

# MILLENNIAL ENGLISH TEACHER IDENTITY: EMOTIONS AND RESILIENCE IN TEACHING

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## Abstract

This study investigates the aspects of emotions and how those emotions affect the resilience of millennial English teachers in teaching. Millennial teachers face severe challenges in teaching. They meet different demands every day in school. This situation forces them to make challenging decisions every day. Therefore, it is crucial for them to have the ability to control emotions and resilience in teaching. In this study, the sampling strategy used to select participants was purposeful sampling. The participants were millennial English teachers who were teaching in a private elementary school. In gathering the data, the researchers applied a semi-structured interview with open-ended questions. The participants were asked about how they experienced their professional teaching careers, the struggles they encountered, especially in terms of emotions and how they overcome the problems they faced in the workplace. A narrative analysis was used in this study to analyze the interview data. The researchers analyzed the participants' answers to find important points to answer the research questions. The results showed that the millennial teachers experienced complex emotions such as disappointment, and resentment when dealing with students, colleagues and students' parents. However, those complex emotions did not make them leave their profession as teachers.

**Keywords:** Emotions; Resilience; Teacher Identity; Millennial Teacher

## INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on the aspects of emotions of millennial English teachers and how those emotions affect their resilience in teaching. Millennials are those born between 1980 and 2000 (Walker, 2009). This generation is the first generation to grow up with technology integrated into their lives such as cell phones, i-pods, computers, Internet, instant messaging, texting, MySpace and Facebook accounts, computer and console video games and multimedia (Nikirk, 2009). Millennial teachers grow up with technology and social media like their students. Hence, millennial teachers must be good in utilizing technology in teaching. It is undeniable that millennials are very superior in the use of technology and have other skills that help them to develop. They are optimistic in doing something. Millennials thrive on contact and have quality time with people having successful experiences. They tend to be optimistic and want to make contributions to their students and the profession (Walker, 2009). Millennial teachers belong to the environment with variety of personalities, energy, and needs. Therefore, they meet many and different demands every day in school. This situation forces them to make tiring decisions every day. All of the demands put them in trouble. The demands reduce teachers confidence, test their patience, and break their hearts, and worst make them give up on their profession. If they cannot overcome their own problems in school, they will not survive and can leave their profession. Walker (2009) argues that the millennials have begun entering the profession, and many will not stay longer than 5 years. Two of the major reasons teachers leave the profession early on in their career are a sense of isolation and difficult work assignments (Walker, 2009). Knowing this fact, millennial teachers must have the ability to solve problems occur in school.

In addition, research shows that emotional endurance is significant when dealing with all kinds of problems. Emotion play a crucial role in teachers life in school. It affects the teachers in every aspects of their teaching since teaching is considered as emotional work. In this severe situation, millennial teachers must be able to understand their emotions. They have to learn how to regulate and manage their emotions when encounter the difficult situations in workplace. Managing emotions is indeed a crucial factor for millennial teachers. Further, maintaining emotions is one of the biggest difficulties for them to do. In facing difficult situations in the classroom, they must be able to control their emotions. Classroom is a battleground for teachers, where they experience challenging situation which demands them to be professional. In the classroom, they encounter emotional interactions. Challenging situations with students are associated with “emotionally charged interactions (Newberry & Davis, 2008). Therefore, millennial teachers need to understand their emotions in order to deal with problems happen. Before managing their emotions, they must construct and understand their identities due to emotion is related to identity. In this case, identity is the major aspect of teachers’ key of success in workplace. Apart from that, the millennial teachers must have the capacity for resilience. In dealing with various obstacles in school, they must have this kind of ability. This ability can be build and learned. It depends on the teachers themselves whether they want to survive or not. They must be professional in facing every difficulties in their workplace. Realizing this situation, the researchers are interested to conduct a study about millennial teachers. Research on millennial teachers has increase in recent years. Allan in 2007, studied about millennial teachers as users of information and communication technologies. She focused on students’ perceptions of the use of ICT in their own studies. In 2013, Rodriguez & Hallman conducted a study about millennial teachers and diversity in new times. They explored the ways in which the historical location of millennial teacher candidates is very different from the previous generation. Bartz et al., 2017, did a research on enhancing the effectiveness of millennial teachers through principals using performance management. Most of the researches focus on millennial teachers in applying technology. There is no research that explores millennial teachers identity, emotion, and resilience in teaching. Hence, the researchers choose “Millennial English Teacher Identity: Emotions And Resilience In Teaching” as the topic of the study. The researchers investigate how millennial English teachers deal with the challenges occur in their workplace. The researchers formulate two research questions: 1) What aspects of emotions do teachers encounter in their professional experiences?; 2) How do those emotions affect their resilience?

