

# The Career Path of an Indonesian EFL Teacher: A Professional Capital Perspective

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## Abstract

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Three components of teachers' professional capital are human capital, social capital, and decisional capital according to Hargreaves and Fullan (2012). These three aspects of professional capital are meant to be part and parcel of developing the teaching profession. In this article, the author focusses on professional capital as a framework by putting the emphasis on the decisional aspect. In this study, the decisional capital is not only found at the micro level of education: the classroom and school level. Beyond that, a teacher also needs to make professional decisions that will affect her/his professional growth and trajectory. To illustrate this professional path through the lens of decisional capital, the author outlines the narrative of decision-making of an Indonesian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher. The findings of the study shed light on the Indonesian teacher's journey to becoming an English teacher and how the journey has been marked by her decisions regarding her career and her engagement with the professional communities in Indonesia.

## Keywords

EFL teacher, professionalism, professional capital, narrative inquiry, Indonesia

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Hargreaves and Fullan (2012; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2013) identify three components of teachers' professional capital: human capital, social capital, and decisional capital. Human capital broadly refers to the talent of teachers as individuals, social capital the collaborative power of teachers as a group, and decisional capital the wisdom and expertise to make sound judgements in the profession. The continuing development of these three aspects of professional capital is expected to help to elevate the teaching profession and the professionalism of teachers.

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In contrast to capitalism in education that often undermines teachers, the concept of professional capital promises a transformation that will empower teachers and foster more professionalism. At a time when education is often defined in economic terms, the borrowed idea of professional capital is especially appealing to EFL teachers, who are often marginalized and lack support from schools or the government. Although English teachers are <sup>17</sup> the top of the hierarchy for prestige among teachers in Indonesia and in other Asian countries where English is taught as a foreign language, they often become the objects of politicization in education. The tension of globalization and nationalism as well as the tension among different political groups that target education as another battleground for political struggles has led to greater challenges for teachers. In Indonesia, curriculum and policy changes are often out of step with teachers' professional interests but are supportive of those who hold power. In the New Order era, for example, teachers were considered an extension of the bureaucracy (Bjork, 2004; Bjork, 2005). As civil servants they were forced (by their supervisors) to vote for Golkar, the ruling party, in the general election. In another example, the 2013 curriculum has been criticized for burdening teachers and confusing them with unsound statements about educational standards.

These types of obstacles to teacher professionalism, mean that Indonesian teachers need to be more aware of the differences between professionalism and professionalization. Professionalism focusses on enhancing and improving the practice of teaching while professionalization focusses more on efforts 'to improve this status and standing of teaching' (Hargreaves, 2000: 152). Professionalization in teaching may include requirements of a certain level of formal education for teachers, certifications, and raising the salary of teachers. Professionalism, on the other hand, refers to improving 'quality and standards of practice' (Hargreaves, 2000: 152). Similarly, among ESL/EFL educators and teachers, the distinction is also clearly articulated by Crandall (1993). Focussing on ESL/EFL teachers, she suggests that the two terms are often confused and mixed up. Therefore, understanding the clear boundary between professionalization of teachers and professionalism will be beneficial. In Crandall's view, professionalization is 'status enhancement through certification or credentialing, contracts, and tenure' (Crandall, 1993: 499–500) while professionalism is a lifelong learning process teachers go through in order to enhance the quality of their professional practice. The lifelong learning process requires teachers to get involved in professional development programmes and engage with their professional communities.

## Four Stages of Teacher Professionalism

Historically, teacher professionalism has undergone development in four stages: <sup>2</sup> 'the pre-professional age, the age of the autonomous professional, the age of the collegial professional and the fourth age – the age of post-professional or postmodern' (Hargreaves, 2000: 151). The pre-professional age was marked by the belief that teaching is technically not difficult to do. A person with enough knowledge of the subject matter can teach. When schooling was first introduced in the United States, for example, many teachers were volunteers and members of the local church where the school had been established. Similarly in modern Indonesia, after the announcement of Independence in 1945, the national education system faced great challenges to meet the demand for more teachers.

