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Exploring the Constructions of English Teachers' Professional Identity in Islamic Private Junior High Schools Through Bourdieu and Kelchtermans' Lenses

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the construction of professional identity among English teachers in Islamic private junior high schools by employing a narrative inquiry approach and drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Pierre Bourdieu and Geert Kelchtermans. Through in-depth life story interviews with selected teachers, the research explores how individual habitus, various forms of capital (Bourdieu), and personal interpretative frameworks (Kelchtermans) shape and are shaped by institutional, cultural, and religious contexts. The study reveals that teachers' professional identities are not fixed entities but are continuously negotiated and reconstructed through their past experiences, educational paths, values, beliefs, and the socio-religious field in which they work. Teachers' dispositions toward teaching are deeply embedded in their social backgrounds and influenced by both internal (self-image, mission, task perception) and external (contextual challenges, interpersonal relationships) factors. This research offers insights into how professional identity in Islamic educational settings is shaped by a complex interplay of structure and agency, highlighting the need for context-sensitive professional development that acknowledges teachers' lived experiences. The findings contribute to the discourse on identity formation in English language teaching by emphasizing narrative, cultural, and reflective dimensions in teacher education.



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INTRODUCTION

The construction of teacher professional identity has become a central issue in educational research, particularly in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). Professional identity is not merely an individual attribute but a dynamic and evolving construct shaped by social, cultural, and institutional contexts (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). For English teachers working in multilingual and multicultural environments, identity formation is intertwined with their beliefs, values, and

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classroom practices. In Islamic private junior high schools, where religious and cultural values are strongly embedded, teachers' professional identity construction is even more complex, as it involves negotiating between pedagogical demands, institutional expectations, and sociocultural norms.

The context of Islamic private junior high schools provides a unique site for understanding identity construction, given that teachers often face the dual responsibility of fostering both linguistic competence and moral-religious development. Teachers in these schools must balance globalized discourses of English language learning with local cultural and religious ideologies (Canagarajah, 1999). This dual role creates a distinctive field in which English teachers' habitus, experiences, and professional beliefs interact with institutional expectations. Thus, exploring professional identity in this context can uncover the tensions, negotiations, and strategies teachers employ in constructing themselves as English teachers and as agents of cultural and moral education.

Theoretical perspectives are essential for understanding the complexity of teacher identity construction. Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital, and field provide valuable tools to analyze how teachers' personal histories, social positions, and resources shape their practices and dispositions (Bourdieu, 1990). These concepts illuminate how teachers' identities are socially structured and reproduced within institutional contexts. Complementing this, Geert Kelchtermans' framework of professional teacher identity, which emphasizes self-image, self-esteem, task perception, and professional vulnerability, allows for a deeper understanding of the personal and emotional dimensions of teacher identity (Kelchtermans, 1993). Together, these perspectives provide a multi-layered lens to capture both the structural and subjective aspects of identity construction.

Narrative inquiry offers an appropriate methodological approach for exploring these identity constructions, as it focuses on teachers' lived experiences and the meanings they ascribe to them (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Through narratives, teachers can articulate how their professional identities are shaped by past experiences, institutional conditions, and future aspirations. Such an approach not only highlights individual voices but also situates them within broader socio-cultural and institutional structures, aligning well with both Bourdieu's and Kelchtermans' frameworks.

This study aims to explore how English teachers in Islamic private junior high schools construct their professional identity through the interplay of personal histories, institutional conditions, and cultural-religious values. By employing Bourdieu's and Kelchtermans' lenses, this research seeks to deepen understanding of teacher identity formation in contexts where language education intersects with religious and cultural mandates. Ultimately, the study hopes to provide insights for teacher education, policy-making, and professional development programs that are sensitive to the unique challenges and opportunities faced by English teachers in Islamic educational institutions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Professional Identity in Education

The notion of professional identity in teaching has been widely discussed across educational research. Professional identity is generally defined as teachers' understanding of themselves in relation to their professional roles, values, and practices (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). It is not a fixed or static entity but rather a dynamic, ongoing process shaped by personal biographies, institutional contexts, and broader sociocultural discourses (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Several scholars argue that professional identity serves as both a lens and a framework that guides teachers' professional decisions, pedagogical practices, and long-term career trajectories (Day, Kington, Stobart, & Sammons, 2006). In this sense, identity formation is central to teachers' agency, resilience, and adaptability in complex educational environments.

