

**UNVEILING THE DUAL FACET EFL NOVICE TEACHERS' IDENTITY
CONSTRUCTION: PROFESSIONALISM AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITY**

THESIS

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for Master's
Degree in English Language Education



By

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THE DIRECTORATE OF GRADUATE PROGRAM
UNIVERSITAS MUHAMMADIYAH MALANG
2024**

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LETTER OF STATEMENT

I, the undersigned:

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Hereby, declare that :

1. The thesis entitled: **UNVEILING THE DUAL FACET EFL NOVICE TEACHERS' IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION: PROFESSIONALISM AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITY** is my original work and contains no one's scientific paper that may be proposed to achieve an academic degree at any universities. Besides, there is no other's idea or citation except those which have been quoted and mentioned at the bibliography.
2. If this thesis is proven as a form of **PLAGIALISM** in this thesis, I am willing to accept the consequences including accepting the **CANCELLATION OF THE GRANTING OF MASTER DEGREE** and undergoing any Procedures required by the prevailing law.
3. This thesis can be used for literature review which can be accessed by others freely **NON-EXCLUSIVE ROYALTY**.

Thus, this statement is made truthfully to be used as appropriate.

Malang, 19th Juni 2024

The Writer,



SRI KURNIAWATI

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, praises and thanks to God, the Almighty, for His blessings throughout my research work and for enabling me to complete it successfully. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my research advisor, Dr. Ria Arista Asih, and Associate Professor Dr. Sudiran, for their invaluable guidance, patience, and immense knowledge throughout my research. It was a great privilege and honor to work under their guidance, and their insights for finishing this thesis. I extend my sincere thanks to all the lecturers in the Master of English Language Education program for the comprehensive knowledge they have imparted, which has significantly contributed to my academic growth. My heartfelt thanks to the Indonesia Endowment Fund for Education Agency and Indonesian Ministry of Religion for awarding me Beasiswa Indonesia Bangkit (BIB) scholarship, which provided the academic and financial support necessary for me to complete my master's degree at Muhammadiyah University, Malang.

Moreover, my completion of this research could not have been accomplished without the support of my family, I cannot express enough sincere gratitude to my parents. Their belief in me has been a driving force in my pursuit of master degree. I also wish to acknowledge my friends and colleagues for their constant encouragement and for providing a supportive and stimulating environment. Your friendship and support have been invaluable. I realize that there are many areas where this thesis could be improved, and I welcome any suggestions and constructive criticism that can enhance the quality of my work. It is my sincere hope that this research will contribute to the development of Indonesian teachers and be of benefit to many in the educational community.

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ABSTRACT

Teacher's identity is crucial for the development of a professional teacher in education. It evolves through a continuous process of refinement and adaptation. Nevertheless, the construction of novice teachers' professional identity in Islamic Junior High Schools, especially in the Indonesian context, is under-explored. Thus, this study aims to explore the development of English teachers' professional identities and the integration between such identities and Islamic values as their religious beliefs in teaching in Islamic Junior High Schools. The narrative inquiry method was employed by three novice English teachers in Jambi. The data was collected through in-depth interviews to explore the novice teachers' stories. The results were analyzed using Miles' model through data condensation, data display, and conclusions. The research results show that novice teachers' professional identity construction began with several challenges regarding adapting to the new profession, developing diverse learners' needs, adapting teaching methods, and performing assessments. In terms of religious identity, these novice teachers reported their abilities to integrate Islamic values into teaching English through the lesson materials, becoming role models, and embracing tolerance in a multicultural society. The findings of this study suggest the need for support for novice teachers, including mentorship programs and professional development workshops, to enhance their professionalism. Such endeavor is pivotal to supporting students' spiritual and moral development, leading to more inclusive learning environments. Implications for future research are related to longitudinal studies tracking novice teachers' development and exploring their coping strategies, focusing on one facet of teachers' identity.

Keywords: *novice teacher, professionalism identity, religious identity, teacher's identity.*

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ABSTRACT

Identitas guru sangat penting untuk pengembangan seorang guru profesional dalam pendidikan. Identitas ini berkembang melalui proses penyempurnaan dan adaptasi yang berkelanjutan. Namun demikian, konstruksi identitas profesional guru pemula di Madrasah Tsanawiyah, terutama dalam konteks Indonesia, masih belum banyak dieksplorasi. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi pengembangan identitas profesional guru bahasa Inggris dan integrasi antara identitas tersebut dengan nilai-nilai Islam sebagai keyakinan religius mereka dalam mengajar di Madrasah Tsanawiyah. Metode penelitian naratif digunakan oleh tiga guru bahasa Inggris pemula di Jambi. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam untuk mengeksplorasi cerita para guru pemula. Hasilnya dianalisis menggunakan model Miles melalui kondensasi data, tampilan data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa konstruksi identitas profesional guru pemula dimulai dengan beberapa tantangan terkait adaptasi terhadap profesi baru, mengembangkan kebutuhan beragam peserta didik, mengadaptasi metode pengajaran, dan melakukan penilaian. Dalam hal identitas religius, guru pemula ini melaporkan kemampuan mereka untuk mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai Islam ke dalam pengajaran bahasa Inggris melalui materi pelajaran, menjadi teladan, dan merangkul toleransi dalam masyarakat multikultural. Temuan penelitian ini menunjukkan perlunya dukungan bagi guru pemula, termasuk program pendampingan dan lokakarya pengembangan profesional, untuk meningkatkan profesionalisme mereka. Upaya semacam itu sangat penting untuk mendukung perkembangan spiritual dan moral siswa, yang mengarah pada lingkungan pembelajaran yang lebih inklusif. Implikasi untuk penelitian masa depan adalah terkait dengan studi jangka panjang yang melacak perkembangan guru pemula dan mengeksplorasi cara mereka mengatasi kesulitan dengan lebih berfokus pada satu aspek identitas guru.