Those who had attended elementary education could become teachers after a short period of training. Imitating the colonial education system, this pre-professional phase in Indonesian education was obsessed with discipline and order in the classroom. Indeed, the teacher was perceived to be central to teaching and learning.

The second phase, as conceptualized by Hargreaves (2000) is the phase where teachers are considered to be autonomous professionals. The autonomy of teachers, as reflected in the US education system, is signified by the freedom enjoyed by teachers in preparing and applying materials and methods as tools to teach their students. In Indonesia this phase may be negligible in public schools as teachers are highly dependent on the national curriculum as well as textbooks and syllabi from publishers. Teachers in Indonesia are also civil servants with a strict hierarchical structure, even after the policy reform that began in 1998. The leaderships in many public schools are still feudalistic. This phenomenon, while not widely researched, is based on anecdotal stories in which teachers' obedience to their superiors is important if they are to advance their careers. Exceptions exist in some private schools where the curriculum and teacher recruitment remain independent. In these private schools, teachers have more freedom to develop the syllabi and teaching materials.

The third phase is the collegial professional, in which professionalism is not an individual effort of teachers but a collective or collegial effort to build the culture of the teaching profession. Collaborations are seen to be essential in order to solve common problems. In this phase, professional organizations of teachers have important roles to play in professionalizing teaching. <sup>16</sup> The case of English teachers in Indonesia the professional organization, Teachers of English as a Foreign Language in Indonesia (TEFLIN), has contributed to enhancing the stature and professionalism of English teachers by virtue of its annual conference and publication of a journal. However, the contribution to the national policy in English Language Teaching is still negligible, marked by individuals' efforts and contribution to the curriculum – not the collegial effort that represents English teachers' interests in Indonesia.

This last phase is called the post-professional or postmodern professional. This phase can be perceived as an extension of the former phase, but it highlights the diversity and flexibility of individuals and professional organizations to enhance professionalism. In this post-professional or postmodern professional phase, current practices, values and paradigms on professionalism are questioned and problematized. According to Hargreaves: 'The fate of teacher professionalism in this era is by no means fixed, but is being and will be argued about, struggled over and pulled in different directions in different places at different times' (Hargreaves, 2000: 167). As the nature of education policy in Indonesia is still top-down, this post-professional phase is not prominent. The values and the nature of being a professional are rarely questioned as the government plays a major role in setting up the standards for teachers.

These four phases of professionalism should not be seen as a sequential <sup>12</sup> chronological process as they can exist side by side at a certain era. In the current English as a Foreign Language/English as a Second Language (EFL/ESL) teaching profession in Indonesia, for example, all those phases may be identified as the quality of education in Indonesia varies, depending on the location and available resources. The last two phases, for example, are still in progress as professional organizations of teachers such as

TEFLIN, are becoming more important in pushing the government's agenda of professionalizing teaching. At the TEFLIN conference held in Solo, for example, the issue of reconceptualizing standards for English teachers was raised by Korompot (2014) – indicating more organized and collegial efforts for professionalizing the field that involve a professional organization for teachers.

Related to professionalism in EFL/ESL, Johnston (1997) also asked a fundamental question about EFL teachers' career paths. Do they have a career? In Johnston's view, a career, as opposed to a job, involves professionalism that allows teachers to grow professionally and personally. Farrell (1998; 1999; 2008; 2011) highlighted the importance of reflections as an important factor in EFL teachers' professional growth. In his work, Farrell (2011) identified various teacher professional role identities of three experienced EFL teachers in Canada. Canagarajah (2012) retold his own story of becoming a professional by highlighting the importance of navigating his professional trajectory by getting involved in the TESOL professional community. In these works by EFL/ESL professionals, a key message is that the route to being professional is not easy; it takes commitment, reflection, and perseverance.

