG program. P1 explicitly described an image of an ideal English teacher as adaptive and student-oriented,

stating, "I imagined that an English teacher should be flexible and truly understand students' conditions, not merely follow the lesson plan." This expectation was reflected in P1's emphasis on needs analysis, contextual learning, and differentiated tasks. Similarly, P2 envisioned the teacher as a facilitator who creates an enjoyable learning atmosphere, noting, "For me, a teacher is not the center of the class, but someone who makes students feel comfortable and willing to participate."

These idealized images functioned as pedagogical orientations that shaped lesson planning and classroom interaction. For P1, student-centeredness translated into continuous adjustment of materials and activities based on learners' responses. For P2, the facilitator role was manifested in efforts to reduce classroom tension and encourage engagement through interactive and playful activities.

However, classroom realities frequently disrupted these expectations. P1 recounted a critical incident related to technological dependence: "The electricity suddenly went out, even though everything I prepared was digital. I panicked, but I had to think quickly." In contrast, P2 highlighted motivational and technological constraints, explaining, "Sometimes I already use Kahoot, but the internet signal is unstable, or the students are simply not focused."

The experience of P1 highlights the hybrid and structurally uneven nature of teacher agency (Gu, 2026). When the digital tools failed, P1 experienced a breakdown in cognitive self-regulation, leading to heightened emotional exhaustion (Bodensteiner et al., 2025). This panic suggests that P1's projective identitythe teacher she aspired to be was heavily reliant on multimodal resources. As noted by Lei and Zhang (2024), while digital modes are crucial, the 'dynamicity

of mode choices' and the use of body language are essential 'scaffolding' tools that teachers must employ when primary resources are unavailable (Zhang et al., 2026). P1's struggle illustrates that without high DI self-efficacy, novice teachers may perceive a total loss of pedagogical control during technical failures (Suprayogi et al., 2025).

These narratives illustrate the phenomenon of praxis shock, in which pedagogical ideals collide with situational constraints. Such moments were emotionally charged and required immediate pedagogical improvisation, marking an important transition from theoretical preparedness to practical teaching wisdom.

Ultimately, P1's experience highlights a critical vulnerability in teacher preparation: a heavy reliance on technology that may not be supported by the school's infrastructure. Her struggle to improvise during a technical failure reveals a gap in socio-material resilience, where the teacher's intended agency is effectively paralyzed by the inadequacy of institutional facilities.

Teaching Strategies Implemented in the Classroom

P1 consistently implemented instruction grounded in initial assessment and learners' needs. Describing a speaking lesson using a board game, P1 stated, "I deliberately used a board game so students would speak without feeling like they were being tested." This narrative demonstrates how pedagogical strategies were adapted to reduce learners' anxiety and increase oral participation.

The integration of Problem-Based Learning with game-based media enabled students to engage in communicative tasks in a low-stress environment. P1's narrative suggests that strategy implementation was flexible and

responsive rather than rigid, allowing instructional objectives to be maintained while accommodating students' affective readiness.

In contrast, P2 relied heavily on gamification and project-based learning to sustain student engagement. As P2 explained, "When the class starts getting noisy and unfocused, I usually insert a game or ice breaker to bring their energy back." This reflects a pragmatic approach to classroom management and instructional flexibility.

In contrast, P2 demonstrated a more resilient professional agency by successfully integrating local cultural contexts and game-based learning into the classroom. This adaptation aligns with the MM-DI (Mind-Mapping integrated Differentiated Instruction) framework, which suggests that combining visual tools with differentiated strategies fosters student creativity and engagement (Pan & Chen, 2026). P2's ability to modify the game based on student behavior reflects a sophisticated form of knowledge translation, where he moved beyond mere reproduction of theory to an intentional selection of practice-relevant ideas (Eriksen et al., 2026). By anchoring his teaching in Problem-Based Learning (PBL) that resonates with the students' lived realities, P2 bridged the epistemic boundaries between the PPG curriculum and the actual needs of Indonesian vocational students (Annajmi et al., 2026).

Although P2's narrative was less detailed, it highlights the importance of immediacy and classroom atmosphere in strategy implementation. The effectiveness of technology-based strategies was closely tied to students' motivation, classroom mood, and situational readiness at a given moment.

