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## Vol 15, No 2 (2021)

April 2021

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15294/lc.v15i2>

## Table of Contents

### Articles

#### EFL Teachers Perception toward the Use of Beyond International Textbook

 **2** DOI [10.15294/lc.v15i2.28246](https://doi.org/10.15294/lc.v15i2.28246) Abstract 307 times PDF 415 times

Muhammad Muzakky<sup>(1)</sup>, Albiansyah Albiansyah<sup>(2)</sup>,

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(2) Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, Indonesia

PDF

177-182



#### Implementing Group Investigation to Learn Reading for Senior High School Students

 **0** DOI [10.15294/lc.v15i2.26453](https://doi.org/10.15294/lc.v15i2.26453) Abstract 230 times PDF 327 times

Ana Valentine Maleng<sup>(1)</sup>, Elysa Hartati<sup>(2)</sup>,

(1) English Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Mercu Buana Yogyakarta, Yogyakarta

(2) English Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Mercu Buana Yogyakarta, Yogyakarta

PDF

183-192



#### Constructing Teacher Identity: Teachers Emotion in Teaching English for Pre-School Students

 **1** DOI [10.15294/lc.v15i2.26365](https://doi.org/10.15294/lc.v15i2.26365) Abstract 273 times PDF 299 times

Anastasia Camelia Wardhani<sup>(1)</sup>, Ouda Teda Ena<sup>(2)</sup>, Concilianus Laos Mbato<sup>(3)</sup>,

(1) Sanata Dharma University

(2) Sanata Dharma University

(3) Sanata Dharma University

PDF

193-200



#### Types of English Intensifiers on Social Media

 **1** DOI [10.15294/lc.v15i2.27787](https://doi.org/10.15294/lc.v15i2.27787) Abstract 426 times PDF 815 times

Yuli Suryaningsih<sup>(1)</sup>, Tofan Dwi Hardjanto<sup>(2)</sup>,

(1) Universitas Gadjah Mada

(2) Universitas Gadjah Mada

PDF

201-208



#### Pictorial Metaplan as a Teaching aid to Improve Speaking Skills in Junior High School Students

 **1** DOI [10.15294/lc.v15i2.27631](https://doi.org/10.15294/lc.v15i2.27631) Abstract 282 times PDF 256 times

Deswandito Dwi Saptanto<sup>(1)</sup>, Tri Arie Bowo<sup>(2)</sup>, Ratih Laily Nurjanah<sup>(3)</sup>,

(1) Department of English Literature, Ngudi Waluyo University

(2) Department of English Literature, Ngudi Waluyo University

(3) Department of English Literature, Ngudi Waluyo University

PDF

209-218



#### Persuasion Action Strategies in Da'wah Discourse on Social Media in the Global Communication Era

 **0** DOI [10.15294/lc.v15i2.26285](https://doi.org/10.15294/lc.v15i2.26285) Abstract 285 times PDF 488 times

Hari Kusmanto<sup>(1)</sup>, Harun Joko Prayitno<sup>(2)</sup>, Isnaeni Sofiana<sup>(3)</sup>, Norliza Jamaluddin<sup>(4)</sup>,

(1) Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta

(2) Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta

(3) Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta

(4) Universitas Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Malaysia

PDF

219-228



#### The Relationship between the Students English Speaking Skills and Their Closeness to English

 **1** DOI [10.15294/lc.v15i2.28581](https://doi.org/10.15294/lc.v15i2.28581) Abstract 589 times PDF 1687 times

Hawa Asma Ul Husna<sup>(1)</sup>,

(1) Politeknik Negeri Media Kreatif

PDF

229-240



#### Developing English Materials for the Students of Information System Department at Technology and Information Faculty, Mathlaul Anwar University Banten

 **2** DOI [10.15294/lc.v15i2.26275](https://doi.org/10.15294/lc.v15i2.26275) Abstract 180 times PDF 998 times

Nur Azmi Rohimajaya<sup>(1)</sup>, Ade Sudirman<sup>(2)</sup>, William Hamer<sup>(3)</sup>,

(1) Universitas Mathla'ul Anwar

(2) Universitas Mathla'ul Anwar, Indonesia

(3) Universitas Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa, Indonesia

PDF

241-248



#### An Analysis of Violation and Flouting Maxim on Teacher-Students Interaction in English Teaching and Learning Process