Kata kunci: *guru pemula, identitas profesionalisme, identitas agama, identitas guru*

INTRODUCTION

Teacher's identity is essential for a journey to becoming a professional teacher in the field of education. Kasmiran (2019) asserts that the development of a teacher's identity plays a significant role since it has the potential to shape teaching pedagogies and influence classroom practice. Miller (2009) proposes that identity is shaped through negotiation, construction, enactment, transformation, and transition, influenced by factors such as language, race, education, and class. Consequently, an individual's identity affects their identity as a teacher who has different life values, beliefs, and principles, which subsequently impact their instructional approaches in the classroom (Rahman & Kurniawan, 2022). Thus, comprehending teacher's identity is crucial for a greater understanding of how teachers develop their images of themselves as educators, like who they are, what they do, and why they do it, especially a beginner teacher embarking on their careers and recently graduated.

The development of teacher identity is a continual process involving ongoing improvement and adjustment. Transitioning from a novice to a professional teacher is both time-consuming and intricate. Awang and Shaari (2021) define novice teachers as beginners with less than three years of experience. Lomi & Mbato (2020) suggest that the identities of novice teachers form during pre-service training and evolve into practiced identities in their first year of teaching. As teachers progress through their educational journey and take on more roles and responsibilities, their experiences shape their identities (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Additionally, the construction of professional identity among new teachers is influenced by various factors, including personal values, beliefs, subject matter expertise, teaching skills, and interpersonal relationships, which involve emotional engagement with students, colleagues, parents, and the broader community (Richardson & Watt, 2018).

However, several teacher factors present challenges in the construction of the teacher identity at the beginning of their career as a teacher. Based on the Law

of the Republic of Indonesia (2005) explains that the teacher and lecturer, a professional teacher, must also have mastered three competencies: pedagogic, personality, social, and professional. Besides, indicators of professional teacher competency are including knowledge of learning content and how to teach it, characteristics and ways of learning of students, developing subject matter creatively and reflective knowledge for sustainable professional development, and utilizing information and communication technology in the learning process and self-development. During the initial year, teachers confront various challenges, such as adapting to the demands of the classroom, establishing authority, managing diverse student populations, and balancing instructional responsibilities with administrative tasks (Ginting & Kuswando, 2020). It is due to a novice teacher having a sufficient academic foundation but may lack practical teaching abilities (Westhuizen & Woest, 2021). Moreover, the discrepancy between theoretical knowledge and practical skills can be another challenge for the novice teacher. As stated by Dvir and Schatz-Oppenheimer (2020), the initial year of teaching often serves as a reality shock, especially amidst global uncertainties, as a pivotal period for shaping their professional identities. Thus, the process of identity construction of novice teachers needs adequate support and resources to novice teachers to help bridge this gap and facilitate a smoother transition into their teaching careers (Wijaya, 2022).

In the context of novice English teachers in Islamic schools, the construction of their professional identity related to teachers' religious beliefs plays an important role in shaping their teaching practices. Research has investigated the complexity of EFL teacher identity construction, highlighting several aspects of EFL teacher identity, not only identity related to teacher-student relationships, professionalism, but religious beliefs play a role in the construction of teacher identity (Irfiana et al., 2021; Rahman & Kurniawan, 2022). Hence, English teachers in Islamic schools must develop and help students behave according to religious values. In addition, Yii Tyng et al. (2023) emphasized that although religious beliefs are very personal and closely related to personal identity, religious beliefs can influence teaching practices and interactions with students. However, Tambak et al. (2022) stated that

teachers play an important role by demonstrating positive values, supporting students' ethical development, and enhancing their educational progress. Thus, teachers' religious beliefs can influence students' perspectives. In addition, Johnson (2003) revealed that Islamic beliefs influence the professional behavior of ESL teachers, especially in the selection of teaching materials and classroom interactions.