To become accomplished and happy, however, the various professional role identities have to be integrated with the whole identity as an authentic person. When teachers can integrate their professional and personal identities in this profession, they can be happy and willing to sharpen their craft. Teachers will keep learning to enhance their professionalism as teachers (Alsup, 2008). In an attempt to add to the literature about improving the professionalism of EFL teachers, this article outlines and discusses decisional capital. The article sees decisional capital as part of professional capital reflected by an Indonesian EFL teacher educator and it traces the formation of her professional identity.

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## **English Language Teaching and Teacher Education in Indonesia**

In discussing English Language Teaching (ELT) in Indonesia from the perspective of professional capital, a short historical review of the profession can be beneficial to provide context. As a foreign language, English in Indonesia has been taught at school since the Dutch colonial era in Indonesia –formerly known as the East Indies. Mistar (2005) describes the history of ELT in Indonesia in three phases. The first phase is the pre-independence period that can be traced back from the early 1900s to 1945. In this period, English was a compulsory subject at Meer Uitgebreid Lager Onderwejs (MULO), or junior secondary schools. The second phase comprises the period of 1945–50 where the revolution for independence was taking place. Due to the war and struggles, there were not many students attending schools so teaching English in this period was very limited. The third period began when Indonesia gained full recognition from the Netherlands in 1949 and the subsequent years when the government started the normal period of schooling. After 1950, the government recruited more English teachers and established more training centres for English teachers. Short courses for English teachers, which were known as B-1 Level courses, were offered in many big cities. The programmes were technically and financially supported by international agencies including the Ford Foundation and the World Bank. The objectives of the courses 'were to train

non-certified teachers who had been teaching in junior secondary schools to be certified teachers' (Mistar, 2005: 77).

The normal period of schooling in Indonesia can be viewed from the perspective of three stages of political periodization – Old Order, New Order, and Reformation Order. However, ELT in Indonesia has developed progressively across different political periods. In the era of the Old Order (1945–65), English was taught in public schools as a library language – a language intended for reading books about science and technology. Students were not expected to speak the language, but to read or, to some degree, write in English. This tradition continued over the next two decades during the New Order regime. In addition, many scholars were sent to English speaking countries to study. Consequently, the need to learn English for more communicative purposes increased. In this context, English was becoming more important as the language of science and technology and the language of international diplomacy. To meet the increasing demand for English teachers, more teacher training colleges were established across Indonesia.

Beginning in the 1980s, the movement to teach English as a spoken language gained pace in big cities. This movement was embraced by private institutions that offered English courses outside the school system. This type of non-formal education outside the formal schooling system has grown well in urban areas where parents want their children to be able to speak English. This mood and interest in English is still pervasive now as shown in many printed job advertisements that require applicants to be able to communicate in English, even when the jobs do not really require English language skills.

At present, English is taught from the Elementary School level either as an extra-curricular or as a local content subject. The allocated time for English varies from two to six hours per week. Teaching English in public schools in Indonesia is challenging due to various factors such as teachers' competence, meeting hours, facilities, and class size (Lie, 2007). However, the government and policy makers often blame the failure of teaching English in public schools on teachers; therefore, various efforts of professionalization have been targeted for teachers. First, the minimum requirement for teacher education has been raised. English teachers are now supposed to be trained at the university level for four years with at least one semester of teaching practice in a public or private school. Current government policy also requires that all teachers be certified and high school teachers be encouraged to pursue a Master's degree in their field. In addition, English is often offered at lower levels in many schools as more and more people perceive the importance of teaching the language early. This practice, however, has been criticized as English threatens the education of the national language and indigenous languages at schools. As a result, the new curriculum issued in 2013 requires English to be taught starting at Middle School (Grade 7). However, this curriculum has just been retracted by the new Minister of Education under the Joko Widodo Administration.