English Language Teachers' Identity

Within the domain of English Language Teaching (ELT), teacher identity has been a critical research focus due to the global status of English and its socio-political implications. Studies show that

English teachers often construct their identities in relation to competing discourses, including native-speakerism, linguistic imperialism, and local cultural expectations (Norton, 2013; Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005). For teachers working in multilingual and multicultural contexts, identity formation involves negotiating between globalized pedagogical practices and the particularities of local settings (Tsui, 2007). In Islamic educational contexts, this negotiation becomes more pronounced, as teachers must integrate English-language teaching with religious and moral values, thereby shaping a dual identity as both language educators and cultural-religious guides.

Bourdieu's Framework: Habitus, Capital, and Field

Pierre Bourdieu's sociological theory offers powerful tools for analyzing how teacher identities are shaped by social structures and resources. His concept of habitus refers to the dispositions, values, and practices developed through life experiences that guide individuals' perceptions and actions (Bourdieu, 1990). Teachers' habitus is influenced by family background, educational trajectories, and cultural experiences, which in turn shape their beliefs and pedagogical orientations. Capital—whether cultural, social, economic, or symbolic—determines teachers' access to resources and opportunities within the educational field (Grenfell, 2012). Finally, field denotes the social and institutional spaces where teachers operate, each with its own rules, hierarchies, and power relations. For English teachers in Islamic private schools, their identity is constructed within the field of religious education, where both linguistic and moral expectations intersect. This framework illuminates how structural conditions and individual histories interact to shape professional identity.

Kelchtermans' Framework of Professional Teacher Identity

While Bourdieu emphasizes structural and relational dynamics, Kelchtermans (1993) provides a complementary framework by highlighting the personal and emotional dimensions of teacher identity. He identifies five key components: (1) self-image, or how teachers perceive themselves professionally; (2) self-esteem, or how teachers evaluate their professional performance; (3) task perception, which refers to teachers' understanding of their professional duties; (4) job motivation, which relates to their reasons for entering and remaining in the profession; and (5) future perspective, which reflects their career expectations and aspirations. Importantly, Kelchtermans also stresses professional vulnerability, acknowledging the challenges and uncertainties teachers face as they navigate institutional demands and societal expectations (Kelchtermans, 2009). This perspective allows for a nuanced exploration of how English teachers in Islamic schools experience both affirmation and tension in their professional roles.

Teacher Identity in Islamic School Contexts

Research on teacher identity within Islamic schooling contexts is relatively limited but growing. Studies suggest that teachers in Islamic institutions often experience heightened expectations to integrate academic instruction with religious and moral education (Raihani, 2014). For English teachers, this creates unique identity negotiations, as English is often perceived both as a tool for global communication and as a carrier of Western cultural values (Ali & Walker, 2014). Teachers in Islamic private junior high schools must reconcile these tensions by positioning themselves as both language instructors and cultural mediators. In Indonesia, where Islamic schools constitute a significant part of the education system, teachers' professional identities are deeply embedded in socio-religious frameworks that shape their pedagogical decisions and career pathways (Zarkasyi, 2020). Exploring this context provides valuable insights into how teacher identity is constructed at the intersection of global and local forces.

Gaps in the Literature

Although substantial research has addressed teacher identity in general, fewer studies have specifically examined English teachers' professional identity within Islamic private schools using both Bourdieu's and Kelchtermans' frameworks. Most existing studies either emphasize structural

dimensions of identity (e.g., institutional and policy contexts) or focus on personal narratives without sufficient integration of sociological theory. By combining Bourdieu’s macro-level lens with Kelchtermans’ micro-level framework, this study seeks to bridge these gaps and offer a holistic understanding of how English teachers construct their professional identity in Islamic private junior high schools.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative approach, using narrative inquiry as the main research design, to explore the construction of English teachers’ professional identities in private Islamic junior high schools. Narrative inquiry was selected because it enables the researcher to understand teachers’ lived experiences across time and to examine how their professional identities are shaped through personal, pedagogical, institutional, and religious experiences. The study was theoretically guided by Kelchtermans’ concept of teacher professional identity, including biography, self-image, self-esteem, task perception, job motivation, future perspective, and professional vulnerability, and Bourdieu’s theory of social practice, particularly habitus, capital, and field.

The participants consisted of five English teachers from two types of private Islamic junior high schools, namely MTs and SMP Islam. These schools were chosen because they combine the national curriculum with Islamic values and require English teachers to perform dual roles as language educators and moral or religious mentors. The participants were selected based on several criteria: having at least five years of English teaching experience, being active or permanent teachers in private Islamic junior high schools, being willing to participate in interviews and audio recording, and agreeing to member checking. Variation was also considered with respect to gender, teaching experience, educational background, professional training, and experience in Islamic educational institutions.