Previous research on English teacher identity has shown that the main focus has always been on professional norms such as knowledge, competencies, and skills that language teachers should possess in language teaching and learning (Aktekin & Celebi, 2020, 2020; Rushton et al., 2023; Sinom & Kuswandono, 2022). For example, systematic review research by Rushton et al. (2023) stated that a limited number of teacher identity research studies from Global South countries, especially focusing on early years teacher identities. In addition, Aktekin and Celebi (2020) reveal that the teachers have challenges in establishing themselves as authorities in the subject matter, followed by a focus on didactics and subsequent pedagogy. Sinom and Kuswandono (2022) researched issues regarding personal and professional identity in Indonesia through two dimensions: personal and professional. However, there is a limited comprehensive study of EFL teachers' religious or Islamic belief identity construction, particularly in Indonesia. A study conducted by Rahman and Kurniawan (2022) explored the professionalism, teacher and student relations, and religious identity of novice teachers but did not focus on Islamic schools, so teaching was not fully integrated into Islamic values. This is supported by Farrell et al. (2020), who stated that teachers' personal beliefs are under-addressed in the literature.

Based on the results of previous research, despite the significance of professionalism and religious identity in the context of EFL teaching in Islamic junior high schools, there is a notable gap in the research regarding teachers' experiences in negotiating these dual facets. Therefore, this research aimed to investigate the dual facets of EFL novice teachers, namely professionalism and the construction of religious identity in Islamic Junior High Schools. This research

investigated dual facets, professionalism and Islam as a religious identity, as the novelty of this research. By examining the experiences, perspectives, and challenges faced by these teachers, this research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities inherent in their professional and personal development. Furthermore, this research aims to inform educational stakeholders, including teacher educators, school administrators, and policymakers, about the needs and considerations of EFL novice teachers in Islamic educational contexts. Thus, this research seeks to address the following questions:

1. How do EFL novice teachers in Islamic Junior High Schools construct their professional identities from the beginning of teaching English?
2. How do EFL novice teachers integrate Islam as their religious identity when teaching English in Islamic Junior High Schools?

METHOD

Research Design

This research employed narrative inquiry. This type of research aims to find and describe meaning in the stories people tell about themselves and their experiences (Riessman, 2008). In essence, this research is based on the study of lived experience (Clandinin, 2006), and narrative serves as an essential element for understanding identity (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). Thus, the narrative inquiry was chosen as an appropriate research design to achieve this research objective, as it can thoroughly investigate identity construction in depth based on teachers' stories about their real experiences.

Participant

The participants of this study were three novice EFL teachers from two Islamic junior high schools in Jambi, one female and two males. Those are selected through purposive sampling since this technique involves selecting participants based on predetermined criteria that align with the research objectives (Cresswell, 2012). In this research, the criteria for participants are teaching English in an

Islamic junior high school, novice teachers with less than three years of teaching experience, and personal bonding with the researchers. In narrative research, the personal bonding inclusion criterion was crucial to encourage participants' openness and foster trust and comfort in sharing their stories. As stated by Morris (2015), it is essential to establish mutual trust between the interviewer and interviewee to promote participants' openness in revealing their experiences. Each of the participants was given a pseudonym with codes P1, P2 and P2. Pseudonyms are used in research and studies to protect the privacy and confidentiality of participants. The descriptions of the participants' profiles are detailed below:

1. P1: A Male teacher with one year of teaching experience. P1 has known one of the researchers for seven years; they attended the same university and have maintained communication since graduation.
2. P2: A male teacher with two years of teaching experience. P2 has also known one of the researchers for seven years through the same university.
3. P3: A female teacher with two years of teaching experience. One of the researchers has known P3 since the start of P3's teaching career in 2022.

Below is a table summarizing the profiles of the participants:

Table 1. Participants' profile

No.	Pseudonym	Gender	Age (year)	Teaching experience (year)
1.	P1	M	26	1
2.	P2	M	26	2
3.	P3	F	25	2

Data Collection

This data was gathered from narrative interviews to extract participants' stories and life experiences. In December 2023, the researchers invited the teachers to take part in the study. Before the interview, all participants received a research

consent form. The researchers explained that participation was voluntary, data would be kept confidential, and participants could withdraw at any time without consequences. Three participants accepted the invitation. Then, the researchers interviewed them in January 2024 to gather data for the research. The researchers utilized in-depth interviews through a semi-structured interview format. The framework of interview guidelines was adapted from Johnson (2003) and referred to the Indonesian Law No. 14 of 2005 on Teachers and Lecturers; a professional teacher means mastering four competency standards, namely pedagogical, personality, social and professional, but this study focuses only on professional items.

Researchers provided a set of questions to serve as a guide during the semi-structured interview. There were 11 questions prepared by researchers for the interview to go smoothly. Interview questions 1-7 were about professional identity, and questions 8-11 were about religious identity. Moreover, the researchers asked additional questions during the interview to obtain more information or confirmation of how their detailed teaching experiences impacted their identity journey. Google Meet was employed as a tool for the collection of interview data. The interview was recorded directly through this application with the teachers' consent. Cresswell (2012) asserts that the crucial aspect of an interview is the record of information. The interview was conducted by researchers approximately 30-40 minutes to ensure the participants' comfort. Moreover, the interviews were conducted in Indonesian, ensuring that language barriers do not hinder open communication since the participants have to share stories as the characteristic of narrative inquiry research and later transcribe them into English.

