

PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION OF JUNIOR SECONDARY EFL TEACHER IN INDONESIAN ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOLS

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of junior secondary EFL teachers constructing their professional within Islamic boarding school (pesantren) settings in Indonesia. A qualitative phenomenological design was employed following (Moustakas, 1994) transcendental phenomenological procedures. Four certified junior secondary EFL teachers at Nurul Jadid Islamic boarding school were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected via semi-structured interview, classroom observation, and document analysis. Four themes emerged: (1) Professional Identity as a moral and educational calling (Amanah); (2) Identity development accumulated teaching experiences; (3) negotiating of dual roles as EFL teacher and religious educator (ustad); and (4) the constitutive influence of pesantren culture and professional development on identity construction. Findings are contextually bounded to two institutions with four participants. Future studies should involve multiple Pesantren contexts and longitudinal design.

Keywords: Professional Identity, EFL teacher, Islamic boarding school, Teacher identity construction, Junior Secondary education.

INTRODUCTION

Teacher professional identity has emerged as a central area of inquiry in educational research, given its substantial influence on teachers' beliefs, instructional practice, professional commitment. And career development (Beijaard et al., 2004). Identity shapes how teachers perceive themselves as professionals, interpret their institutional roles, and respond to the evolving demands of their profession. As educational environments grow increasingly complex, teachers must continuously negotiate personal beliefs, professional values, institutional expectations, and sociocultural demands rendering professional identity a dynamic, context-sensitive, and continuously reconstructed construct (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009)

Within the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, professional identity carries particular significance. EFL teachers operate within complex linguistic, cultural, and institutional environments where responsibilities extend well beyond developing students' language proficiency. They must navigate pedagogical challenges, respond to institutional expectations, and manage the demands of contemporary educational practice. Consequently, understanding how EFL teachers construct and negotiate professional identities has become a prominent area of concern in language education research (Pennington & Richards, 2016).

The construction of professional identity acquires distinctive significance within Islamic boarding schools (*Pesantren*), which represent a unique educational context in Indonesia. Unlike conventional schools, *Pesantren* integrate formal academic instruction with religious education, character formation, and communal values. Teachers in this setting are expected not only to fulfill instructional duties but also to contribute actively to students' moral and spiritual development, creating a distinctive environment for identity construction and negotiation (Qoyyimah et al., 2020).

A growing body of empirical studies has examined teacher professional identity across diverse educational settings. Several prior investigations are directly relevant to the present study. (Moradkhani & Ebadijalal, 2024) explored Iranian EFL teachers' identity development

through a four-year narrative inquiry grounded in Activity Theory and found that workplace conflicts triggered fluctuations between teachers' imagined and practiced professional identities. (Nazari et al., 2023) examined how institutional power shaped English language teachers' autonomy, agency, and identity from a poststructural perspective, finding that policies functioned as hierarchical forces that constrained teachers' personalized understandings and performances, even as teachers viewed the broader institutional discourse positively for sustaining systemic organization. (Wu, 2022) conducted a longitudinal narrative case study of a tertiary-level EFL teacher in China and demonstrated that sustained individual agency enabled the negotiation of an initially marginalised professional identity and its eventual reconstruction into integrated teacher and researcher identities.

Within Islamic educational contexts, (Tambak & Sukenti, 2025) investigated how Islamic professional identity among madrasah teachers in Indonesia is shaped by religious values and motivation for continuous development, finding that teachers consistently integrated Islamic commitments into their professional self-conceptions. (Almayez, 2022) a similarly documented how faith-based educational settings in Saudi Arabia produced distinctive professional identities marked by the convergence of pedagogical roles and religious responsibilities. More recently, (Li, 2023) demonstrated that EFL teacher identity in higher education is mediated by agentic processes, community participation, and institutional belonging – findings that resonate with the dynamics anticipated in the present study's *Pesantren* context.