Data were collected through semi-structured narrative interviews conducted in two sessions: an initial narrative interview and a follow-up interview. The interview guide combined experiential questions with theoretical exploration of habitus, capital, field, and the dimensions of teacher identity. The interviews were conducted face-to-face, audio-recorded, and supported by field notes. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis through repeated reading, coding, categorization, and theme development. Kelchtermans’ framework was used to interpret the dimensions of teachers’ professional identity, while Bourdieu’s concepts were used to contextualize how teachers negotiate agency, institutional demands, pedagogical responsibilities, and Islamic values in their daily professional practice.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Professional Identity Construction of English Teachers in Islamic Private Junior High Schools.

Teacher	Habitus (Background)	Capital (Resources)	Field (Institutional Context)	Self-image & Esteem	Task Perception	Job Motivation	Future Perspective	Vulnerability
Fitri (MTs Fatahillah, 4.5 yrs)	From farming family in Grobogan; values education highly	PG studies UNNES, PPG Prajab, Tanoto training, MGMP, writing articles, private	MTs Fatahillah; aligns with character + Islamic values	Cheerful, humanist, inspiring like Kobayashi; students see her as fun	Mastery of 4 teacher competencies; active MGMP secretary	Childhood dream, lifelong passion for teaching	Wants to be tech-savvy, productive in writing, continuous learner	Experienced tension in exam policy during COVID-19; chose acceptance

Teacher	Habitus (Background)	Capital (Resources)	Field (Institutional Context)	Self-image & Esteem	Task Perception	Job Motivation	Future Perspective	Vulnerability
		English teacher						
Riska (MTs Fatahillah, 2.5 yrs)	From entrepreneurial family; early passion for business	MGMP forums, creative use of games/manual tools	MTs with strict rules (no phones), requiring adaptive teaching	Patient, dedicated, interactive	<i>3S principle</i> (smile, greet, sapa); build comfort in class	Commitment to adapt pedagogy for SMP students	Lifelong learning; adapting to evolving methods	Sometimes too detailed, slow with admin tasks
Niat Firdi (MTs Ar-Rois Cendekia, 5 yrs)	Farmer family; first teacher in family	Pare courses, journal seminars, Amcor UIN Walisongo, tutoring TOEFL	Islamic private school; role as homeroom teacher, trusted by peers	Trustworthy, friendly, relied on by colleagues	Build comfort & trust, teamwork in school	Motivation from passion for English and family support	Aspires to be "special professional English teacher"	Feels pressure balancing school and professional development
Nadia (SMP Al-Azhar 29, 12 yrs)	From middle-class family; passion in English but studied Math due to finance	Curriculum coordinator, bilingual program, MGMP Math	Al-Azhar 29; communication-focused, parental engagement	Teacher as <i>digugu lan ditiru</i> (role model); empathetic	Balances curriculum, bilingual program, and student needs	Started with idealism; shifted to sincerity in teaching	Continuous upgrading of knowledge and technology	Easily swayed by emotions; struggles with firmness
Dediono (SMP Al-Azhar 23, 20 yrs)	From carpenter family; 20 yrs teaching	Workshops, poetry writing, continuous training	Al-Azhar 23; communal, treating school as family	"Never angry" teacher; loved by students	Strong classroom communication; engaging lessons	Deep commitment, teaching as lifelong job	Ongoing professional growth; adapting to new method	Weakness in being slow to prepare teaching materials

Habitus: Life Histories and Personal Backgrounds

Teachers' professional identities were strongly shaped by their life histories and family contexts. Fitri (MTs Fatahillah) came from a modest farming family in Grobogan, Central Java, but her parents instilled the value of education despite limited means. Riska (MTs Fatahillah) was raised by entrepreneurial parents, which influenced her dual interest in both teaching and business. Firdi (interview 2024) was the first teacher in her farmer family, highlighting her identity as a pioneer in pursuing education within her kinship. Nadia (SMP Al-Azhar 29) initially aspired to study English but, due to financial constraints, pursued mathematics; she later developed her bilingual skills through self-study. Dediono (SMP Al-Azhar 23) drew inspiration from his carpenter father's perseverance and positioned himself as both a teacher and family figure in school. These narratives reflect how habitus dispositions inherited from family and upbringing influenced their teaching values, resilience, and determination to pursue education against socio-economic odds.