Data Analysis

In analyzing the data, the researchers employed the interactive model of Miles et al. (2014), which was divided into data condensation, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions. In data condensation, the researchers collected data based on teachers' stories from interviews with three novice teachers. The data obtained were identified and simplified, which parts were the most relevant data for

maintaining the key information while eliminating unnecessary data details based on criteria such as prioritized statements provided about professionalism and religious identity while reducing filler, repetitive and ambiguous statements for enhance clarity and conciseness. Moreover, in the data display, the researchers grouped the relevant teachers' stories and created detailed narratives that are structured below the identified themes in structured data. For the key information of professionalism identity, the sub-themes of emotional response, adaptation strategies, and professional growth were found, while the key theme of religious identity, sub-themes are incorporating Islamic values into teaching, the role of teachers, and social life were found Each narrative should include multiple teachers' perspectives on a single theme. Lastly, in the conclusion drawing and verification stage, researchers draw conclusions based on key information found and relate them to research questions, such as novice teachers experiencing many challenges in constructing their professional identity and integrating their religious identity in teaching. This conclusion was then verified with teachers to ensure their accuracy and validity to support the overall research findings. The verification was categorized by member checking trustworthiness data, which aims to identify biases or assumptions that may influence the analysis data (Maxwell, 2013).

FINDINGS

The study's findings are organized based on the data analysis in a particular way: 1. Teachers' professional identities from the beginning of their profession; 2. Teachers' religious beliefs;

Teachers' Professional Identities from The Beginning of Their Profession

The novice teachers began the identity construction process by experiencing some initial obstacles related to negative emotions and difficulties adapting to the classroom situation when they started teaching. Their narrative stories are described in the following interview excerpts:

“I was very nervous when I taught students at the first-time teaching. I am confused about how to manage the classroom and use a method. I felt unconfident that the experience that I got from university and teaching training would help me when I first started teaching.” (P1)

“It is not an easy thing for me when my first time teaching at school. I am not confident because I am unsure about my knowledge of the English language and I expected it would be difficult to acclimate to the school environment.” (P2)

Additionally, other participants also showed negative emotions when teaching for the first time. P3 shared that:

“I felt nervous standing in front of the class. I got anxious about the students and the teacher’s response and engagement of my students. I lacked confidence that my skills were a good fit for the expectations of an English teacher established by the school.” (P3)

From the interview above, all of the participants stated that their initial experience of teaching as English teachers was challenging and triggered various negative feelings such as anxiety, uncertainty, and lack of self-confidence. However, when they got further time and experience, they felt more comfortable and confident in their role as teachers. Moreover, novice teachers could encounter numerous challenges when they begin their careers. Researchers interviewed novice teachers to gain a deeper understanding of their first teaching experiences and the challenges they faced as English educators. Based on interviews, they told that:

“I am afraid, I could not manage the classroom because I was unfamiliar with the student’s characteristics and abilities. I also lacked the experience of preparing thoroughly for English lessons and had to learn from more experienced teachers to address these challenges. However, over time, I began to adapt to the school environment and the needs of the students. I gained a better understanding of classroom management and effective teaching strategies, which helped me become more confident in my role as a teacher.” (P1)

Similarly to P1, P2 explained that he found challenges when P1 first taught. P1 revealed that:

“I feel confused because many students don’t understand what I explain when I teach them. I am also confused about designing the learning material. So, my first experience when teaching English was much worse. Then, I addressed my problem by learning and asking other teachers who have much experience in how to make effective learning. After several months, I can choose a learning method that will make the student enjoy the class.” (P2)

In contrast to P2, P3 indicated that he did not encounter any difficulties related to the material itself. However, P3 found challenges regarding how to deal with students. P3 stated that:

“My first experience being a teacher in school was no specific obstacle. Because I have read the material first as my preparation before I come to the class. But at that time, I just faced the different characteristics of the students and it made me feel a quite nervous, standing in front of the class, but as time passed, I just enjoyed the moment. Then I learned how to handle the class and I asked other teachers what the teaching method was to solve my obstacles. And I plan to use technology to make them fun.” (P3)

The results of the interview show that their first teaching experience as English teachers was a challenging learning process. P1 and P3 experienced initial uncertainty in class management due to a lack of experience and knowledge about students’ characteristics. Despite the initial difficulties, P1 adapted to the school environment and understood students’ needs. P2 faced challenges in explaining material to students and designing effective learning materials. P2 and P3 learned from experience and asked for help from other, more experienced teachers; they were able to overcome the problem. The results of these interviews showed that the process of becoming professional teachers were not always smooth and could be filled with various challenges. However, despite facing multiple difficulties, the respondents overcame these challenges through patience, hard work, and support

from more experienced fellow teachers. This illustrates the importance of continuous professional development in a career as an educator.