Despite this growing body of research, several gaps remain. First, much of the existing scholarship has focused on pre-service teachers, novice educators, university lecturers, or teachers in mainstream school settings; comparatively limited attention has been directed toward certified EFL teachers at the junior secondary level within Islamic boarding schools. Second, studies conducted in Islamic educational contexts have predominantly examined curriculum implementation, pedagogical approaches, or value integration, rather than engaging directly with teachers' lived experiences of professional identity construction. Third, phenomenological perspectives remain scarce in this literature, leaving underexplored how teachers themselves experience, interpret, and negotiate identity formation within the *Pesantren* environment.

Theoretically, professional identity is understood as a dynamic, multidimensional construct through which teachers integrate personal values, disciplinary knowledge, and institutional roles into a coherent sense of professional self (Beijaard et al., 2004). In the ELT field, identity construction involves ongoing negotiation between linguistic, pedagogical, and socio-institutional dimensions (Pennington & Richards, 2016). Identity negotiation the continuous process by which teachers reconcile competing role demands, institutional expectations, and personal beliefs echoes (Norton, 2013). Conceptualization of identity as multiple, shifting, and shaped by relations of power, a perspective originally developed for language learners that has since been extended to teacher's professional development contexts, where teachers similarly navigate power-laden institutional environments that shaped how they understand and perform their professional selves (Wu, 2022). In religious educational contexts specifically, professional identity is further shaped by faith-based values, moral responsibilities, and the convergence of pedagogical and spiritual roles dynamics that distinguish Islamic institutions such as the *Pesantren* from mainstream school environments (Almayez, 2022; Tambak & Sukenti, 2025).

This study addresses these gaps by exploring the lived experiences of junior secondary EFL teachers in Islamic boarding schools through a phenomenological lens. Three aspects constitute its novelty: (1) it focuses on junior secondary EFL teachers, a population underrepresented in professional identity research within Islamic settings; (2) it situates identity construction within the distinctive sociocultural and religious environment of the *Pesantren*; and (3) it employs phenomenology to foreground teachers' meaning-making processes, offering insights that extend beyond the institutional and pedagogical perspectives prevalent in existing studies. The study addresses the following research questions: (1) How do junior secondary EFL teachers in Islamic boarding schools construct their professional identities? (2) What factors influence the development of those identities within the *Pesantren* context? (Beijaard et al., 2004). Define professional identity as teachers' perceptions of themselves as professionals, continuously shaped by experiences, beliefs, knowledge, and contextual interactions. The authors identify three interconnected dimensions constituting teachers' professional knowledge base: subject matter expertise (disciplinary content knowledge), pedagogical expertise (understanding of students and learning processes), and didactical expertise (capacity to design and implement effective instructional strategies). These dimensions collectively shape how teachers understand and enact their professional roles.

Within EFL education, professional identity extends beyond linguistic competence and instructional skills. EFL teachers negotiate multiple responsibilities, including facilitating language learning, responding to institutional expectations, and adapting to sociocultural demands. (Pennington & Richards, 2016) identify ideological orientations, emotional engagement, and institutional positioning as key dimensions of EFL teacher identity. Recent scholarship consistently confirms that identity influences teacher motivation, professional commitment, wellbeing, and instructional effectiveness (Xing, 2022; Zen et al., 2022).

Several empirical studies have provided foundational insights into teacher professional identity that directly inform the present investigation. (Nazari et al., 2023) conducted a qualitative study of Iranian English language teachers using narrative frames and semi-structured interviews, and found that institutional power discursively shaped teachers' autonomy, agency, and identity through three interrelated mechanisms: power as a normative impetus, policies as hierarchical forces, and power weakening the nexus between autonomy and agency. Teachers who experienced this institutional power nonetheless valued the systemic organization it provided, illustrating the dual constraining and legitimizing role of institutional structures in identity construction. This finding is particularly relevant to the present study, as *Pesantren* teachers similarly operate within environments characterized by distinctive institutional expectations. (Wu, 2022) examined how a tertiary-level EFL teacher in China reconstructed her professional identity across career stages through a positioning theory lens. The findings demonstrated that consistent individual agency served as the primary driver of identity reconstruction, enabling the teacher to move from a marginalised professional position toward an integrated teacher-researcher identity. This resonates with the present study's interest in how teaching experience contributes to identity formation among *Pesantren* EFL teachers. (Moradkhani & Ebadijalal, 2024) explored professional identity development among in-service Iranian EFL teachers over four years and found that identity was fluid, collaborative, and shaped by ongoing negotiation between personal ideologies and institutional demands a finding that resonates with the present study's interest in how teaching context shape's professional identity construction.