In Indonesia, English teacher education is typically a four-year college education. Students who want to be English teachers have to attend education and training in an English Language Education Department. Before they graduate, students should have completed courses related to English language, linguistics, English literature, and pedagogy, which includes teaching methods and educational psychology. During the four years, trainee teachers should also take courses related to civics and the state's ideology. More importantly, they should have teaching experience as student-teachers at either

public schools or private schools. The length of their internship at schools varies, but typically, the programme is conducted in one semester.

In the context of Indonesia, politics, culture, and teacher competence often hinder the effectiveness of ELT (Marcelino, 2008) and bring about the poor results of teaching it in public schools. Related to English language teachers' competence, the government and TEFLIN have promoted teacher upgrading and certification to ensure teachers are professionals in the field. However, conflicting language and language teaching policies (Lauder, 2008; Lie, 2007) may have also contributed to the poor results and teachers' dissatisfaction with their profession.

### **The Narrative Inquiry Methodology**

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This current study illustrates the situation by looking at the career path of an Indonesian English teacher called Ratna (a pseudonym), from the perspective of professional capital. For this purpose, I employed the narrative inquiry of Ratna's experiences of becoming an English teacher. Ratna was special as she had been through an interesting career path. Her educational background was not in line with her current position as an English teacher. This was because she had studied agriculture as her undergraduate major and she had worked as a credit analyst at a bank before she decided to become an English teacher.

Using the narrative inquiry method, life experiences and professional experiences are seen as narratives that can shed light on the subject's personal and professional identities, and aspirations (Baddeley and Singer, 2007; Clandinin et al., 2006; Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007; Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). More importantly, the investigation of experiences as narratives can become pedagogical tools for professional growth (Van Manen, 1994). To get the data, I interviewed Ratna and transcribed the interview for further analysis. First, I identified the episodes of her life experiences which had led to her decision to become an English teacher as well as the critical events she experienced and shared with me as the researcher. Second, I outlined Ratna's career trajectory based on her experiences. Finally, I identified the decisions that led to her chosen career as an English teacher. In these steps, I coded the data based on the critical events and highlighted the emergent themes. The findings are discussed from the perspective of professional capital, especially the decisional capital (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012), which is very important in understanding Ratna's career path.

### **An EFL Teacher's Professional Path: Claiming Professional Identity Against All Odds**

The main phrase used in Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) is 'teaching like a pro'. This phrase alludes to a professional level of teacher that assumes teaching as a series of complex processes. It takes up to 10,000 hours of intense teaching experience to be able to teach effectively "like a pro" – roughly the equivalent of eight years of teaching experience. A "pro" in teaching means embracing the assumption that teachers need to learn all the time – a journey of lifelong learning. This long and winding journey enables teachers to improve their own practices along the way. The learning process and the route to

becoming a “pro” in teaching, is not only influenced by teachers as individuals. The sociocultural and political factors are also dominant in determining the route to professionalism and the formation of their professional identity. As an illustration I outlined Ratna’s route to entering the profession and her struggle to claim her professional identity as a legitimate professional English teacher. I also described the difficult route taken by the teacher to become a professional in the field and how she overcame challenges in the profession.

I started my research by contacting one of my colleagues, who introduced Ratna, a female Indonesian student. Ratna was a graduate student in TESOL at a Midwest university in the US. From this early encounter, I learned that she was an English teacher and educator with an interesting background to her education. Ratna had attended an elementary school in the US for three years and she had a college degree in agriculture because she did not want to become a teacher like her parents had done. That was why, after completing her agriculture degree, she worked as a consultant in a Dutch foreign agency. In the Dutch agency, her main job was to translate documents from English to Indonesian and vice versa.

While employed at the agency she saw an opportunity to work at a bank which offered her a position as a credit analyst. Recalling the process of getting the position, Ratna said she had passed seven different tests before being offered the position. She worked at the bank for 11 years before finding her soul mate and getting married. Since her husband also worked at the same bank, she had to quit from her position because there was a regulation that prohibited a husband and wife from working at the same bank; this decision marked a major change in her career trajectory.