To get in-depth data about novice teachers' professional identities, the researchers asked about how English teachers define themselves professionally, including the responsibilities, skills, knowledge, and values they bring to their profession. The results are related to several capabilities sub-indicators of professionalism in professional teachers on the Republic of Indonesia Law No. 14 in 2005 about teachers and lecturers. Those are (1) mastering learning content, (2) understanding of characteristics of students, (3) mastering learning methods and strategies, (4) understanding philosophy and learning goals, (5) understanding technology for learning, (6) understanding assessment and evaluation, and (7) can make a plan of the learning process (Law of Republic Indonesia, 2005). The detail explanation is described as follows:

Mastering learning content

To become professional teachers, novice teachers must have a deep understanding and strong mastery of the study discipline. This entails a comprehensive grasp of the topics included in the curriculum and the ability to explain the material clearly and in detail to students. According to the interview, P1 expressed that:

“My educational background and experience have significantly contributed to my teaching skills and subject expertise. I graduated from an Islamic College, majoring in English, and have experience teaching English in a course. These experiences have profoundly shaped my teaching theoretical abilities, such as conveying messages effectively, engaging students, and creating a conducive learning environment.” (P1)

P2 also explained that her educational background reflected the foundation of teaching as a novice teacher. P2 and P3 revealed that:

“This foundation of English from my university studies greatly aided my initial teaching experiences. I studied at an Islamic university in Jambi. The practical experience in teaching practice

sessions helped me learn how to teach for the first time in this Islamic school.” (P2)

“As a student in the English education department at one of the universities in Padang, every subject I took always led me to contemplate how to become a teacher.” (P3)

Based on the results of the interviews, the teachers explained that their experience and educational background shaped their professional identity when they started teaching. All teachers said that their background studies from the English department created the foundation of knowledge in teaching English. Moreover, teaching experience also determines how they teach. For example, P1 explained that he also had experience teaching English in courses, which helped when teaching at school for the first time. Hence, educational and practical experiences play an important role in shaping novice teachers' subject matter expertise.

Teachers need to understand the characteristics of students

Teachers must realize that each student has different needs, interests, talents, and learning styles. By understanding these characteristics, teachers can adapt their teaching approaches to suit each student's individual needs. In the interview, teachers said that *“This is quite challenging for me as a new teacher. The strategy I use is emphasizing a learning environment where every learner feels valued and no student is left behind.” (P1).*

In addition, P2 also had challenges with different students' needs. However, P2 used a different strategy to deal with the problem of various students' needs. P2 explained that:

It is not easy to cover students' different needs, wants, and class abilities. I use various learning media, such as videos, images, and technology, to make learning interesting. Additionally, sometimes, I also open communication with students about today's learning or identify from their tests that material needs to be improved or learned in the next learning. (P2)

Moreover, P3 used a strategy in the form of an assessment to identify students' needs. P3 reported that:

I usually conduct a diagnostic assessment as the first step. In my opinion, this assessment is quite difficult and time-consuming. However, this assessment helps me understand the students' different needs and wants. (P3)

The result revealed that all of the novice teachers found it challenging to tailor the students' diverse needs, abilities, and backgrounds, but they understood the importance of making effective learning. P1 said that the strategy used was to create an inclusive learning environment and pay attention to each student. P2 used different learning media and technologies and opened communication with students to identify their learning needs and progress. In addition, P3 conducted diagnostic assessments as a first step in understanding the different needs of each student. Addressing these challenges through adequate support, training, and resources is crucial to promoting effective differentiated instruction and meeting the diverse needs of students in the classroom.

Mastering learning methods and strategies

It is important since the right methods and strategies can maximize students' engagement, comprehension, and retention. Based on the result of the interview, the teachers expressed that:

“One of the methods that I apply in class is fun learning, such as using icebreakers, interactive games, and quizzes. Choosing the right method or approach for a material is a process of trial and error.” (P1)

“I use different methods for different materials or topics, but I try to consider enjoyable approaches or strategies for students. I have learned a lot from my mistakes.” (P3)

P1 and P3 explored some methods or strategies to teach students on their own. Besides that, P3 sought advice from senior teachers regarding teaching methods. Additionally, P2 revealed that *“As a new teacher, I apply what I learned*

at university and ask senior teachers for advice on best practices and handling noisy students or the class.” (P2)

Novice teachers applied some methods and strategies to teach English. Their teaching process involved a continuous cycle of experimentation with various teaching methods and approaches to enhance students' learning outcomes, such as trial and error (P1) and learning from mistakes (P3). To continually improve their teaching practices, teachers combined knowledge gained from personal experience, guidance from senior teachers, and reflection on mistakes they make.

Understanding technology for learning

Teachers must be able to utilize technology or platforms to enhance teaching and learning experiences to indicate that they are professional teachers. From the interview sessions, teachers affirmed that:

“Today, in this modern era, I believe I must adapt to technological advances to keep interest in lessons. It provides an enjoyable learning experience.” (P1)

“Incorporating technology into teaching is essential nowadays, and technology also simplifies teaching tasks. I utilize technology in every class, using tools such as a projector and laptop.” (P3)

From the interview quotation, P1 and P3 utilized technology and school facilities to make learning more interactive. In addition, P2 utilized communication media to support teaching. P2 exposed that:

“Because there are projectors in some classes, I use them to convey the material. Sometimes, I also provide material in the form of videos on WhatsApp, such as watching how to make fried rice to teach students text procedures before they enter class to give them initial knowledge of the material even though they are not allowed to bring gadgets to school.” (P2)

The interview shows that novice teachers have integrated technology into the English class. All novice teachers stated that it is important to adopt technology to assist in teaching English. P1 used YouTube media to make students enjoy themselves, P2 used WhatsApp to send material a day before learning, and P3

commonly used a laptop and projector to present the material. Teachers thought technology could make learning more interesting and increase students' interest. Furthermore, P3 supposed that technology enhances students' learning experiences and simplifies many teachers' tasks.

