



# Exploring the Professional Identities of English Lecturers: Indonesian Students' Perspectives

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**Abstract.** Language teachers are active, imaginative, and compassionate, and their identities are constructed by short- and long-term social connections. Research on teachers' professional identities has become more prevalent to understand how teachers grow and develop educational resources that meet their needs. Few studies have examined how university students evaluate the professional identities of their English lecturers in Indonesia, even though many studies have focused on teachers' professional identities in primary and secondary schools. This qualitative study examined how university students perceive the professional identities of their English lecturers in Indonesia. Nineteen participants from two universities were interviewed and participated in focus groups. The selection criterion for research participants was based on their learning experience with more than five lecturers in English Language Teaching. Participants were both male and female students. The participants' oral narration was examined using semi-structured interviews. Interview guidelines were utilized to collect data, which was analyzed using thematic analysis. Several informants and member checks were used to organize and ensure the information's reliability. Braun and Clarke's six theme analysis processes were used to analyze the study's data. The study revealed that a lecturer's professional identity can be understood through their teaching activity, connection-building strategy, and academic career. Implications and recommendations for further research are discussed.

**Keywords:** English Lecturer; Professional Identity; Students' Perspectives.

## 1 Introduction

Teachers' professional identity is related to a teacher's self-concept or self-image. A teacher's professional identity emerges from within; processes continuously shape a professional teacher's side [1]. Identity is not something one has but something that develops over a lifetime. Professional knowledge of teachers requires a specific language to better allow for a diversity of expression and exchange of ideas in teaching and learning, so this should be a priority for any teacher to reflect on [2]. The problem of teacher professionalism or quality is fundamental, not limited to how teachers teach and prepare participants for learning, or how they discard their duties in the class-

room. It is also about how a teacher continues to develop their insights and knowledge and how they develop competence. These two aspects, on the part of both the teacher and the student, must be balanced to achieve mature professionalism. Of course, it is not just about these two aspects but also about a teacher's ability to use pedagogical knowledge, culture, language, and learning to solve practical problems in the field-an important factor that influences teacher professionalism.

Professional teachers and their character must be composed of interrelated competencies. Personal competence is the basis for the competence of others, while social competence describes the appreciation of the environment, even the public, for the quality of teachers' professionalism. Therefore, pedagogical and professional competencies must be based on personal competence and serve as pillars to support social competence[3]. Professional development is a particular dimension of empowerment of learning resources, especially teachers and their devices, to improve student achievement. This improvement is evidenced by several studies that have found that the overall quality of teachers directly impacts student competency outcomes [4], [5]. Therefore, every teacher must feel that it is essential to understand how they can continue to learn to improve their competence in the context of meaningful learning so that the competence performance of participants in every aspect of this behavior becomes a good learning goal-setting and increase knowledge and skills.

Teachers and lecturers should master four competencies, namely pedagogy, professional, social, and personal competence, in Indonesian schools or universities [6]. The professional competence of teachers is defined as the knowledge, skills, and attitudes manifested in the form of intelligent and responsible actions possessed by someone who holds the position of teacher as a profession. It includes understanding the teaching materials in the school curriculum, concepts, structures, scientific methods, and coherent teaching materials, understanding the concept of certain subjects, and applying all the concepts in daily life. Based on the preliminary survey, many students believe professionalism is related to a sense of connectedness and competence. Some studies emphasize the social and cultural nature of identity[7]–[9], while others focus on its discursive and narrative character[10], [11]. However, most contemporary approaches agree that identity is constructed in a social context. Few studies discuss students' voices about their lecturers' professional identity. Therefore, this study aims to explore how university students perceive the professional identities of their English lecturers in Indonesia.

## 2 Method

This qualitative study seeks to analyze and understand the importance of a person or group of teachers to a social or human problem[12]. Interpretivism was chosen as the most appropriate epistemological approach for this study because it allowed for rich, in-depth data to be gathered through life stories[13]. Furthermore, the case study technique is the most appropriate approach because it provides a systematic means of collecting, interpreting, and publishing the results, thus providing a comprehensive

understanding of the student about their lecturers' professional identity. Nineteen students from two Islamic universities were involved as the research participant. The selection criterion for research participants was based on their learning experience with more than five lecturers in English Language Teaching. Participants were both male and female students. All participants used pseudonyms and received verbal and written informed consent and a study description. Students consented to participate in the study by signing informed consent forms. Two research instruments used in the study are open-ended surveys and interview guidelines. Before the instruments were tested expert judgment was used to ensure the instrument's validity. Two questions were eliminated due to the ambiguity of the context. The data gathered was analyzed using Nvivo 12. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data.