Capital: Resources for Professional Development

All five teachers invested different forms of capital to sustain their careers. Fitri leveraged her cultural capital through postgraduate studies from UNNES and training supported by Tanoto Foundation, while also building social capital by writing and joining MGMP forums. Riska relied on MGMP networks to share teaching modules and improve pedagogical practices. Firdi enriched her professional knowledge through courses in Pare, journal-publishing seminars, and involvement with Amcor, which provided symbolic capital by boosting her recognition as a competent speaker. Nadia utilized her bilingual skills and her role as curriculum coordinator to strengthen her

institutional capital. Dediono emphasized continuous engagement in workshops and poetry writing, which he used both for personal growth and for motivating students. Their strategies demonstrate how teachers mobilized cultural, social, and symbolic capital to strengthen their identities and gain recognition within the educational field.

Field: Institutional Contexts and Cultural Expectations

The school environment, as Bourdieu's field, shaped how teachers negotiated their identities. In Islamic private schools, teachers balanced expectations of academic performance with religious and moral responsibilities. Fitri saw herself not only as an English teacher but also as a role model in the community, aligning with the school's emphasis on character and faith. Riska applied the 3S principle (smile, greet, and address politely) to build harmony in the Islamic school setting. Firdi highlighted her role as a homeroom teacher in shaping students' discipline and religious values. Nadia stressed communication with parents and colleagues as central to maintaining school harmony. Dediono described students and colleagues as "family," reinforcing the relational and communal culture of Islamic schools. The field thus provided both opportunities and constraints, demanding that teachers align professional practices with the cultural-religious ethos of their institutions.

Professional Identity through Kelchtermans' Dimensions

- **Self-image & Self-esteem:** Fitri saw herself as a cheerful, humanist teacher inspired by Kobayashi's philosophy of joyful learning, while Riska described herself as patient and dedicated. Dediono was seen by students as "never angry," which made his classes enjoyable. Nadia positioned herself as "digugu lan ditiru," embracing the traditional Javanese view of teachers as models.
- **Task Perception:** Teachers emphasized holistic duties beyond teaching. Fitri and Riska underscored mastery of pedagogical, personal, professional, and social competences. Firdi emphasized trust-building and teamwork as part of her teaching responsibilities.
- **Job Motivation:** All teachers expressed a strong commitment to teaching as a lifelong calling. Fitri and Dediono described teaching as a dream profession. Nadia noted that initial idealism gave way to a more pragmatic philosophy of sincerity in teaching.
- **Future Perspective:** Teachers envisioned continuous growth. Fitri aimed to be tech-savvy and productive in writing, Riska emphasized ongoing learning to adapt to evolving pedagogy, and Firdi aspired to become a "special professional English teacher" by investing in her knowledge.
- **Professional Vulnerability:** Vulnerabilities varied. Nadia admitted to being easily swayed by emotions and not always being firm with students. Fitri acknowledged disagreements over pandemic-related exam policies but chose to accept them for institutional harmony. Dediono identified his weakness in being "slow" to prepare materials. These reveal the human dimension of teaching identities, marked by both resilience and fragility.

Synthesis: Negotiating Professional Identity in Islamic Schools

The findings reveal that teachers' professional identities are constructed through an interplay of personal habitus, accumulated capital, and the institutional field of Islamic schools. Their narratives show a commitment to balancing global discourses on English with local religious and cultural values. Through Kelchtermans' lens, they expressed strong self-images as caring, dedicated, and adaptive teachers, while also acknowledging vulnerabilities. Bourdieu's framework illuminates how socio-economic background, access to professional development, and institutional recognition shaped their agency. Collectively, these teachers exemplify how English educators in Islamic private junior high schools continuously negotiate their roles as both language teachers and moral educators, embodying hybrid professional identities that are both globally responsive and locally grounded.

This study set out to explore the complex construction of professional identity among English teachers in Islamic private junior high schools. The findings reveal that this identity is not a static label but a dynamic, ongoing negotiation shaped by the intricate interplay between personal agency (habitus and capital) and structural forces (the institutional field), as theorized by Bourdieu (1990), and further nuanced by the personal and emotional dimensions outlined by Kelchtermans (1993).

The profound influence of habitus on teachers' professional dispositions aligns with Bourdieu's assertion that an individual's history is incorporated into their present practices. Teachers like Fitri and Dediono, who came from modest backgrounds, internalized a habitus of perseverance and a high valuation of education from their families. This echoes the findings of Grenfell (2012), who emphasized that teachers' pedagogical choices often reflect unconscious aspects of their ingrained social dispositions. Their journeys demonstrate that a teacher's "feel for the game" in an Islamic school is shaped by their socio-cultural history, fostering resilience and a deep-seated commitment to their roles as educators and moral guides.