Understanding assessment and evaluation

To become professional teachers, novice teachers must understand how to assess and evaluate each student's progress to meet students' needs. Related to students' assessment and evaluation, teachers asserted that:

"I assess the student based on their progress in the class and exam... I make assessments based on the skills I teach, such as writing, listening, and speaking. For me, it is challenging to assess in speaking and writing since their ability in English is still low. So, I decided on the student based on their improvement in the process during the class. (P1)

Based on the interview, P1 was focused on assessing overall progress in key language skills and adapted assessments to reflect students' development. Besides, P2 and P3 explained that:

"It is difficult to design English language assessments, especially for students speaking. I usually test more on reading, grammar, and vocabulary when I take exams. I also assess students' progress at each meeting. I always emphasize that students should not be afraid to learn English." (P2)

"Assessing student progress is challenging, especially when students still lack English proficiency in vocabulary. However, I observe progress in class as students begin to ask for translations or incorporate English words into their conversations. Despite the difficulties, I appreciate and acknowledge their progress." (P3)

In the context of novice teachers' professionalism in assessment and evaluation, the interview findings shed light on several aspects. First, all novice teachers' recognition of the challenges they faced in assessing students' language skills, particularly speaking and writing, due to low English language proficiency

demonstrated a commitment to their role as educators despite initial barriers. Second, there were difficulties in designing an assessment, which were stated by all novice teachers in their initial year of teaching. Therefore, novice teachers need ongoing professional guidance and development.

Ability to make a plan for the learning process

Teachers need to be able to develop lesson plans and learning sequences that align with curriculum standards and learning objectives. Based on the interview, the teachers stated that:

“Before I made a lesson plan, I managed planning in the classroom that focused on our target and goal of learning. For example, about the simple presents, I make sure the material can be delivered in a fun and interesting way for the students but still focus and achieve their learning goal.” (P1)

“My lesson plans follow the government lesson plan format. Additionally, I collaborate with colleagues and sometimes search for unique and interesting activities, such as icebreakers, to use in class.” (P3)

P1 emphasized the importance of aligning lesson plans with learning goals and objectives. P3 adhered to the state’s lesson plan format but enhanced it through collaboration with colleagues. In addition, P2 prefer to make unstructured lesson plans modified by the government. P2 revealed that:

“Actually, I prefer to make an unstructured plan before modifying it to the lesson plan suggested by the government. I like to think and make notes about how I should teach students. Commonly, I made the government lesson plan, but after teaching.” (P2)

Based on the interview, there were some viewpoints on novice teachers’ professionalism and identity construction in lesson planning. First, P1 and P3 novice teachers demonstrated they followed the governance to align lesson plans with learning targets and goals, emphasizing the importance of engaging and effective delivery while focusing on educational objectives. Nevertheless, P2 did not prepare the governance lesson plan before teaching. The teachers preferred to

take a note to make a plan. Second, all the novice teachers expressed that they tried to explore instructional strategies and pedagogical approaches.

Teachers' Religious Belief Identity

In the context of Madrasah Tsanawiyah or Islamic junior high school, building religious identity by incorporating Islamic values into English language learning is essential. In this interview, the researchers listened to the novice teachers' experiences about how novice EFL teachers represent their religious identity in teaching English in Islamic Junior High schools. The teachers must incorporate religious values into the school teaching and learning process. Interview data indicated that teachers occasionally integrate religious values into English Language Teaching (ELT). Their narrative stories were illustrated in the following interview:

"As an Islamic Junior High School teacher, I think I have to balance the knowledge of science and hereafter. Thus, I try to integrate Islamic values both in the material I teach and the attitude I show." (P1)

Similarly, P2 stressed the significance of moral development alongside academic excellence. P2 stated that *"As a teacher, I am more appreciate the students that have good morals rather than good in academics only. So, I combine English material with Islamic values as possible as I can." (P2)*. P3 integrated Islamic values into their lessons by incorporating Islamic stories and implementing rules during English classes that encouraged positive behavior. P3 explain that *I integrate Islamic values into teaching material like Islamic stories or values and make rules while learning English that students must show a good attitude." (P3)*

Based on the interview results, the novice teachers represented their religious belief identity by integrating Islamic values into their teaching. P1 stated the importance of maintaining a balance between knowledge and the afterlife, P2 said that P2 appreciated students' good morals more than academic achievements

but was weak about moral values, P3 integrated Islamic values like Islamic story P3 teaching and emphasized students to have a good attitude. It showed that novice teachers actively integrated religious values, especially the Islamic religion, into English language teaching to highlight the importance of developing good character and behavior.