Braun and Clarke's six theme analysis processes were used to analyze the study's data[14]. The writers endeavored to become intimately acquainted with the data by listening to the recordings of the participants' voice notes multiple times. This process entails carefully listening to the data and highlighting relevant narratives from participants. Second, to thoroughly comprehend the shared stories, we transcribed the recordings and read the interview transcripts numerous times. Third, we reviewed the interview transcripts at least three times. At this point, formal coding was carried out. Fourth, we read and reread all of the transcripts numerous times. Fifth, we documented a comprehensive list of the various codes when we coded and compiled all the data. Finally, we classified the code into teaching activity, academic career, and connection-building strategy. Member checking was done to ensure the validity of the findings.

### 3 Findings and Discussion

#### 3.1 Teaching Activity

The result of the interview and the open survey indicate various responses regarding the characteristics of a professional lecturer. A professional teacher should be able to understand their students' abilities. Nadia expressed her voice:

*The teacher must still adjust to students' abilities from where students start. If the teacher insists on using English in class while the students do not understand what the teacher is talking about, it will make it difficult for the teacher in the future.*

From the statement above, it is apparent from this excerpt that Nadia saw the importance of choosing language instruction. For her, professional lecturers should know the students' needs and lack, such as language mastery. She believed that accommodating the language mastery of the learner is the characteristic of a professional lecturer. In line with Nadia, Juniar stated that:

*A professional lecturer will try to find ways to ensure his students do not get bored following the teaching and learning process.*

Juniar sees the importance of choosing the appropriate teaching activity, ensuring the

student will not get bored. What is interesting about the data in this excerpt is that teaching strategy selection may shape the lecturer's professional identity. Suppose the lecturer always tries a new way. In that case, it represents that the innovation of the lecturer could probably become the factors that may contribute to the professional identity formation in teaching English.

What stands out in this study shows that technology mastery represents the professionalism of the lecturer, as Sodiq reflects it:

*I think professional lecturers are lecturers who are up to date because it will attract the attention of millennial students. Moreover, it cannot be denied that technology will continuously develop and be sophisticated and always accompany the lives of millennial students.*

This belief may represent the teaching process with technology; a teacher with a broader perspective on teaching and a higher level of dedication to teaching may feel more involved with their students.

### 3.2 The academic career

The participants had different voices about the importance of lecturers' academic backgrounds to professional identity. Strong evidence of the student's belief about the importance of linearity of the education experience was reflected in the following excerpt. "

*A professional lecturer is a lecturer who understands and is a master in the subject taught by the lecturer. Lecturers must also pay attention to the level of education that has been passed, which must be linear with what is being taught. (Ade)*

It is worth noting that there were also differences in the common belief about the professional identity of overseas graduates. The most surprising aspect of the data is that the participant believed a lecturer who graduated from another country is not always a professional lecturer, as reflected in the following excerpt:

*Studying abroad does not guarantee that a lecturer has a good understanding of good knowledge (Dodi)*

Concerns were expressed about professionalism from the academic background. It can be inferred that the lecturer's professional identity is not depending on the institution where the lecturer graduated. However, there will be other considerations that determine the professionalism of lecturers.

### 3.3 Connection-building strategy

In order to enhance students' academic, social, and emotional development throughout the year, lecturers have a considerable obligation to forge deep ties with their pupils. A culture of respect and trust among individuals is generated when solid relationships are formed. This view was echoed by another informant who argued that If it is formed well, it could construct the professional identity as reflected by Abdul :

*In my opinion, the professionalism of a prospective teacher can be seen directly in his daily life, teaching and interacting with his students outside of class hours. Then how can the teacher separate personal matters from obligations or responsibilities?*

Hana presented different voices about the connection-building and professionalism of lecturers:

*The close relationship between teacher and students indicates that the lecturer is open-minded, not closed-minded. Lecturers are willing to accept (different) suggestions and opinions from students, show tolerance, and know that everyone has the right to voice their opinion.*

It can be inferred that a lecturer's social and interpersonal competencies seem to play a significant role in shaping the professional identity. One interviewee argued that how professional lecturers should be not only good at teaching but also multi-talented:

*Because lecturers do not only teach or provide material to students. So to be a professional lecturer, you must be multi-knowledge and multitalented (Verda).*

The excerpt from Verda shows that a professional lecturer should play more than one role in teaching. Multi-activity seems to derive from multi-talent if they apply different strategies within the teaching and learning process. The results reported here show that most students see professional identity as the result of dynamic structure and process inside the classroom.