In the Indonesian context, (Tambak & Sukenti, 2025) investigated professional identity among Islamic *madrasah* teachers in Indonesia and found that participants consistently integrated Islamic values, moral responsibilities, and religious commitments into their professional self-conceptions. Teachers described themselves not merely as subject specialists but as educators driven by Islamic principles and motivation for continuous professional development. While this study focused on *madrasah* rather than *Pesantren*, its findings provide important comparative grounding for the present investigation.

(Almayez, 2022) examined professional identity among university teachers in Islamic higher education in Saudi Arabia and demonstrated that faith-based institutional contexts produced distinctive professional identities characterized by the convergence of pedagogical roles and religious responsibilities. Teachers perceived their professional work as a form of Islamic service, a finding that aligns closely with the present study's preliminary interest in how *Pesantren* teachers relate religious commitment to professional identity.

Collectively, these prior studies establish that professional identity is shaped by institutional context, accumulated experience, mentoring relationships, community participation, and ideological commitments. However, none of the studies reviewed engaged specifically with junior secondary EFL teachers operating within the Indonesian *Pesantren* environment leaving a contextual gap that the present study seeks to address (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Argue that teacher professional identity should be conceptualized as an ongoing process of becoming rather than a fixed professional attribute. Identity is continuously constructed and reconstructed through experience, reflection, and interaction with professional environments. Teachers are therefore not passive recipients of professional expectations but active interpreters and negotiators of their professional roles.

This perspective is particularly relevant for phenomenological inquiry, given that phenomenology seeks to understand how individuals experience and make sense of particular phenomena. In the context of teacher professional identity, lived experiences provide invaluable insights into how teachers construct meanings about their roles and how those meanings evolve over time. For EFL teachers, identity development involves ongoing negotiation between personal beliefs, educational values, institutional expectations, and classroom realities rendering identity dynamic, context-dependent, and inherently social (Pennington & Richards, 2016). (Wenger, 1998) introduced the concept of Community of Practice (CoP) to explain how learning and identity formation occur through active participation in shared social practices. Within a CoP, individuals develop knowledge, skills, and professional understandings through sustained interaction with others who share common goals, values, and responsibilities. Identity, in this framework, is understood as a product of participation shaped by who we are in relation to the communities we belong to.

This framework is particularly applicable to Islamic boarding schools, which simultaneously function as educational, religious, and social communities. Teachers interact closely with students, colleagues, school leaders, and religious authorities within a community structured by shared values and educational goals (Qoyyimah et al., 2020). Prior studies confirm that teachers in Islamic educational settings perceive themselves as both educators and moral role models, with professional identities shaped by pedagogical, religious, and institutional dimensions (Almayez, 2022; Tambak & Sukenti, 2025).

This study draws upon three complementary theoretical perspectives. First, (Beijaard et al., 2004) provide the primary framework for understanding professional identity as a dynamic

construct shaped by professional knowledge, experience, and contextual factors. Second, (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009) conceptualize identity as a process of becoming, continuously constructed through lived experiences and reflection. Third, (Wenger, 1998) Community of Practice foregrounds the constitutive role of social participation and community engagement in identity development. Together, these perspectives frame the study's analysis of how junior secondary EFL teachers construct professional identities within the distinctive sociocultural and religious environment of the Islamic boarding school.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences of junior secondary EFL teachers constructing professional identities within Islamic boarding school settings. As (Creswell & Poth, 2018) explain, phenomenological research focuses on understanding the meaning individuals assign to a shared experience through their lived accounts. The design was selected because the study aimed to uncover how teachers experience, interpret, and assign meaning to their professional roles, rather than to measure variables or compare institutions. (Moustakas, 1994) transcendental phenomenological procedures guided data collection and analysis. The study was conducted at Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School, Probolinggo, East Java, Indonesia a prominent *Pesantren* that integrates formal education with religious instruction, moral development, and communal living. This setting was selected for its distinctiveness as an environment in which academic and religious responsibilities are structurally intertwined, providing a productive context for investigating professional identity construction.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure informational richness and relevance to the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 2014). Inclusion criteria required participants to serve as junior secondary EFL teachers, hold a minimum of five years' teaching experience, possess professional teacher certification, actively participate in the boarding school community, and consent voluntarily. Four EFL teachers meeting these criteria participated. Pseudonyms were assigned to protect confidentiality.