## **METHOD**

The sampling strategy used by the researchers to select participants was purposeful sampling. The participants were English teachers who are teaching in a private elementary school for two to three years. Moreover, the researchers selected the participants aged 25 to 30 years to ensure that they are the members of the millennial generation cohort. A pseudonym for each participant was applied to maintain the confidentiality. Further, the reseachers applied semi-structured interview as the primary data collection method in this study. The researchers applied Smith's (2015) semi-structured interview with open-ended questions. A narrative analysis of Ary et al. (2010) was used in this study to analyze the interview data since narative inquiry allows researchers to investigate people’s stories about their lives and build narrative analysis of the stories.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results**

***Laura: “I feel a lot of emotions while teaching here”***

Laura is a young married woman aged 25 years. Teaching in this elementary school is her first experience teaching young learners. She teach at this school starting in 2017, which means she has been teaching in this school for two years. In the interview, Laura said that she did not expect that being an elementary teacher had many responsibilities to do.

When asked about the role of her teacher's education in preparing herself to become a teacher, Laura stated that when she was in college she focused more on handling teen and adult learners. She ever taught junior high school students and tourism polices whose age was close to 50 years old. So during studying at the English Education Study Program, she did not get any lessons about young learners.

Laura then shared why she ended up teaching in this school. She revealed that at first she wanted to teach in a junior high school that is still in one foundation with this elementary school. She then explained that she was quite surprised when she first taught at this school. She said there was gap in terms of working hours between teachers.

Besides having problem in working hours, Laura also had difficulty adjusting to the characters of the students and their behavior in class. She said during interview that she did not know that young learners like to overestimate things that happen in class to other teachers. She was surprised by these situations.

Other than that, Laura had a time when she felt anger. The feeling of anger that she felt depended on the problems ocured. She said that in facing the problems that aroused her anger, she only disciplined her students with words. She raised her voice volume. However, if the students were still noisy, Laura just kept silent. She said during the first year of teaching, she shouted a lot.

Laura further told that she had experienced a complex problem because of the behavior of a student. She recounted the last year incident in which a student accidentally injured another student during her English class. As the result, the injured student must be taken to the hospital and Laura must leave her class to accompany the student. She had a difficult time because of the demands of the student’s parents. Laura felt like she failed doing her responsibilities as a teacher. She blamed herself for being a careless teacher.

When discussing about work colleagues, Laura stated that her relationship with the teachers and students parents was fine. Even so, she also said that not everyone showed a positive response to her. Laura's problems are the common problems experienced by teachers, not only teachers in elementary schools but also them who teach at senior high schools.

Laura, in her interview, explained that since she did not take the concentration of Teaching for Kids during her study in college, in order to be able to teach at this school, she had to learn about children. She read journals about approaches to teaching children. During the first semester, she observed the behavior of students. She claimed that she felt closer to the students after the first year of teaching. She increasingly understood the teaching methods that were suitable for young learners. Laura further mentioned that her students were encouragement for her when she had a difficult time. Besides her students, the colleagues also encouraged Laura when she had hard time. She revealed that when she faced problems, she often consulted with her colleagues. Therefore, it can be concluded that even though Laura experienced problems as she mentioned in the interview, she did not give up on her profession. On the contrary, she remained in this profession.

***Susan: “I had no thought at all to become a teacher”***

Susan is a 25-year-old young woman. She is a graduate of English Language Education Department in a private campus. She has been teaching at this school for three years. In the

interview, Susan said how she who initially did not have thought to become a teacher ended up teaching at this school.

Susan told how she imagined the chaos that would occur when teaching in elementary school. She, who only had the experience of teaching one or two students in private, must face thirty young learners in one class. Susan's anxiety about the teaching situation in elementary school changed when she entered the school. She said that the students were very enthusiastic. This situation was contrary to what she had thought. She was happy to realize that the students were enthusiastic to be taught by new teacher.

During her teaching in this school, Susan experienced problems related to students, colleagues and parents. Just like Laura, the problems Susan experienced with students were due to the behavior of the students. She explained how she felt angry because the students didn't respect her as a teacher. Susan's anger is an emotion that is often experienced by teachers in the classroom. When referring to colleagues, Susan stated that when she was having problem with colleagues, she felt complex emotions. She explained her disappointment when her opinion was criticized by other colleague.

When asked about her relationship with students' parents, Susan told about her difficult problem with a student's parents. The problem she experienced was related to the academic of the student. She described the condition of the student in which he rarely gets guidance from his parents so he did not do his assignments since the beginning of the semester. As the result, he didn't get any score in that semester. Susan complained by saying that she was tired of taking care of this students while she had many students to watch out for. She believes that there must be a cooperation between teachers and parents. She said that the teacher's responsibility to students is limited to school, so parents must be responsible to students if they are at home. She then told how she advised the parents to pay more attention to their children. It could be said that Susan has strong character. In interview, she said that she did not drag on the problems she experienced.

Even so, Susan had experienced the boredom of being a teacher. She even applied for another job. However, when she passed the interview stage, she felt sad because she had to leave the school. She admitted that she still felt comfortable working in this school. She realized that she was still needed. These reasons made her stay in this school. When experiencing this kind of upheaval, Susan said that she often did self-reflection. From this interview, it is known that Susan often does a self-reflection when having problems.