Consistent with the literature, this research found that participants who reported that the professional identity of their English lecturers is structured from three points of view. Teaching activity, connection-building strategy, and academic career are the pillars of lecturers' professional identity. These findings are somewhat surprising given that other research shows academic backgrounds or careers are not merely the major factor contributing to the professional identity construction of their English lecturer.

Students' voices about professional identity exemplify Norton's description of the process of identity construction as the site of struggles. multiple, and contradictory[15]. Empirically, lecturers' professional identities are influenced by many factors, and each individual may be varied. For example, Hana's perspective about the closer relationship between lecturer and students indicates how cultural factors may play an important role. As the culture of teaching in Indonesia commonly provides social

distance between teachers and students, particularly in Islamic universities, this culture may change due to cultural exposure to the target language. However, many teaching strategies for learning English have focused on developing the participant role. In this case, teachers' ability to build rapport may become the cause of the positive portrayal of professional identity in the classroom. When two individuals can relate to each other, they form a mutual bond and respect for each other, there have been instances when conflicts and disputes do not occur at all between two individuals, or there may be instances when conflicts and disputes do exist. However, they should be resolved peacefully [16].

History in the context of EFL has demonstrated that the manner of professional identity changes occasionally is consistent with Wenger's concept [17]. Surprisingly, the lecturers' professional identity was noted in this condition. Teachers must strike a balance between three critical factors in their work: a personal factor, a professional factor, and a situational factor [18]. Students' belief that a teacher should be multitalented represents a personal, professional, and situational factor. A possible explanation might be that the students are a reasonable observer in the classroom. They could see how their lecturer treated the students and got the direct impact of the chosen learning strategy. A comparison of the findings with those of other studies confirms that lecturers do not simply accept or reject what is being imposed in a study of the impact of professional identity on educational innovation. Instead, educators actively take a position regarding innovation [19].

This finding broadly supports the work of other studies on this pedagogical principle. When implementing learning technologies, a teacher with a broader perspective on what it means to be a teacher and who is more dedicated to the profession may have a sense of involvement. Meaning-making becomes more accessible when a teacher finds that learning technology supports his or her pedagogical principles and implements his or her chosen teaching style [20].

These data must be interpreted cautiously because students may not be familiar with the three pillars of higher education for lecturers in Indonesia. They may have limited information about the research career, community services career, and the lecturers' professional development experiences. Therefore, their responses might not cover their lecturer's two pillars of higher education experiences. It is essential to bear in mind the possible bias in these responses. The findings from this study make several contributions to the current literature. First, the possibility that the professional identity of English lecturers can be spotted differently based on the audience. Since students are the stakeholder of the university, the faculty member should accommodate the stakeholder's expectations to ensure that a professional figure services their stakeholders. Second, the availability of a professionalism certificate does not guarantee that a lecturer owns a professional identity in the eye of the students. Therefore, policy maker should regularly evaluate professional practices in the classroom. Regular reflective teaching and learning might be helpful to scaffold the professional identity of English lecturers, particularly in the Indonesian context.

#### 4. Conclusion and Suggestion

This study aims to portray the student's voices toward English lecturers' professional identity. Through an open survey and in-depth interview, the result identified that their teaching activity, connection-building strategy, and academic career contribute to forming professional identity. Elaboration of the data suggests that teaching activity becomes the most prominent finding. The current data highlight the importance of technology and teaching strategy as factors that might be powerful in shaping professional identity. The findings of this study have several important implications for future practice. Policymakers should consider designing professional development sessions for their lecturers to build their professional identity. The major limitation of this study is the limited number of participants. Therefore, future studies could focus on different types of universities and a more significant number of participants. Lecturers' voices toward their colleague's professional identity might be an excellent issue to explore further.

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