 **1** DOI [10.15294/lc.v15i2.28148](https://doi.org/10.15294/lc.v15i2.28148) Abstract 660 times PDF 1635 times

Siti Arofah<sup>(1)</sup>, Husni Mubarak<sup>(2)</sup>,

(1) Universitas Islam Nahdlatul Ulama Jepara

(2) Universitas Islam Nahdlatul Ulama Jepara

PDF

249-256



#### Unmasking of the President Joko Widodo Ideology Stances Realized in His Political Speech towards the People of Indonesia

 **0** DOI [10.15294/lc.v15i2.28546](https://doi.org/10.15294/lc.v15i2.28546) Abstract 181 times PDF 252 times

PDF

257-264



Focus and Scope

Guide for Authors

Template











Editorial Board

Abstracting/Indexing

Ethics Statement

Contact Us

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 Citations { 0 } **DOI 10.15294/lc.v15i2.28540** Abstract 181 times PDF 232 times

Suswanto Ismadi Megah<sup>(1)</sup>, Siti Noor Mohd. Noor<sup>(2)</sup>, Azmi Abdul Latif<sup>(3)</sup>,  
(1) University Tun Hussein Onn  
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#### Viewing Female Depiction in Frozen 2

 Citations { 0 } **DOI 10.15294/lc.v15i2.26416** Abstract 458 times PDF 1173 times

Tia Aprilianti Putri<sup>(1)</sup>,  
(1) Airlangga University

PDF

265-274



#### Translanguaging in International Student Teaching: Narratives of Filipino Teachers in an Indonesian Setting

 Citations { 2 } **DOI 10.15294/lc.v15i2.28135** Abstract 405 times PDF 386 times

Willy Prasetya<sup>(1)</sup>,  
(1) English Language Education Department, Universitas Islam Indonesia, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

PDF

275-284



#### Gender Bias in Translation Using Google Translate: Problems and Solution

 Citations { 2 } **DOI 10.15294/lc.v15i2.28641** Abstract 1248 times PDF 877 times

Tira Nur Fitria<sup>(1)</sup>,  
(1) Institut Teknologi Bisnis AAS Indonesia

PDF

285-292



#### A Manipulation of Semantic Meanings as a Humor Construction Strategy

 Citations { 0 } **DOI 10.15294/lc.v15i2.28637** Abstract 255 times PDF 979 times

Muhammad Masqotul Imam Romadlan<sup>(1)</sup>,  
(1) Gadjah Mada University

PDF

293-304



#### Using Modelling-Based Speaking Module for Informal Interaction Class to Support Self-Regulated Learning

 Citations { 0 } **DOI 10.15294/lc.v15i2.28656** Abstract 160 times PDF 220 times

Ratih Laily Nurjanah<sup>(1)</sup>, Deswandito Dwi Saptanto<sup>(2)</sup>, Maya Kurnia Dewi<sup>(3)</sup>,  
(1) Universitas Ngudi Waluyo  
(2) Universitas Ngudi Waluyo  
(3) Universitas Ngudi Waluyo

PDF

305-316



#### Analysis on the Structure and Purposes of Travel Blog Posts

 Citations { 1 } **DOI 10.15294/lc.v15i2.28792** Abstract 563 times PDF 821 times

Hanna Juliati<sup>(1)</sup>, Agustina Dita<sup>(2)</sup>,  
(1) Universitas Kristen Krida Wacana  
(2) Universitas Kristen Krida Wacana

PDF

317-328



#### The Portfolio Assessment to Teach Writing of Opinion Essay

 Citations { 2 } **DOI 10.15294/lc.v15i2.28807** Abstract 416 times PDF 448 times

Anjar Setiawan<sup>(1)</sup>, Dodi Mulyadi<sup>(2)</sup>,  
(1) Universitas Muhammadiyah Semarang  
(2) Universitas Muhammadiyah Semarang