Furthermore, the strategic accumulation and deployment of various forms of capital were crucial for identity validation and professional agency. Fitri's pursuit of postgraduate studies (cultural capital) and active participation in MGMP forums (social capital) provided her with the legitimacy and resources to navigate her field effectively. This supports Bourdieu's argument that capital determines one's position and power within a field. Similarly, Firdi's engagement in seminars and certification programs functioned as symbolic capital, enhancing her recognition. This finding resonates with studies by Varghese et al. (2005), which show that language teachers in specific contexts often seek additional qualifications to bolster their authority, especially when navigating the perceived tensions between a "global" language and local values.

The field of the Islamic private school emerged as a powerful structural context that defined the rules of the game. The institutional expectation to integrate academic instruction with religious and moral education (Raihani, 2014) created a unique set of demands. Teachers responded not by resisting but by creatively adapting their identities. Riska's adoption of the "3S" principle (smile, greet, *sapa*) and Nadia's embodiment of the Javanese concept *digugu lan ditiru* (to be believed and imitated) are clear examples of how teachers internalized the field's doxa. They constructed a hybrid identity that successfully reconciled the roles of an English teacher and a cultural-religious mentor, a negotiation also observed in Ali & Walker's (2014) research on English teachers in Muslim contexts.

Through Kelchtermans' lens, the study captured the deeply personal and emotional aspects of this identity work. The teachers expressed a strong, positive self-image and self-esteem, seeing themselves as patient, dedicated, and humanistic educators. Their task perception extended far beyond linguistic instruction to include building trust, comfort, and moral character, confirming Kelchtermans' (2009) view that a teacher's role is perceived as fundamentally moral. However, this research also underscores the concept of professional vulnerability. The tensions experienced by Fitri over exam policies and Nadia's struggle with emotional firmness reveal the fragility inherent in their professional selves. These vulnerabilities are not signs of weakness but indicators of the high-stakes emotional labor involved in constantly balancing pedagogical, institutional, and religious demands.

In summary, this study fills a gap in the literature by showing that macro-sociological structures (Bourdieu) and micro-personal narratives (Kelchtermans) are not opposing forces, but rather complement each other in identity construction. Teachers' professional identities are formed at the intersection of their personal histories (habitus), the resources they acquire (capital), the constraints and opportunities in their schools (field), and their ongoing emotional and professional reflections.

CONCLUSION

This research concludes that the professional identity of English teachers in Indonesian Islamic private junior high schools is a complex, multifaceted construct continuously negotiated through a dynamic interplay of structure and agency. It is shaped by deeply personal life histories (habitus),

strategically mobilized resources (capital), and the distinct socio-religious expectations of the institutional environment (field). Furthermore, this identity is characterized by a strong sense of moral duty, a commitment to holistic student development, and an adaptive resilience, as captured by Kelchtermans' dimensions, while also being marked by inherent professional vulnerabilities.

The study successfully answers its research question by showing that these teachers construct their identities by harmonizing global linguistic competencies with local Islamic values. They do not see these roles as contradictory but rather as complementary, forging a hybrid professional identity that enables them to be effective English-language educators and respected moral guides within their communities. However, this study is not without limitations. The small sample size of five teachers, while providing rich narrative depth, limits the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, the focus on teachers' self-reported narratives may not fully capture the observable manifestations of their identity in classroom practices.

Based on these conclusions, several recommendations are proposed:

1. For Teacher Education and Professional Development: Programs for teachers in Islamic schools should move beyond purely pedagogical training. They should incorporate reflective practices that help teachers consciously explore their habitus, capital, and position within their field, enabling them to navigate their professional vulnerabilities more effectively.
2. For School Policy and Leadership: School administrators should recognize and formally value the dual role these teachers play. Providing support systems, such as mentoring programs and collaborative forums (e.g., MGMP), can help teachers build the social and cultural capital necessary to strengthen their professional identity and mitigate feelings of vulnerability.
3. For Further Research: Future studies could employ a mixed-methods approach, combining narrative inquiry with classroom observations, to provide a more holistic view of how professed identities align with teaching practices. Research could also expand to include the perspectives of students and parents to understand how they perceive and shape teachers' identities.

In implication, this research contributes to the broader discourse on teacher identity by affirming the necessity of context-sensitive frameworks. It demonstrates that understanding teachers requires listening to their stories through lenses that appreciate both the social structures that confine them and the personal agency they exercise. Ultimately, supporting the professional identity of English teachers in Islamic schools is crucial not only for their personal well-being and career longevity but also for the quality of education shaping their students' future.

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