The teachers' tasks were not only to transfer knowledge but also to shape students' moral character. In the school environment, teachers are not only educators but also must become behavior models for the students. Based on the teachers' stories, researchers got some views from novice teachers about the importance of maintaining a good attitude to provide a positive example for students. P1 and P2 explained that:

“Students perceive teachers as mature individuals and parental figures. Students perceive their teachers as role models for acting and behaving. Positive and negative attitudes can impact students' interactions with others. As a teacher, I must consistently maintain my attitude to set the best example for the students.” (P1)

“I have to give a good example of religious identity for the students from the simple one like Adhering to modest costumes, such as wearing the hijab for women or dressing casually for men, it demonstrates reverence and modesty in line with Islamic rule.” (P2)

This was also illustrated by P3, who said that teachers as examples would be seen in things such as attitude and good behavior towards themselves and others. P3 asserted *“As a teacher, I apply the principles of being friendly to everyone, respecting older people, and being kind to others as an example of implementing Islamic identity that my students can emulate. (P3)*

From the interviews with the novice teachers, all teachers confirmed that their role as teachers would become role models in shaping the students' religious identity. P1 emphasized that teachers must consistently display good attitudes to influence students positively because students view teachers as parental figures at school. P2 and P3 stated that they tend to display Islamic attitudes and values, such

as politeness and humility, as good examples for students. Thus, novice teachers tried to provide good examples as a form of their religious identity so that students could emulate their students' positive attitudes.

Furthermore, the novice teachers shared about how to behave in social settings. The teachers explained that:

"I notify my students that they will grow up in a varied and complex society. Therefore, showing respect to one another and avoiding participating in discrimination is imperative." (P1)

"I always remind my students to follow the story and act like prophet Muhammad as the role model to the students because from the story they can get examples of good character." (P2)

Furthermore, P3 taught her students about the influence of good and bad attitudes on their social environment. P3 told *"As a teacher, I tell them about the good and the bad attitude that can affect their social environment. For example; if you treat other people well, they will do that so and likewise." (P3)*

From the results of interviews with the novice teachers, the novice teachers acknowledged the importance of showing a positive attitude in socializing. All novice teachers emphasized mutual respect in a pluralistic society. P1 taught students to show respect for each other and avoid discrimination. P2 reminded students to follow the attitude of the prophet Muhammad as an example of good character. P3 explained that their good and bad attitudes would influence other people's views of them. Therefore, in presenting Islam as a religious identity, the teachers taught moral values by guiding students to shape them into good, tolerant individuals who care about society.

Discussion

The findings provided about the professional identities and religious beliefs of EFL novice teachers, particularly Islamic Junior High School. Novice teachers' professional identities were constructed from their first teaching experience in the classroom. Thus, the discussion focused on two main themes. Those are novice teachers' professional identities from the beginning of the teaching profession and

teachers' religious beliefs. First, teachers' professional identities from the beginning of the teaching profession. Based on the findings, the initial experiences of the participants highlighted challenges such as anxiety, uncertainty, and lack of confidence. However, with time and experience, they gradually adapted to their roles and developed confidence in managing classrooms and using effective teaching strategies. This finding is supported by previous research by Lomi & Mbato (2020), who asserted that novice teachers are transitioning into a new phase of life where they are responsible for implementing what they have learned in college. Additionally, Voss and Kunter (2020) stated that the challenges of novice teachers are exacerbated by the realization that they are fully responsible for their classrooms, which can lead to emotional exhaustion and a shift in their beliefs toward more constructivist approaches.

In the process of becoming a professional teacher, the result found that teachers have several capabilities referred to Law of Republic Indonesia No. 14 in 2005 about teacher and lecturer, such as mastering disciplines of study, understanding of characteristics of students, mastering learning methods and strategies, understanding about philosophy and learning goals, understanding technology for learning, understanding assessment and evaluation, and planning of the learning process. The results reveal that novice teachers acknowledged the role of their educational backgrounds and practical experiences in shaping their subject expertise and teaching approaches. This is supported by the statements of Anwar et al. (2020) and Ubaidillah and Widiati (2021), who stated that past learning experiences influence language and how professional identities are constructed. Like other identities, teachers' professional identity is not static; instead, they adapt to new demands and activities of past experiences shaped by ongoing progress (Gao & Zhang, 2020). However, novice teachers encounter challenges in understanding students' diversity and implementing differentiated instruction effectively in their initial years. This aligns with prior research by (Idrus et al., 2021 Papanthymou & Darra, 2022; Smale-Jacobse et al., 2019), which highlighted that teachers face difficulties in implementing differentiated instruction, especially when they lack a thorough understanding of the concept, effective strategies implementation, lack of

resources, insufficient training, and feeling unprepared to implement differentiated instruction effectively.