Table 1. Participant Profiles

Participant	Teaching Experience	Certification Status	Additional Role
P1	12 years	Certified	<i>Ustadz</i>
P2	22 years	Certified	<i>Ustadz</i>
P3	20 years	Certified	EFL Teacher
P4	27 years	Certified	Teacher & Seminar Speaker

Data were collected through three complementary methods to facilitate triangulation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Semi-structured interviews served as the primary source, with each participant completing one to two sessions of 45–60 minutes, conducted in Indonesian. Classroom observations provided contextual insight into instructional practices and professional role enactment, documented through systematic field notes. Document analysis of lesson plans, teaching materials, institutional guidelines, and professional development records supplied additional contextual information.

Data were analysed following (Moustakas, 1994) transcendental phenomenological procedures. Analysis proceeded through: (1) *epoche* identifying and bracketing personal assumptions to minimize interpretive bias; (2) repeated iterative reading of transcripts, observation notes, and documents to identify significant statements; (3) grouping of statements into meaning units and thematic categories; (4) development of textural descriptions (what was experienced) and structural descriptions (how experiences were situated); and (5) composite synthesis articulating the essence of professional identity construction among participants.

First, *epoche* (phenomenological reduction) was applied: the researcher identified and bracketed prior assumptions, theoretical preconceptions, and personal experiences related to EFL teaching and Islamic education, in order to approach participants' accounts with as open and unbiased a perspective as possible (Moustakas, 1994). This stage required sustained reflexive awareness maintained through journaling throughout the data collection and analysis process. Second, *horizontalization* was conducted through repeated iterative reading of all interview transcripts, observation field notes, and documentary materials. Each statement potentially relevant to the experience of professional identity construction was identified and treated as having equal initial value. No statement was ranked above or excluded at this stage; all significant expressions were listed horizontally, following (Moustakas, 1994) principle that every horizon of the experience holds equal standing in the initial stage of analysis.

Third, the horizontalized statements were clustered into *meaning units* coherent groupings of statements that shared the same experiential reference. Redundant or overlapping statements were removed; only those statements that were both necessary and sufficient to characterize the experience were retained (Moustakas, 1994). Meaning units were then organised into thematic categories, as illustrated in Table 2 above.

Fourth, *textural descriptions* were developed for each participant: accounts of *what* was experienced, drawing directly from participants' own language and the concrete details of their accounts. These were complemented by *structural descriptions*, which addressed *how* the experience came to be examining the contextual, situational, and sociocultural conditions (including the *Pesantren* environment, institutional culture, and community participation) that shaped the experience of professional identity construction for each participant (Moustakas, 1994). Fifth, textural and structural descriptions were synthesised into a composite *essence construction* a unified statement articulating the invariant, essential structure of professional identity construction as experienced by junior secondary EFL teachers within the Islamic boarding school context. This composite essence, presented in the Discussion section, reflects the shared core of participants' lived experiences while acknowledging individual variation (Moustakas, 1994).