Overall, the narrative of P2 demonstrates a higher degree of

pedagogical flexibility, where challenges are met with creative improvisation rather than distress. By successfully modifying his teaching strategies to fit the students' interests, P2 exemplifies how a pre-service teacher can exercise agency to bridge the gap between abstract theory and the messy realities of a vocational classroom

Critical Moments and Pedagogical Decision-Making

Both participants experienced critical moments when lesson plans did not unfold as expected. P1 described this disruption as emotionally challenging: "That was when I realized the lesson plan is important, but the class is far more important." This statement reflects a shift from procedural compliance to situational prioritization.

P1 responded by substituting digital media with offline worksheets, demonstrating adaptive decision-making under pressure. This moment became a reflective turning point in which pedagogical authority was redefined as responsiveness rather than strict adherence to pre-planned procedures.

Meanwhile, P2 viewed such disruptions as routine, stating, "Now I'm more relaxed. If it doesn't work, I just change the approach." This pragmatic stance indicates growing professional confidence, where unexpected challenges are normalized rather than perceived as failures.

The contrasting narratives suggest different stages of professional development. While P1 framed critical moments as learning opportunities requiring reflection, P2 framed them as practical problems requiring immediate solutions. Both responses, however, signify the emergence of pedagogical agency.

Findings Related to RQ 2: Pedagogical Decision-Making and Professional Identity

Contextual Factors

Contextual factors played a significant role in shaping the implementation of teaching strategies. School facilities, particularly access to electricity and internet connectivity, emerged as dominant influences on instructional choices for both participants. Beyond infrastructure, student characteristics such as motivation, classroom discipline, and language proficiency strongly affected how strategies were enacted. Both participants emphasized that strategies considered effective in theory required substantial modification when applied to heterogeneous classrooms (Abdul Rahman & Kurniawan, 2022).

These findings indicate that pedagogical success in English language teaching is deeply embedded in situational conditions. Contextual awareness, therefore, emerged as a core component of professional competence rather than an optional teaching skill.

Personal and Professional Factors

Personal factors such as self-confidence, emotional readiness, and reflective capacity played a crucial role in navigating classroom uncertainty. P1 reflected on identity development by stating, "Now I feel that I don't have to be a perfect teacher, but a teacher who is willing to learn." This indicates a shift toward a reflective practitioner identity.

Similarly, P2 articulated a transformation in self-perception: "I used to want everything to be ideal; now I'm more realistic and calm." This change suggests increased emotional regulation and professional maturity.

Together, these narratives demonstrate that professional identity

development is closely tied to how teachers interpret and respond to classroom challenges. Reflection and emotional resilience emerged as key personal resources in sustaining pedagogical practice.

Support from the School Environment

Support from mentor teachers and colleagues played a significant role in helping participants navigate pedagogical challenges. Both participants described informal discussions with senior teachers as valuable sources of reassurance and practical advice. A supportive school environment provided space for experimentation and reduced anxiety associated with making mistakes. Such collegial support contributed to participants' willingness to adapt teaching strategies and reflect critically on their classroom experiences.

These findings underscore the importance of collaborative school cultures in supporting novice teachers' professional learning and identity development.

Discussion

This study examined the narrated experiences of two English Teacher Professional Education Program (PPG) participants in implementing English Language Teaching (ELT) strategies in real classroom contexts. The findings indicate that pedagogical strategy implementation is inherently contextual, adaptive, and non-linear, supporting the core assumption of narrative inquiry that professional practice is best understood through lived experiences rather than prescriptive instructional models (Cooper, 2026). (This finding resonates with previous narrative studies in Indonesian EFL contexts, which highlight the role of classroom uncertainty in shaping novice teachers' professional identity (Chen et al., 2026).

The narratives of both participants reveal that theories and strategies learned during the PPG program functioned as an initial pedagogical framework rather than fixed procedures. In practice, these theoretical foundations were continuously negotiated and reshaped in response to classroom realities such as students' motivation, classroom dynamics, and infrastructural limitations. This finding aligns with (Farrell, 2016; Thomas et al., 2026), who argue that teaching knowledge is constructed through experience and reflection rather than direct theory-to-practice transfer.

The findings also demonstrate that the transition from idealized conceptions of teaching to pragmatic classroom practice constitutes a critical stage in teacher professional identity development. In line with Beijgaard et al. (2004), both participants' identities evolved through engagement with classroom challenges and pedagogical decision-making. P1's narrative illustrates the emergence of a reflective practitioner identity, marked by increased contextual sensitivity and willingness to learn from uncertainty. Meanwhile, P2's narrative reflects a pragmatic and resilient professional identity, emphasizing flexibility, emotional regulation, and instructional efficiency.