Quitting her job led her to change her professional course. She knew that she was good at English and she also knew that she was good at teaching. When she worked at the bank, she also had an opportunity to teach English to her colleagues as they needed to take the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC). A high TOEIC score represented an important step forward for bank personnel in terms of career advancement. With her English competence and teaching experience, Ratna felt better prepared to jump into teaching English – a profession she had avoided when she was younger. To become a formal English teacher, however, she needed a formal education. After her marriage, she decided to go to a graduate school to get her Master’s degree in Language Education, a degree that she thought could compensate for her lack of formal training in teaching.

Her decision to become an English teacher and to study in the graduate school opened a door for her to teach English at college level. However, her educational background in agriculture caused many people at the place where she taught English to have doubts about her ability. Even after she completed her Master’s degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), her credentials as an English teacher were still questioned and rejected. However, she did not quit as she felt teaching was her real vocation descended from her parents and other ancestors. As described by Ratna, her roots in teaching can be traced back several generations.

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I was raised in a teacher family. My parents, my father was an English teacher and my mother was a biology teacher. From my ancestors’ line, there were teachers or *ulemas* (Ratna; Interview 25 April 2013).



Ratna's ancestors were teachers or *ulemas* – traditional religious teachers that occupied a certain social status in society. The family and the educated people around her had formed an image of the teaching profession – which she avoided when she was younger. She acknowledged that she wanted to be different from her parents as her father was an English professor and her mother was a biology teacher. Further, she felt that she had already mastered the English language. Indeed, she perceived it as a tool to learn other subject matter. That was why she took up agriculture as her major. In her own words, she emphasized her reasons for not taking an English major that would lead to her becoming an English teacher:

Because I already knew English, I did not want to take English major; I wanted to take another major (Ratna; Interview 25 April 2013).

Ratna did not have any difficulties in completing her study because she was good at English and she was highly motivated to learn how to teach English. Moreover, her professor trusted her to work as a teaching assistant – which she did very well. She taught an English class that was supposed to be taught by her professor and the students appreciated her because of her natural talent and her sociable nature when working with them. She described her teaching as becoming a teacher and a friend of the students. She also explained that as a teacher, she needed to know her students so that she could properly teach them and so they could benefit fully from her teaching.

I found out that the students were funky so I related my lessons with popular song lyrics from English songs that they might know – [songs] which resonate with them (Ratna; Interview 25 April 2013).

The realization that being an English teacher also means that she should know the students and by knowing the students she could teach them better was a professional growth that helped to craft her teaching philosophy. This realization was more than a professional awareness. As a graduate student who was learning to teach, she learned the craft of English language while teaching on the job in the classroom – experimenting and practising with the theory she learned and finding the outcomes and the students' responses. It was through her experience that she expanded and accumulated her decisional capital in the classroom.

Ratna's professional identity formation as an English teacher was hampered by her self-doubt. She was sure that she was good at English and she could teach well but, at the same time, she was unsure about the pedagogical knowledge underlying her teaching methodology – which she developed mostly by trial and error – and her continuing effort to upgrade her perceived deficit in pedagogy. While she attended graduate school to study English language education, her challenge was to achieve professional acceptance. As an English teacher with an undergraduate degree in agriculture, she was not considered as a fully professional English teacher by her colleagues and the institution where she wanted to teach.

In Indonesia, it is normal for people to think that it is better to choose those who have undergraduate degree in English education and higher degree in English education for English

teacher position rather than choosing the one who only has a Master's degree in English education – with only two years of education (Ratna; Interview 25 April 2013).