Table 2. Coding Process and Theme Development

Significant Statements	Meaning Units	Categories	Themes
Teaching is an <i>amanah</i> that must be carried out responsibly.	Teaching responsibility	as Moral commitment	Professional Identity as a Moral and Educational Calling
Teaching provides <i>barokah</i> and opportunities to serve others.	Teaching service	as Spiritual motivation	Professional Identity as a Moral and Educational Calling
English is important for students to face global challenges.	Global educational mission	Educational purpose	Professional Identity as a Moral and Educational Calling
English can be used as a medium for <i>dakwah</i> .	Religious purpose of English	Educational-religious integration	Professional Identity as a Moral and Educational Calling
Students have demanding schedules due to boarding school activities.	Student learning challenges	Teaching challenges	Identity Development Through Teaching Experiences
Teachers develop creative strategies to maintain engagement.	Pedagogical adaptation	Professional growth	Identity Development Through Teaching Experiences
Experiences inside and outside the classroom broaden perspectives.	Learning through experience	Professional learning	Identity Development Through Teaching Experiences
Teachers also serve as <i>ustadz</i> in the boarding school.	Multiple professional roles	Dual identity	Negotiating Dual Roles
Teachers are expected to become role models for students.	Moral responsibility	Religious leadership	Negotiating Dual Roles
Islamic values should be integrated into educational practices.	Value integration	Religious commitment	Negotiating Dual Roles
Religious activities influence teachers' professional practices.	Institutional culture	Cultural influence	Contextual Factors Influencing Identity Development

Interaction with kyai and colleagues shapes professional growth.	Social interaction	Community participation	Contextual Influencing Development	Factors Identity
Teacher certification enhances confidence and competence.	Professional recognition	Professional development	Contextual Influencing Development	Factors Identity
Training programs and seminars support identity development.	Continuous learning	Professional development	Contextual Influencing Development	Factors Identity

Trustworthiness was established following (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) criteria. Member checking was conducted by sharing interview summaries and preliminary interpretations with participants for verification. Triangulation was achieved by integrating interview, observation, and document data. Thick description of the research context was provided to support transferability, while reflexive journaling was maintained throughout to enhance confirmability and dependability. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without consequences. Confidentiality was ensured through pseudonymization, and all data were stored securely for academic purposes only.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 3. Summary of Themes and Subthemes

Themes	Subthemes
Professional Identity as a Moral and Educational Calling	Teaching as <i>Amanah</i> and Responsibility; Seeking <i>Barokah</i> Through Education; English as a Tool for Global Engagement and <i>Dakwah</i>
Professional Identity Development Through Teaching Experiences	Navigating Challenges in the Boarding School Environment; Developing Creative Pedagogical Practices; Learning Through Diverse Professional Experiences
Negotiating Dual Roles as EFL Teachers and Religious Educators	Being Both Teacher and <i>Ustadz</i> ; Acting as Moral Role Models; Integrating Islamic Values into Educational Practice
Contextual Factors Influencing Professional Identity Development	Influence of <i>Pesantren</i> Culture; Social Interaction and Community Participation; Professional Certification and Continuous Development

Theme 1: Professional Identity as a Moral and Educational Calling

Participants consistently described teaching as extending far beyond academic content delivery. They characterized their profession as an *amanah* a sacred trust requiring sincerity, integrity, and wholehearted commitment. Professional identity was thus understood as carrying moral dimensions that extended into teachers' conduct in both professional and social

domains. Participants also articulated that their engagement with English was motivated by belief in the language's strategic importance for students' global engagement. Critically, they positioned English not as a cultural threat but as a vehicle for accessing broader knowledge and for *dakwah*. Teaching was further associated with the pursuit of *barokah* situating pedagogical work within a spiritual framework of devotional service.

"For me teaching is not just a profession, but a mandate given to me, and I have to carry it out wholeheartedly, I remember that I am responsible not only to the students, but to the pesantren that has brought me to this point"

(P2, Interview). This account illustrates how teaching is experienced not merely as an occupational duty but as a divine trust, embedding professional identity within a moral and spiritual framework. A second participant expressed a similar orientation, specifically addressing the strategic value of English: *"English is not just a world science. If students can speak English, they can preach with their knowledge anywhere and can read Islamic references from all over the world"* English is not merely worldly knowledge. If students can speak English, they can do *dakwah* anywhere, they can read Islamic references from all over the world (P1, Interview). These accounts demonstrate that participants did not perceive a tension between English-language education and Islamic commitment; rather, they reconceptualized English as an instrument of religious and moral outreach, integrating their roles as language educators and religious agents into a coherent professional self.