PDF

329-336



#### Syntactic Analysis of Chinese Imperative Function in "The Captain" Movie

 Citations { 0 } **DOI 10.15294/lc.v15i2.28819** Abstract 257 times PDF 242 times

Cintiawinata Jung<sup>(1)</sup>, Julina Julina<sup>(2)</sup>, Rudiansyah Rudiansyah<sup>(3)</sup>,  
(1) Universitas Sumatera Utara  
(2) Universitas Sumatera Utara  
(3) Universitas Sumatera Utara

PDF

337-348



#### Ideology and Power in Political News Text: Appraisal in Critical Discourse Analysis

 Citations { 1 } **DOI 10.15294/lc.v15i2.28896** Abstract 640 times PDF 654 times

Setyo Prasianto Cahyono<sup>(1)</sup>, Galuh Kirana Dwi Aren<sup>(2)</sup>, Sumarlani Sumarlani<sup>(3)</sup>,  
(1) Universitas Dian Nuswantoro  
(2) Universitas Negeri Semarang  
(3) Universitas Sebelas Maret

PDF

349-360



#### Cohesion and Coherence of Students Recount Texts in Indonesia

 Citations { 2 } **DOI 10.15294/lc.v15i2.29003** Abstract 350 times PDF 279 times

Arif Suryo Priyatmojo<sup>(1)</sup>,  
(1) [SCOPUS ID: 57216301180] Universitas Negeri Semarang

PDF

361-374



#### Tell me about your Day: Portraying Students Reflective Practice through Diary Writing

 Citations { 0 } **DOI 10.15294/lc.v15i2.29252** Abstract 299 times PDF 365 times

Teguh Kasprabowo<sup>(1)</sup>, Endang Yuliani Rahayu<sup>(2)</sup>, Agnes Widyaningrum<sup>(3)</sup>,  
(1) Universitas Stikubank (UNISBANK) Semarang  
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PDF

375-384



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# Constructing Teacher Identity: Teachers Emotion in Teaching English for Pre-School Students

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## Abstract

This research discusses how teachers' emotion regulation helps them construct their professional identity. To be specific, the emotion regulation studied is around teaching pre-school students. The emotion regulation investigated covers the teachers' behavior in the classroom setting when they are dealing with little children. The research question of this study is "How teachers' identity is constructed especially in teaching pre-school students?". Theories related to emotion competence, emotion regulation, and teacher identity were also reviewed in this paper. In conducting the research, teachers from one of English courses in Yogyakarta becomes the participant. The researcher uses the Critical Incident Technique (CIT). Many factors such as teaching goals, commitment, particular meaningful experiences become the main consideration in formulating the questions asked in the interview section. Actions such as the distribution of questionnaires and interviews are conducted in order to collect the data. In analyzing the data, the researcher presents the findings narratively based on the result of the questionnaire and the interview.

**Keywords:** Emotion Regulation, Teaching English, Teacher Identity, Pre-School Students

## INTRODUCTION

It is obvious that teaching pre-school students is a challenge. Understanding the materials is not enough. Teachers need to understand the pre-school students and their behavior too. It is not as easy as communicating with teenagers or adults. As shown in research by Van Der Want et al. (2018), teachers need to cope with and give meaning to their relationship with students (p. 2). The relationship mentioned is also related to emotions that occur during the learning process. Moreover, this research is also rising based on the writer's personal reflection that teaching pre-school students need extra energy since the condition and the situation can be out of control. In this paper, the writer would like to investigate the emotional regulation of teachers during teaching English to pre-school students. Pre-school students here refers to children 3-6 years old. Emotion

regulation itself is interesting because as teachers, it is frequently quite difficult for the writer to be able to manage her emotion during the learning process, especially when she teaches pre-school students. Personal problems and sometimes the pre-school students' behavior in class influence the emotion as a teacher. It faces the teachers to their personal identity as a human and my professional identity as an English teacher. It means that teachers have to give a good example to their students and they are trusted by the students' parents to 'take care' of their children in the course their surrender their children to.