Additionally, novice teachers faced challenges in methods and strategies for teaching English. Beginning teachers learn from their experiences, seek guidance from more experienced colleagues, and adapt their strategies to meet students' evolving needs. As stated by Syah et al. (2020), the development of professional identity among teachers is a discursive process. Moreover, challenges in assessment and evaluation are also indicated among novice teachers, as supported by previous studies by Anggraini et al. (2020) and Janah and Anam (2021). Despite these challenges, novice teachers demonstrate resilience and a willingness to evolve in their roles as educators. Moreover, the finding presents that the participants have implemented the integration of technology in the English class. It is supported by (Ge et al., 2019) that highlight the integration of emerging technologies not only offers additional tools and resources but also fosters social interactions and motivational support for learners. Moreover, it can enhance connectivity and provide valuable resources for educators (Diyal & Pandey, 2022; Syauqi Malik, 2020). Furthermore, there are different approaches to lessons; some teachers adhere to government-prescribed lesson plans, while others prefer a more flexible approach. Nevertheless, lesson planning is highlighted as an essential stage that teachers must undertake before teaching (Emiliasari, 2019). Professional English language teachers have identified proper lesson planning as a critical technique to enhance teaching analytical thinking skills (Moorthi & Rawian, 2023). Moreover, the availability of well-organized lesson plans is essential for achieving the objectives of English Language Teaching (ELT) (Akmal et al., 2022).

Second, teachers' religious belief's identity. In the context of Islamic schools, integrating religious values into teaching practices is essential for shaping students' moral character. As a result, novice teachers actively incorporate Islamic values into English language teaching to emphasize the importance of good character and behavior. It is supported by Tyng et al. (2023), who emphasized the importance of integrating spiritual and moral values into educational programs.

Additionally, Johnson (2003) stated that teachers' beliefs impact their actions in educational settings. Religious beliefs can influence students' perspectives on how they interact with others (Costandius, 2021). The participating teachers believed that it was their responsibility to incorporate religious values into the English classroom to develop proficient and accountable students. Moreover, novice teachers identify themselves as role models and strive to maintain positive attitudes and behaviors to influence students positively. It is also suggested by Johnson (2003) that ELT teachers must develop social and moral values that impact their lives regarding the suggestion. Changes in behavior that can be shown must be influenced by religion, educational background, and experience possessed by an educator. In other words, educators influence changes in students' behavior. For this reason, educators must be role models for students. Lastly, novice teachers are accountable for instilling positive values like tolerance, respect, honesty, and other ethical standards related to professional conduct. Moral values aim to impact and provide significance to thoughts and behaviors (Everington, 2019). Teachers play a crucial role by demonstrating positive values, supporting students' ethical development, and enhancing their educational progress (Tambak et al., 2022). Moral and religious values can improve performance and increase the fulfilment of responsibility for the students.

This research highlights the complex processes of professional identity and religious beliefs among novice EFL teachers in Islamic schools. Based on the result, it emphasizes the importance of providing ongoing support, training, and resources to empower novice teachers to fulfil their roles effectively in the unique context of Islamic education. Ongoing professional development and support play an essential role in helping novice teachers navigate the complexities of their profession and facilitating their identity construction-process (Grinfelde et al., 2019). Mentoring, in-service training, emotional support, and positive feedback from mentor teachers are highlighted as essential elements for novice teachers to develop and maintain their profession (Huang et al., 2021; Rahman & Kurniawan, 2022). Therefore, the support and recognition provided by mentors could have a positive influence on the development of novice teachers' professional identity to grow, gain confidence, and

become professional educators. Additionally, this research provided input to policymakers or stakeholders to better prepare novice teachers for real classroom challenges, such as in teacher training programs emphasizing enhanced practical teaching experience. Teacher training programs can be practical teaching experiences that better prepare novice teachers for real classroom challenges to help them refine their skills and stay updated with the latest educational practices and technologies.

CONCLUSION

The study's findings highlighted that constructing the English novice teachers' identity was a discursive process in their past education, and experience significantly influenced teaching. Many teachers faced difficulties managing classrooms, adapting teaching methods, and integrating into the school environment. However, novice teachers gradually developed their confidence and effectiveness in the classroom through observation, learning from experienced colleagues, and adapting their teaching beliefs. Additionally, some teachers integrated religious values into their teaching, aiming to balance secular knowledge with spiritual values and serve as role models for their students. This integration extended to promoting tolerance and respect for diversity, including religious tolerance, among students. Professionalism in teaching English encompassed various aspects, including mastery of subject matter, understanding students' characteristics, employing effective teaching methods, utilizing technology, assessing students' progress, and planning learning processes. Despite facing challenges in these areas, novice teachers demonstrated resilience and a commitment to ongoing professional development.

The study suggests several implications for English language teaching and future research. It highlights the need for targeted support for novice teachers, including mentorship and professional development programs, to enhance their professionalism. Continuous support, guidance, and collaboration with experienced colleagues are essential for novice teachers to navigate these challenges and enhance their teaching skills effectively since becoming a proficient English teacher

that continuous learning, adaptation, and growth are required. Furthermore, this research is limited by its focus on novice teachers, defined as teachers with less than three years of experience, thereby limiting understanding of professional identity and the development of religious beliefs over a longer teaching career. Therefore, the recommendation for future research is to explore longitudinal studies tracking novice teachers' development and senior teachers' identity. Additionally, this research explored the facets of professional identity and religious beliefs. Thus, it suggested that future researchers focus on one facet of teachers' identity to get more in-depth data.

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