Theme 2: Professional Identity Development Through Teaching Experiences

Participants described their professional identities as having developed gradually through sustained teaching experience rather than being established at qualification. The demanding environment of the boarding school where students balance academic responsibilities with intensive religious activities compelled teachers to develop creative and adaptive pedagogical strategies. These adaptive processes strengthened instructional confidence and deepened professional identity over time. Engagement beyond the classroom, including service as *ustadz* and participation in professional development activities such as seminars and workshops, further contributed to identity development by broadening professional perspectives and expanding competence.

"In the past, I was often confused about how to keep students enthusiastic about learning English, even though their schedules were already very busy. I tried various ways of games, discussions, songs until finally I found an approach that was suitable for the pesantren environment. That experience really shaped me as a teacher."

(P3, Interview; translated from Indonesian). "I used to be often confused about how to keep students motivated to learn English, when their schedules were already very demanding. I tried various approaches games, discussions, songs until I eventually found an approach suitable for the *pesantren* environment. That experience truly shaped me as a teacher." This narrative exemplifies how classroom challenges functioned not as obstacles but as catalysts for pedagogical creativity and professional identity formation consistent with (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009) conceptualization of identity as a dynamic process of becoming through experience.

Theme 3: Negotiating Dual Roles as EFL Teachers and Religious Educators

Participants simultaneously occupied multiple professional roles within the boarding school environment functioning not only as EFL teachers but also as religious educators, mentors, and moral guides. Students perceived them as *ustadz* whose conduct was expected to exemplify Islamic values, creating a felt responsibility to maintain consistency between professional behaviour and the moral standards participants sought to model. Educational responsibilities therefore encompassed language instruction, discipline guidance, character development, and religious observance illustrating the inseparability of pedagogical and religious commitment within this professional context.

"Here, I'm not just an English teacher. The students see me as an ustadz as well. If my behavior is not in accordance with Islamic values, it will directly affect their trust in me as a teacher. So I have to take care of myself wherever I am, not just in the classroom."

(P4, Interview; translated from Indonesian). "Here, I am not only an English teacher. Students also see me as an ustadz. If my behaviour does not conform to Islamic values, it will immediately affect their trust in me as a teacher. So, I must conduct myself wherever I am, not only inside the classroom." This account powerfully illustrates that dual role negotiation operates not as a professional burden but as a constitutive dimension of professional selfhood within the Pesantren context.

Theme 4: Contextual Factors Influencing Professional Identity Development

Several contextual factors shaped professional identity development. The institutional culture of the *Pesantren* was cited as most pervasive, with religious practices integrated into daily school routines collective prayers, *istighasah*, *tahlil*, and communal activities reinforcing values of discipline, responsibility, and spiritual awareness that informed professional orientations. Institutional policies, including gendered learning environments and pre-instructional religious activities, further shaped professional practice. Professional certification and accumulated experience (approximately ten to twelve years) were associated with increased confidence and commitment. Social interactions with *kyai*, colleagues, and professional communities provided ongoing opportunities for reflective learning and professional growth.

"The culture of the pesantren has a great influence on the way I look at teaching. It is intended to worship. My interaction with kyai also shaped my perspective on education that science must bring benefits to the world and the hereafter. The certification I got also made me feel more confident and recognized as a professional."

(P2, Interview; translated from Indonesian). "The pesantren culture greatly influences how I teach. Here everything starts with bismillah, everything is intended as worship. My interactions with the *kyai* also shaped my perspective on education that knowledge must bring benefit in this world and the hereafter. The certification I received also made me feel more confident and recognized as a professional." This account vividly illustrates how institutional culture, community participation, and formal professional recognition converge as simultaneous shapers of professional identity in the Pesantren context consistent with (Wenger, 1998). Community of Practice framework and with the contextual identity dynamics documented by (Nazari et al., 2023).