Susan passionately told how she who initially did not have the skills to teach young learners becomes a reliable teacher. She revealed that she studied the characters of her students, thus she could choose the right teaching method for teaching them. She did not want the students to feel bored because it would affect their scores. Further, Susan revealed that she loved to share her problems with other colleagues. When experiencing problems, she always asks for advice from other teachers. As the time goes by, Susan increasingly loves her profession as a teacher. She said that at the beginning of her career, her love for the profession was only 20 percent. But over time, her love for teaching profession was increased to 85 percent. From the results of this interview, it can be seen that Susan has a strong passion for her profession. She chooses to become a teacher even though she realizes that being a teacher is not easy.

## **Discussion**

The findings of this study indicated that the problems that occurred at school made the two millennial teachers showed their emotions. They felt anger, disappointment, and resentment when dealing with students, colleagues and parents. When the students behaved badly, Laura and Susan showed anger in response to the their behavior in the class. The classroom atmosphere can be filled emotionally, and teachers can easily feel exposed, vulnerable, and

'show', both as professionals and as humans (Moore, 2010). Achinstein (in Schutz et al., 2018) states that during the first few years of their career, teachers leave their profession at disproportionately high rates. Emotional labour is one of the reasons for this withdrawal which teachers are required to handle complex classroom environments (Schutz et al., 2018). Classrooms are challenging areas where teachers are required to handle a complex array of social, cognitive, academic, and emotional demands (Schutz et al., 2018).

One complex problem that Laura faced throughout her career as a teacher was with student's parents. She was in a situation in which she felt guilty and blamed herself for neglecting her duties as a teacher. She must face the demands of the parents. Laura's self-blame attitude shows that she is at a stage where she experiences a crisis of confidence in her abilities as a teacher. The tension between teachers' original identity and the environment caused them to have a significant emotional burden and led them to uncertainty about their professional competence (Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2018). Susan, on the other hand, also experienced a serious problem with parents. However, this problem did not make her feel worse until blaming herself. Instead, she reminded the parents to carry out their responsibilities.

The difficulties experienced by teachers are due to the environment and their relations in school rather than the teachers themselves. However, if the teachers are unable to deal with the problems that occur, they may experience their work as "emotional labour". This condition may affect their efficacy, agency, commitment and capacity for resilience (Day, 2018). Students, colleagues, and parents have potential in causing inconvenience for teachers. This kind of work environment leads teachers to experience burnout and as a result they quit their profession. Teachers who struggle to understand their role and place in the classroom are more likely to burn out and leave; whereas teachers who are more successful in understanding and adjusting their identities as teachers might be more willing to persevere (Schutz et al., 2018).

Other findings from this study showed that despite experiencing many problems in school, Laura and Susan did not give up on their profession as teachers. They were able to manage their emotions, thus it did not reduce their passion toward their profession. Managing their and other people's emotions requires a lot of energy, and demands that they have a sustainable capacity for resilience (Day, 2018). Besides, Laura and Susan also showed determination in carrying out their responsibilities. Awareness of the importance of the role of a teacher makes them increasingly love this profession even though they often experience complex problems. They have a good strategy in solving the problems which is by sharing their stories with other colleagues. Teacher learning does not only occur in a practical context, but it is in the security and authenticity of sharing stories that are lived (Alsup, 2006). Support from colleagues is one of the most influential forms of assistance for teachers. In addition, self-reflection is arguably the most successful way of dealing with dilemmas when working. Susan, for example, was able to manage her problems well since she did self-reflection. Reflection includes self-assessment tools. These self-assessment tools can be useful in identifying potential burnout, areas of strength, physical and emotional health, and can also be used by individuals for ongoing reflection and professional development throughout their careers (Curry & O'Brien, 2012).

On the other hand, Laura also showed resistance to problems even though she had felt down. She rose again from her problems and persisted in this profession. From this, it can be concluded that both Laura and Susan have strong commitment towards their profession. They do have strong resistance. Resistance fluctuates according to the individual's willingness, commitment and ability to manage successfully a number of potentially conflicting forces with different strengths; and that they were helped or hindered in this case in part by the strength of their inner commitment to teaching (Day & Qing, 2009).

Palmer (in Alsup, 2006) called teaching as "daily training in vulnerability". He further states that in order to develop their identities, teachers need three aspects to identity development which are intellectuality, emotionality and spirituality. These three aspects of self according to

Palmer, are closely related to teachers attempt in finding their “teacher within” and teach from a place of “integrity” (in Alsup, 2006). These two millennial teachers prove that even though they live in modern era which everything goes easier, they don't give up when experiencing difficulties. They have strong resistance as millennial teachers. They professionally overcome the negative emotions they encounter.

## CONCLUSION

The narration of the participants showed the situation of millennial teachers whose emotions and resilience were influenced by the factors in their workplace. In both narratives, students, colleagues and parents played a role in determining the success of the participants as teachers. Even though they had complex problems that led them experienced complex emotions, they did not give up on their profession. Awareness of their responsibilities as teachers was a key factor in the resilience of these teachers when dealing with problems. In addition, sharing stories with colleagues and doing self-reflection were the tools that also helped them to survive. The participants' experiences showed that the level of resilience of teachers depended on the teachers themselves and the people around them. Looking at the examples from the participants, it could be concluded that millennial teachers had the ability to survive in facing challenges in their workplace. Their professional identities were growing as their teaching experiences increased.

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