Moreover, *critical incidents* such as lesson plans failing to unfold as expected played a pivotal role in shaping professional learning. These moments became sites of reflection and meaning-making, where participants reassessed their beliefs about effective teaching. This supports Barkhuizen's (2011) assertion that teachers' narratives reveal emotional and cognitive dimensions of teaching that often remain invisible in traditional evaluative studies.

Overall, the discussion confirms that ELT strategy implementation within

the PPG context cannot be reduced to methodological compliance. Instead, it represents a dynamic process mediated by reflection, contextual awareness, and identity negotiation. These findings affirm the relevance of narrative inquiry for capturing the complexity of early-career teacher development.

Conclusion

Based on the two research questions guiding this study, several conclusions can be drawn. First, the narrated experiences of PPG English participants reveal a clear transition from idealized images of the “ideal teacher” to the realities of classroom practice. This transition is characterized by continuous adaptation, improvisation, and reflective learning rather than linear mastery of prescribed strategies.

Second, the implementation of ELT strategies and the development of professional identity are shaped by the interaction between contextual factors such as school facilities, student characteristics, and institutional support and personal-professional factors, including self-confidence, emotional readiness, and reflective capacity. These findings reinforce the view that teacher professional identity is an ongoing, experiential, and socially situated process.

Ultimately, this study reveals that the development of novice teacher identity is a process of constant negotiation between personal aspirations and professional tensions (Cooper, 2026b). To mitigate teacher attrition, induction programs like PPG should focus on fostering shared epistemic agency and providing training in cognitive self-regulation strategies (Bodensteiner et al., 2025; Eriksen et al., 2026). Developing a teacher's capacity for agentic self-positioning enabling them to act purposefully even in resource-poor settings is the key to ensuring long-term

professional growth and resilience in the face of systemic challenges (Gu, 2026; Pan & Chen, 2026).

In conclusion, the divergent experiences of P1 and P2 underscore that the transition from a student teacher to a professional educator is not merely a technical journey, but a profound negotiation of identity and agency. This study highlights that while theoretical knowledge from the PPG program is essential, its success in the field is heavily mediated by the teacher's emotional resilience and the socio-material conditions of the school. Therefore, this research suggests that teacher education in Indonesia must move beyond pedagogical compliance. It is imperative for training programs to cultivate 'improvisational agency' and 'contextual flexibility,' enabling pre-service teachers to transform institutional constraints into opportunities for creative knowledge translation. By fostering a resilient professional identity that is prepared for the unpredictable realities of the classroom, we can better support novice teachers in navigating the 'praxis shock' and ensuring long-term commitment to the teaching profession in diverse and resource-constrained settings

Implications for the PPG Program

The findings suggest that the PPG program should place stronger emphasis on experience-based and narrative reflection, in addition to methodological training. Structured reflective practices, guided mentoring, and dialogic supervision may better prepare pre-service teachers to navigate classroom uncertainty. Teaching strategies should be presented not as rigid techniques, but as adaptable resources that require contextual judgment.

Implications for Novice Teachers

For novice English teachers, this study highlights the importance of embracing

uncertainty as a natural component of professional growth. Developing pedagogical flexibility, emotional resilience, and reflective habits can support sustainable teaching practices. Classroom challenges should be reframed as learning opportunities rather than indicators of professional failure.

Implications for Future Research

Future research may extend this study by involving a larger number of participants across diverse educational contexts and PPG pathways. Methodologically, combining narrative inquiry with classroom observation or reflective journals could further enrich understanding of how pedagogical knowledge is enacted and transformed over time.

Limitations

This study involved only two participants; therefore, the findings are not intended for statistical generalization. However, this limitation aligns with the epistemological orientation of narrative inquiry, which prioritizes depth and meaning over breadth. Additionally, reliance on retrospective self-reported narratives may introduce recall bias, although member checking was employed to enhance credibility.

Recommendations

It is recommended that PPG institutions and partner schools strengthen reflective mentoring systems and promote collaborative professional learning communities. Providing structured spaces for narrative sharing between mentor teachers and PPG participants may support deeper professional learning and foster sustainable identity development among novice English teachers.

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