Many educators and those who hold power in educational institutions still believe that a rigid line of professional formal education is the best route for aspiring teachers to take. In teacher recruitment, candidates who do not follow this rigid line are unlikely to be considered ideal candidates as teachers as their competencies are questioned regardless of their test results for the position. Ratna felt this approach was unjust as she herself was highly competent in English and in teaching. Furthermore, her highest educational qualification was in teaching English. From this perspective, the quotation above describes how Ratna viewed her failure to get a full-time position as an English teacher at the state university in her hometown. She realized that her undergraduate certificate in agriculture did not give her the advantage in securing the full-time teacher position regardless of her ability and her competence. Her Master's degree in English Education was not enough to guarantee her the position. As a result of this, she applied for another teaching position at a private university. Ratna said she needed an institution that trusted her to teach English – not one that questioned her education in agriculture. She convinced the head of the university that she could be a great asset with her knowledge and competence and pledged she would pursue a PhD in English Language Education abroad. This strategy would enable her in the future to contribute more to the development of the university.

Her experience in teaching at the university – which was affiliated with *PGRI* (Teacher Association of the Republic of Indonesia) – was evidenced by the appreciation she got as a teacher. The university was not a large university and its students were from rural areas. The students were committed to becoming teachers – unlike most students in the state university who majored in English Education but who did not want to become English teachers.

I was glad; there were students who said that in *PGRI* the culture was identified as teachers' culture. So, I was surprised when the students – the graduate students who took TOEFL class with me – they kissed my hand. So, indeed teacher culture could not be separated from *PGRI* (Ratna; Interview 25 April 2013).

From a Western perspective, it may seem strange that graduate students kiss their teacher's hand as an expression of respect. However, this is a traditional custom in many parts of Indonesia, especially in rural areas, where teachers are highly respected and enjoy a high status. Indeed, traditionally, teachers are highly respected by students and have certain roles to fulfil in society. In villages in Java, for example, teachers are often called *Pak Guru* (Mr. Teacher), not only by students, but also by their neighbours. Due to this special position, teachers are considered to be 'the wise men' – the sages with whom the villagers will consult in affairs of the village. Such traditions are under threat and currently the status of teachers is declining due to societal changes and the teaching professions' low salary packages. These developments have made the profession unattractive to many graduates. To compensate, the government has launched programmes aimed at improving the status of teachers. This includes support for the teacher certification programme and higher salaries for teachers.

In big cities, university students will not kiss their professors' hand to show respect. That was why the tradition that was maintained at the private university where Ratna worked was special to her. Ratna referred to this tradition as a teacher culture, a traditional culture that had been eroded by the modernization and social changes in many aspects of Indonesian society. The appreciation and acceptance she enjoyed at the private university encouraged her to pursue her PhD studies abroad. To achieve this, Ratna applied for a Fulbright scholarship to study in the US. She felt confident due to the relevant experience and qualifications she had gained. Her first application for a Fulbright Scholarship was unsuccessful, but in the following year she secured the scholarship.

### **Decisional Capital Beyond the Classroom's Walls**

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2013) explain the power of professional capital to empower teachers and how that power can bring about changes in the profession. When explaining about the decisional capital – how teachers can make good and wise judgments on day-to-day classroom teaching and on other unexpected happenings in the classroom – they suggest experience and reflection are important factors in enabling teachers to teach “like a pro”. In fact, the decisional capital is similar to Shulman's idea (Shulman, 1986; Shulman, 1987; Shulman, 2000) about the pedagogical content knowledge – the expert teacher knowledge that can distinguish an expert teacher from a novice teacher. This pedagogical content knowledge in many ways is the result of the teacher's experience in the classroom. In Hargreaves and Fullan's terms (2012; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2013), to be professional, a teacher needs 10,000 hours of teaching experience. This is also an approximate time to become an expert teacher although the learning curve varies among individual teachers.

While the practice of formal teaching can only be conducted at school in the classroom with real students, the decision to choose the teaching profession and decisions to stay in the profession take place beyond the classroom. In the narrative illustration that describes the professional trajectory of an Indonesian English teacher, this decisional capital, can be viewed as not only limited to the experience and judgements at the micro level, in the classroom, but also at the macro level beyond the classroom and beyond the school boundary. Ratna's decision to become an English teacher was more of a situational decision that forced her to leave her career as a credit analyst in a bank. Her decision to continue her studies to get a Master's degree in English Language Teaching was her way to get into the profession through an appropriate track as her background was not in line with teaching English. Her continual effort to study further for a doctorate degree was also a part of her professional enhancement that could allay the doubts of those who questioned her college education as well as for her own career as she projected herself as a tenured professor at a university level.