Teachers deal with many students with a different character. In the classroom, the unexpected situation is possible to happen. The situation in the classroom also involves teachers' emotions. Further, questions such as "How can the teacher manage his/her emotion in front of the

students?" or opinions such as "That teacher is not able to manage him/herself. He/she is not professional". As written by Song (2016), emotions; including pride, happiness, shame, and distress have become an intricate part of teachers identity, revealing who they are as a teacher (p. 632). This paper is inspired by an article created by Tehseen and Ul Hadi (2015) about teachers' professionalism and factors influencing. The purpose of this paper is to find out teachers' emotional regulation in teaching English especially for pre-school students during the learning process. Some papers discuss mostly the relationship between the pre-school students and their relationship with parents or teachers. However, building relationships with the teacher in the classroom is rarely discussed. Besides, many studies examine the suitable materials to be taught to pre-school students. Here, the focus of the paper is the teachers' identity development constructed through experiences in teaching pre-school students. The writer would like to find out how teachers' emotion initially expressed and managed, and also how emotion regulation during teaching pre-school students construct their identity as teachers. The emotion discussed in this paper is limited to the definition that emotions are "socially constructed and personally enacted" (Schutz et al., 2006). In meaning, this research is going to discuss the connection between emotion which appears from external factors (social context), and internal factors (self-awareness). This research also discusses the reflection from the teachers' perspective towards their professional identity as an educator. Furthermore, their commitment as teachers is also discussed in this research. It is crucial since there are a number of possible factors that underlie the reasons why a person would like to be a teacher.

## METHODOLOGY

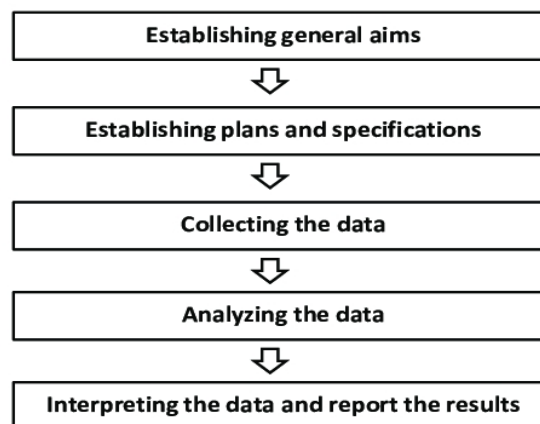
The participants of this research were ten English teachers in an English course in Yogyakarta. The method used in conducting this research was the critical incident technique. The data were presented in descriptive texts. In collecting the

data, the writer distributed a questionnaire and also interviewed the participants. The interviews were conducted for ten minutes for each of the participants. The questions in the interview sections were constructed based on the critical incident questionnaire and related supporting theories.

The critical incident technique was chosen as the method in conducting this research because CIT is a well-proven qualitative research approach that offers a practical step-by-step approach to collecting and analyzing information about human activities and their significance to the people involved (Hughes, 2007). Below is the diagram of the CIT process as data collection.

Figure 1

*CIT Diagram According to Hughes*



The learning activities that discussed were also precise to the activities that were meaningful and had relation to construct the teachers' identity. Thus, reflection from the teachers' perspective was needed. According to Harrison and Lee (2011), reflection is an attempt to understand an issue or doubt which triggered the reflective process (p. 201). The reflection aimed to understand the teachers' criticism towards themselves related to their professional identity as educators. The focus of the reflection was to understand how the teachers overcame their problems during teaching pre-school students and its relation to their teachers identity development influenced by the particular experiences.

The participants of this research were ten English teachers from an English course in Yogyakarta. The teachers were non-native and native speakers of English. The diversity was preferred to enrich the result of the discussion. In collecting the data, the researcher distributed questionnaire based on the critical incident questionnaire by Brookfield (2017); with several adjustments, and related sources. Besides, the questions related to the teachers' emotion regulation are also included. The questions constructed for this field are based on theories from Song (2016), Lopes (2019) and Garner (2010). As written by Garner (2010), knowledge of emotional expressions is concerned with the comprehension verbal labels for facial displays of emotion (p. 300). The question asked was related to how the teachers control their expression during the learning activities. It is included facial expressions and body language. The next question was related to the teachers' training and the conditions or situations occurred in the learning process. According to Song (2016), teacher identity is represented in teachers' rational and emotional responses toward conditions and discourses, along with their professional knowledge and training (p. 632). Moreover, Lopes (2019) stated that teacher training will be all the more relevant for the teaching profession (p. 38). The questions in the questionnaire also included the reflection from the teachers. The implementation of the reflection as the questions in the questionnaire was inspired from Sutton et al. (2009). The questionnaire is distributed through Google Form considering its flexibility and practicality. The setting of this research was in the classroom. According to Schutz et al. (2006), the focus of inquiry on emotion should therefore be on the activity setting where the person-environment transactions occur (p. 345). The center of this research was the teachers' emotion regulation during teaching pre-school students. The purpose of the interview section was to deeper the understanding from the teachers' perspectives about how their identity constructed through their critical incident. The questions in the interview section were also considered based on the theories mentioned above.