DISCUSSION

Professional Identity Beyond Instructional responsibilities

The findings demonstrate that participants understood professional identity as extending well beyond instructional competence. Teaching was conceptualized as an *amanah*, a form of moral service requiring dedication to students' academic, personal, and spiritual development. This finding substantiates (Beijaard et al., 2004) proposition that professional identity is fundamentally connected to how teachers perceive themselves and assign meaning to their roles. In the present study, professional identity integrated educational duties, moral commitments, and religious values simultaneously a configuration not typically encountered in mainstream EFL settings.

The integration of religious purpose into professional identity aligns with prior studies in Islamic educational contexts. (Tambak & Sukenti, 2025) found that Indonesian Islamic madrasah teachers consistently incorporated religious commitments into their professional self-conceptions, integrating Islamic values as the foundation of their professional motivations and identity development. (Almayez, 2022) similarly documented the convergence of pedagogical and religious responsibilities in the professional identities of Islamic higher education teachers. The present findings extend these observations to junior secondary EFL teachers in the *Pesantren* context, confirming that the integration of faith and professional role is not incidental but constitutive of identity in Islamic educational settings. The framing of English as a medium for da'wah further elaborates this dynamic, suggesting that participants resolved potential tensions between foreign-language learning and religious commitment by reframing English as an instrument of religious outreach.

Professional Identity as a Process of Becoming

The data confirm that professional identity developed through sustained experience and active engagement rather than being established at the point of qualification. This finding directly supports (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009) conceptualization of professional identity as a process of becoming. Participants' descriptions of how classroom challenges prompted pedagogical innovation and deepened confidence illustrate the generative role of difficulty in identity development a mechanism also documented by (Wu, 2022), who found that a Chinese EFL teacher reconstructed her professional identity through agentic responses to institutional constraints and career-stage challenges

The finding that diverse professional engagements serving as *ustadz*, attending workshops, assuming mentoring responsibilities contributed to identity development is consistent with (Moradkhani & Ebadijalal, 2024), who demonstrated that Iranian EFL teachers' identity formation was substantially mediated by mentoring relationships and institutional support. However, the present study extends this finding by showing that in the *Pesantren* context, identity-shaping experiences encompass not only professional interactions but also religious and communal activities a configuration not accounted for in contexts where the school's social and spiritual dimensions are absent. (Li, 2023) and (Zen et al., 2022) further confirm that identity development is an active, experiential process unfolding across the professional lifespan, consistent with the trajectories described by participants in the present study.

The Influence of the *Pesantren* Community on Identity Construction

The findings highlight the substantial role of the Islamic boarding school community in shaping professional identity. Participants' identities were mediated by religious activities, institutional culture, social interactions, and participation in the *Pesantren* community consistent with (Wenger, 1998) Community of Practice framework. Through sustained interaction with kyai, colleagues, and students, participants continuously negotiated and reconstructed professional identities in relation to community expectations and shared values.

This finding resonates with (Nazari et al., 2023), who documented how institutional power and policy shaped the professional autonomy, agency, and identity of English language teachers in Iran. In the present study, however, the institutional expectations encompassed moral and spiritual dimensions absent from the secular, policy-driven contexts examined by Nazari et al., suggesting that the *Pesantren* constitutes a qualitatively distinct form of professional community with unique implications for identity construction.

The dual role of teacher and religious mentor further demonstrates how professional identity is embedded within the sociocultural fabric of Islamic boarding schools. Comparable findings have been reported by (Qoyyimah et al., 2020) and (Tambak & Sukenti, 2025), whose research confirms that teachers in Indonesian Islamic educational institutions perceive character formation and religious guidance as core professional responsibilities. The present study extends this finding by offering phenomenological evidence that such dual role negotiation constitutes not a supplementary professional function but a central dimension of how junior secondary EFL teachers in *Pesantren* understand and perform their professional selves.