From the narrative and the critical events, we can also identify the challenges Ratna had to overcome. The critical events she experienced not only changed her career trajectory but also motivated her to pursue further study and to become a more professional teacher. The first critical event that changed Ratna's course of life was getting married. In this critical event, Ratna quitted her job and she decided to become an English teacher.

because there was a policy that husband and wife were not allowed to work in the same bank, I decided to quit so that Mas Dedi (pseudonym), my husband, could still work there. At that time, I wanted to teach English, I was challenged to teach English as I knew many people in the bank had learned English for years and they still could not speak English well (Ratna; Interview 25 April 2013).

Built into this event, there are complex discourses that reveal the professional identity claims as an English teacher and at the same time it also reveals the professional identity maintained and reinforced in the society. Ratna, with her competence in English and her confidence in teaching, was struggling for acceptance and recognition. The professional image and identity maintained by her professional circles was not solely on the subject mastery and the expertise in teaching but also the proper formal track in education. Even when Ratna got her certificate, her Master's degree in English Language Teaching, the institution and the authority in the institution were reluctant to accept her on the basis of her off-line undergraduate education.

For the professional community in Indonesia, it is not only about competence but also about a formal track to become a teacher. Since Ratna lacked the first level of formal track to become a teacher, she felt that she was not accepted as a real English teacher with a full authority. She needed to make an extra effort to prove herself as an English teacher. This professional identity clash and realization was repeated in the course of her narrative and it was also highlighted in the second critical event of her life when she failed to secure the teaching position at the state university.

Another revelation regarding the first critical event is that becoming a teacher might not be the first choice. It was true in Ratna's case and it might be true for teachers in general in Indonesia. Ratna, with her underlying rationale that she wanted to be different from her *ulemas* family, finally quit her job at the bank and changed course to become a teacher. Had she not married the man who worked in the same bank, her story might have ended differently. Although among teachers English teachers have their own prestigious stature, it is still not the first choice of profession in the society. Those who entered English education have the advantage of being able to apply for positions at major companies in larger cities that can offer better financial benefits than teaching can.

The second critical event for Ratna was the rejection of her application to become an English teacher in the state university in her hometown. That rejection led her to apply for another teaching position in a less prestigious institution. This decision brought her to a very different culture of education and teaching. It was not in the high profile university that she was more respected and appreciated as a teacher. In the private university she realized that becoming a teacher was not only about competence in the subject matter and in teaching. She realized that becoming a teacher was also about understanding the students and their needs. In this atmosphere of acceptance and respect, both by her colleagues and her students, her professional identity grew and she experienced the satisfaction of teaching.

## Conclusion

The decision to choose to enter the teaching profession and to stay in the profession determined not only based on individual decisions but also by sociocultural factors. In

the case of the Indonesian English teacher narrative illustration, the teaching profession was not her first choice. It was after she had to quit her job in banking that she decided to become an English teacher. In this case, she decided with the full awareness of the consequences that she needed to take a formal study that would allow her to enter the profession. The acceptance and recognition, however, were not always rewarding.

From the critical events experienced by Indonesian teachers, we can learn that indeed professional capital with the human, social, and decisional capital are important factors that can enhance professionalism. The decisional capital itself, as illustrated in Ratna's narrative, includes not only decisions at the micro level of the classroom, but also at the macro level beyond the classroom walls where sociocultural and political contexts have an important role in Ratna's professional decisions.

Finally, future research in EFL teacher professional growth and identity can be focussed on other teacher's capitals as Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) suggested, especially, the social capital that allow teachers to thrive in the profession. The importance of socio-cultural contexts on EFL teacher professional growth is highly relevant to the social capital owned and expanded by EFL professionals.

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