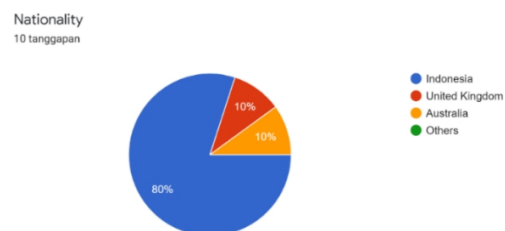
The steps in conducting the data collection was started from questionnaire distribution through Google Form. The researcher then analyzed and categorized the data. Next, the researcher conducted semi-structured interview with the participants through digital media.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In collecting the data, the researcher distributed a questionnaire consists of thirteen questions in the questionnaire and seven questions in interview sections related to emotion regulation and teacher identity construction. The questions were also based on the CIT questionnaire from Hughes (2007).

Based on the distributed questionnaire and the interview conducted, some findings were found and worth discussing in this paper. Firstly, the participants were asked to identify their nationality. As seen on the figure below, most of the participants are Indonesian. The rest are Australian and British.

Figure 1  
*Participants' Nationality*



Second, the question is about the experiences of the participants in teaching pre-school students. The experience is measured by how long they have been teaching pre-school students. The figure shows that 45.5 % of the participants have been teaching pre-school students for 1 to 3 years. Next, 36.4 % of the participants have been teaching pre-school students for more than 5 years.

Moreover, the participants share their experiences in teaching pre-school students. Based on the participants' answers, for senior or new teachers,

most of them believe that students' motivation and behavior in class are the most challenging factors. Lack of motivation which leads to unpleasant behavior in class influence the teachers' emotion. According to O'Connor as cited in van der Want (2017), positive professional relationship with students is seen by teachers as 'being an integral

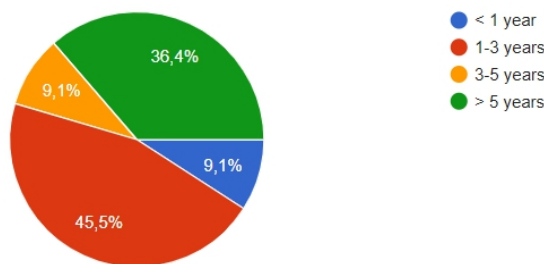
part of their professional identity (p. 1). Other factors such as tiredness and period (for female teachers) also mentioned by the teachers as important role in how capable they are in controlling their emotion during the learning process.

Figure 2

*Participants' Experience in Teaching Pre-School Students*

Experience in teaching toddler

11 tanggapan



Third, the participants are asked whether they ever joined any trainings to teach pre-school students. As shown in the figure, 40% of the participants have joined training related to teach pre-school students. It means that they have the knowledge related to pre-school students' behavior. The teachers also agree that trainings are

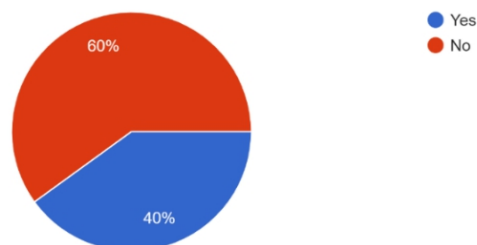
important for them to be more capable in handling the students. Cited from Tehseen and Ul Hadi (2015), highly qualified and committed teachers can give best education to the students (p. 233). By joining advantageous trainings, teachers hope to perform better in the classroom.

Figure 3

*Participants' Experience in Pre-School Training*

Have you ever joined any trainings to teach toddler?