Essence of Professional Identity Construction in Islamic Boarding School

Taken together, the findings reveal that professional identity construction among junior secondary EFL teachers in Islamic boarding schools is a multidimensional process shaped by personal beliefs, teaching experiences, religious commitments, and community participation. The essence of professional identity in this context resides in the integration of educational responsibilities, religious commitments, lived experience, and active *Pesantren* community engagement. Through these interconnected dimensions, teachers construct identities that position them not only as language educators but as moral guides, role models, and contributors to students' holistic development an essence that reinforces (Beijaard et al., 2004) framework, (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009) notion of becoming, and (Wenger, 1998) community of practice while situating these theoretical perspectives within a sociocultural and religious context that existing literature has not yet fully examined.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the professional identity of junior secondary EFL teachers in Islamic boarding schools through a phenomenological lens. The findings indicate that professional identity is constructed through the continuous interaction of educational responsibilities, religious commitments, lived teaching experiences, and participation in the *Pesantren* community. Participants perceived teaching as an *amanah* a trust and form of devotional service carrying moral, educational, and spiritual dimensions rather than as a purely occupational function. Professional identities were shaped by commitment to student development, strategic valuation of English for global and religious purposes, and the simultaneous obligation to uphold Islamic values within educational practice.

Professional identity was found to develop through accumulated teaching experience and active professional engagement. Classroom challenges, community interactions, professional development activities, and additional boarding school responsibilities collectively contributed to participants' growth as educators consistent with the characterization of professional identity as a dynamic, lifelong process. The negotiation of dual roles as EFL teacher and religious educator emerged as a defining characteristic of professional identity in this context, with participants experiencing their pedagogical and moral responsibilities as inseparable dimensions of a unified professional self.

The findings contribute to the literature on teacher professional identity by providing contextually grounded phenomenological insights from the *Pesantren* setting, and by extending prior studies in Islamic educational contexts (Almayez, 2022; Qoyyimah et al., 2020; Tambak & Sukenti, 2025) to the underexamined population of junior secondary EFL teachers. Practically, the findings suggest that Islamic boarding schools should support professional identity development through structured professional learning, mentoring programs, reflective practices, and collaborative communities that explicitly recognize the moral and religious dimensions of teaching as integral to professional growth.

Theoretically, this study makes three distinct contributions. First, it extends (Beijaard et al., 2004) framework by demonstrating that in Islamic boarding school contexts, professional knowledge encompasses a religious-moral dimension that is constitutive rather than merely supplementary to professional self-understanding. Second, it enriches (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009) conceptualization of identity as becoming by showing that in the *Pesantren* context, the process of becoming integrates spiritual development with professional growth, making religious experience an integral site of identity formation. Third, it advances (Wenger, 1998)'s Community of Practice framework by illustrating that in faith-based educational communities, participation in religious and communal activities functions as a powerful mechanism for professional identity construction a dynamic that has received insufficient attention in the broader teacher identity literature.

In terms of practical implications, school leaders and educational coordinators in Islamic boarding schools are encouraged to create formal structures that recognize and sustain the dual professional roles teachers occupy. Mentoring programs pairing novice EFL teachers with experienced colleagues who have navigated the intersection of language teaching and religious guidance would provide vital support. Reflective practice communities where teachers regularly engage in dialogue about the moral, spiritual, and pedagogical dimensions of their work would strengthen identity coherence and professional resilience. Professional development activities should be designed to address not only pedagogical skills but also the cultivation of professional identity within Islamic educational values.

From a policy standpoint, this study underscores the need for teacher certification frameworks in Indonesia to explicitly acknowledge the distinctive professional demands of Islamic boarding school contexts. National teacher competency standards could be strengthened by recognizing the religious-moral dimension of professional identity as a legitimate and assessable competency domain for teachers in Islamic educational institutions. Policy support for structured induction programs for EFL teachers entering *Pesantren* environments would also facilitate more effective role negotiation. More broadly, national professional development policies for Islamic schools should integrate identity formation as an

explicit educational goal, recognizing that teachers' professional identities are institutional assets that sustain the quality and distinctiveness of *Pesantren* education.

Several limitations warrant acknowledgment. The study involved four participants from a single institution, and findings should be interpreted within the specific context in which they were generated. Future research should engage participants from multiple *Pesantren* environments and varied educational levels, employ longitudinal designs to track identity development across career stages, and consider mixed-methods approaches to examine the prevalence and predictors of the identity dimensions identified here.

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