10 tanggapan



From the further interview with the participants, most of the participants agree that special trainings for teachers in teaching pre-school

students is important. One of the participants say that the knowledge about classroom management and children behavior will be very helpful for the teachers to have control for the students in the



classroom. According to Livingston (2016), if teacher education is to be successful in supporting teachers in identity shifts, we must be willing to reform our own identities as teacher educators in changing educational contexts (p. 401). Changing educational contexts happen means that teachers need to have regular training or education related to their profession in order to strengthen their identity. It can also remind the teacher of their purpose of being a teacher. Besides, one of the participants also explains that the ability to manage the class and understand the children behavior has impact to the ability to control the emotion.

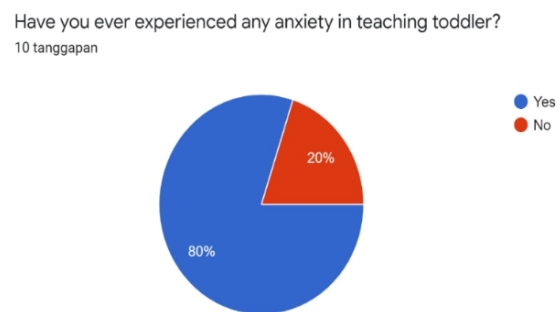
Next, related to the participants' experiences in teaching pre-school students, 80% of the participants ever experienced anxiety when it comes to teach pre-school students. It shows that even participants who ever joined particular training to teach toddler still have doubt and lack of confidence in teaching pre-school students. According to the participants, material preparation, unexpected situation (e.g. crying students) and feedback from the students are the factors which make the anxiety appears. Moreover, the teacher frequently questioning whether or not their approach is proper to the students. It is an important factor to be concerned since teacher is described as an educator, mentor, coach and a leader which can creates an interesting ambience for studying, gives sense of secure, comfort and conducive in classroom (Asgarwijaya and Prasetio, 2015).

Furthermore, related to the teachers' emotion regulation, the participants show how well they are in managing their emotion during

the teaching and learning process. The result is satisfying because most of the participants (70%) are able to manage their emotion well. Even 10% of the result shows that a teacher totally sure that he/she is able to manage their emotion properly. However, still there are 2 participants (20%) who think that sometimes they can manage their emotion, sometimes not. Nevertheless, all teachers agree that emotion regulation in teaching pre-school students is crucial.

Figure 4

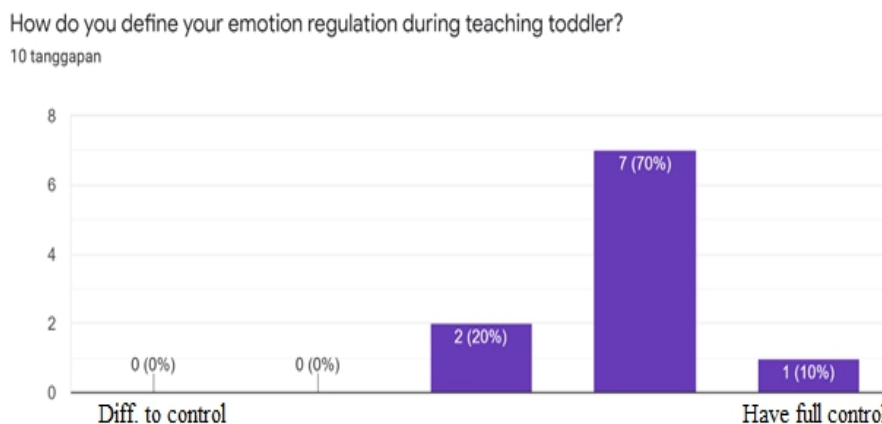
*Participants' anxiety in teaching pre-school students*



A teacher also adds that transparency and being open about the true feeling to the students is considered as fine as long as teachers as adult understand how to get through the problem properly. From the side of the teachers, there are some competences needed to support their performance. According to Arifin (2015), the competences are pedagogical competence, personality, social and professionalism (p. 38). The personality aspect here includes emotion regulation. Thus, teachers think that when teachers and students can learn together, emotions regulation could help both parties to understand each other

Figure 5

Participants' Emotion Regulation



Furthermore, the participants share what makes them happy or unhappy during teaching pre-school students. Most of the participants believe that the participation of the students in the learning process and sometimes, their nice behavior makes the teacher encouraged to teach. As stated by Ruprecht et al. (2015), teacher-child relationships over time may increase interactive involvement, increase children's social competence and reduce problem behaviors (p. 223). Also, one of the teachers' states that being emotionally engaged with the students makes him/her happy.

When it is time to discuss the challenges in teaching pre-school students, the participants share various answers. Some of the participants agree the ability to manage the classroom is the most challenging. From the interview, teachers believe that mentioned ability has a close relation to the success of the learning process. Some say that the engagement built between teacher and students is the most assertive. Those factors play important role in deciding the teachers' emotions during the learning process. It is because emotions influence the behavior and how the teacher treats the students. According to Asgarwijaya and Prasetyo (2015), pre-school students is in a language development phase which means they can deliver their feeling through spoken language. Their feeling includes wants, refusal and also their opinion (p. 1010). The ability of the pre-school

students in giving opinion and showing feelings become a consideration for the teachers in taking a decision; which involve their emotion to treat the students during the learning process.

Linked with those challenges, the teachers seem to have found their own strategy to overcome them. Three out of ten teachers agree to let the students be for a moment. According to one of the teachers, it does not mean the teacher ignores the student but it gives time to the students to manage their emotions too. "Let the kid be for a moment. I learned that it helps them to acknowledge his/her own emotion. When he/she begins calm, then I will approach the kid". Another teacher suggests to stay calm and manage the emotion and understand the student's emotion too before getting back to the current activity. This action is taken to avoid anger and uncontrollable emotion shown from teacher to students. As explained by Gastaldi et al. (2015), the person (teacher) therefore tends to reduce his/her emotional involvement in the professional context (p. 18).

Related to the development of the teacher identity, all of the teachers agree that they could feel changes in themselves. Mostly, they feel it is very difficult to manage their emotion. According to Livingston (2016), some teachers feel comfortable about re-forming their identity as a teacher and others find it a very difficult process (p. 401). As time goes by, experiences, trials, and

errors help them to be a better teacher. One of the teachers explains, *"In my very first-time teaching toddler I could say I was really emotional. I could shout at them or scream. And the worst I did and I forever regret was slamming a chair. Now, I can say I can manage my emotion during hard times like engaging super quiet students to speak up, managing 'naughty' students by making negotiation and the most important I'm feeling I am always ready for teaching toddler"*. Based on the answer, it can be seen that there is development in understanding his/her agency in teaching toddlers. Besides, it indicates good changes because the teacher is always ready to teach toddlers. As stated by van der Want (2017), benign-positive appraisals can be found in classroom situations that teachers experience as enhancing or preserving their well-being (p. 5). Another answer from the teacher also shows that their teacher identity is constructed through many unpleasant experiences. *"Having a different toddler means having different lessons each time so it is difficult to determine how we recognize our development. However, teaching toddlers has given me the opportunity to be patient, content, and passionate"*.

Moreover, some teachers believe that in constructing their identity, they find that creativity becomes one of the most developed factors. According to Olivant (2015), creativity is a means of helping students use their creativity to learn and feel successful (p. 120). The challenges experienced by the teachers influence them to be more creative in teaching. It leads them to find their passion in teaching and their identity as an educator. Moreover, the challenges also have related to how teachers define the quality of themselves. According to Sachs (2016), teacher standards refer to levels of competence expected of individual teachers, either for entry into the profession or for measuring ongoing performance (p. 5). It means that the influence of challenges shapes the teachers' competence and how they develop their achievement.

The teachers also share some of the situations or conditions which affect the teachers' emotional regulation and their identity development. Some of the teachers mention about the involvement of the parents in the learning

process is advised as disturbing. Another opinion is about students' behavior.

## CONCLUSION

From the findings and discussion above, it can be concluded that there are many factors which influence teachers' emotion during teaching pre-school students. For example, students' behavior and the teacher's personal condition. It can also be seen that the ability of the teachers to regulate their emotions is well managed. Experiences truly help the teachers to develop their ability to handle their emotions during the learning process. Those experiences also lead the teachers to be able to develop their identity. It motivates them to be better teachers and makes them aware that they have a passion for teaching especially pre-school students.

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