

«I teach, therefore I become»: Tracing the transformative identity of an English teacher

«Enseño, por lo tanto me convierto»: rastreando la identidad transformadora de una profesora de inglés

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ABSTRACT

This article is part of an exploration of how English language teachers construct their professional identities, examined through the case of Windi (pseudonym) using a narrative inquiry approach. Through reflective interviews, the researcher explored teaching experiences, reflections on classroom practices, pedagogical innovations, and the influence of the school environment. The results indicate that teacher identity is dynamic, shaped by ongoing reflection, lifelong learning, and social interactions. Windi's journey demonstrates a shift from novice teacher to educational leader, developing initiatives such as Mini World Class and Grammar Detective. The results demonstrate how the theory of teacher professional identity (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009) and reflective practice (Schön, 1992) can be observed in real-life practice, while emphasising the importance of creating spaces that encourage professional growth and personal transformation. Creating school environments that support lifelong learning is recommended to strengthen teachers' identity and transformative capacity.

KEYWORDS

English education, innovation, lifelong learning, professional teacher identity, teacher reflection

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RESUMEN

Este artículo se enmarca en una investigación sobre la construcción de la identidad profesional de docentes de inglés, analizada a través del estudio de caso de Windi (seudónimo) mediante un enfoque de indagación narrativa. A partir de entrevistas reflexivas, la investigadora examinó sus experiencias docentes, sus consideraciones sobre la práctica en el aula, las innovaciones pedagógicas implementadas y la influencia del contexto escolar. Los hallazgos evidencian que la identidad docente es un proceso dinámico, configurado por la reflexión continua, el aprendizaje permanente y las interacciones sociales. La trayectoria de Windi ilustra la transición de docente novel a líder educativa, impulsando iniciativas como Mini World Class y Grammar Detective. Asimismo, los resultados muestran cómo la teoría de la identidad profesional docente (Beauchamp y Thomas, 2009) y la práctica reflexiva (Schön, 1992) se manifiestan en la práctica educativa concreta, al tiempo que subrayan la necesidad de generar espacios que favorezcan el crecimiento profesional y la transformación personal. Se recomienda crear entornos escolares que fomenten el aprendizaje permanente para fortalecer la identidad y la capacidad transformadora de los docentes.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Aprendizaje permanente, educación en inglés, identidad profesional docente, innovación, reflexión del profesorado

Introduction

Teachers play a crucial role in the education system, not only as transmitters of subject matter but also as character builders and agents of social change within society. A teacher's role extends beyond the classroom, as the quality of future generations is determined by the competence, dedication, and values they bring to their teaching practice. A teacher's professional identity is not formed instantly, but rather through a long process that encompasses practical experience in the field, critical reflection on their roles and responsibilities, and dynamic interactions with colleagues, students, and the broader educational community (Hong et al., 2024; Rodrigues-Silva and Alsina, 2024; Rojas et al., 2025). This identity is fluid and develops throughout a career, influenced by both successes and

failures in teaching, and reinforced through feedback received from the social and institutional environment (Boateng and Wittes, 2025).

The challenges teachers face in the contemporary era are increasingly diverse and complex, driven by the rapid flow of globalisation, the rapid advancement of information technology, and the ever-changing dynamics of the curriculum (Kolikant et al., 2020; Varas et al., 2023). A teacher is no longer simply a master of teaching materials; they must also develop 21st-century skills, such as critical, creative, collaborative, and communicative thinking, which are the foundation for meaningful learning (Belyaeva et al., 2022). Teachers must consider their teaching practices, be open to innovation, and be ready to reconstruct their professional identities to remain relevant to changing times (Seng, 2019).

Being a teacher is not just about teaching; it is a dynamic process that builds professional identity through learning, self-reflection, and adaptation to technological and social changes. Teacher professionalism comes from the complex interactions between individuals and their environment, making identity development a continuous, context-dependent process, not a single product (Gu, 2024; Livingston, 2016). Therefore, it is important to understand this process when building an education system that can face future challenges. However, current research and policy often prioritize student learning outcomes as the main indicator of educational success and neglecting other critical aspects like teacher identity development (Neupane, 2024). Overemphasis on student metrics without recognizing the internal processes teachers undergo risks ignoring key components of improving education quality.

Teachers are not merely instruments for implementing educational policy, but rather key actors who determine the direction and quality of the learning process. A strong professional identity impacts not only classroom learning but also the success of pedagogical innovation, the development of school culture, and the sustainability of educational reform (Connolly and Stanton, 2020; German et al., 2021). Without recognising and strengthening teacher identity, educational policy risks remaining at the administrative level without tangible changes in the classroom. Therefore, teacher identity needs to be understood not merely as a personal aspect, but also as a social construct shaped by policy, school culture, and professional relationships. This perspective allows us to see how education moves beyond formal rules to a vibrant and empowering practice.

Education centred on human transformation requires critical thinkers, empowered teachers, and continuous development throughout their careers. Developing teachers' professional identities must be prioritised

in educational policy and academic research. Focusing solely on student learning outcomes risks neglecting crucial aspects of teachers' internal processes (Pandey and Mohanty, 2025). Teachers with strong professional identities are more reflective, adaptive, and innovative in facing the challenges of the times (Farwa et al., 2025; Orfali et al., 2024). Sustainable educational reform can only be realised if the system facilitates the development of a strong teacher identity through spaces for reflection, collaboration, and institutional support. Thus, educational change is not merely procedural but also transformative, grounded in the awareness, commitment, and professionalism of teachers themselves.

Understanding the dynamics between teachers' personal values, professional responsibilities also allow for creating teacher development strategies that combine personal values and professional needs in education. Education that is centred on human transformation must be supported by teachers who are reflective, empowered, and continually developing in their work (Kashar et al., 2025; Prabandari, 2020). By placing teacher professional identity as the focus of study, the world of education has the potential to produce more substantial and long-term changes. Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) define professional identity as teachers' understanding of themselves in the context of their work, which develops through social interactions, direct experiences, and reflection on their teaching practice. Teacher identity encompasses not only what they do but also how they see their role in education and adapt to the demands of their work. The process of its formation takes place over time and is related to lifelong learning.

A critical approach to understanding the formation of teachers' professional identity is the concept of reflective practice, introduced by Schön (1992). Through reflection, teachers can review their teaching practice and gain a deeper understanding of their role. This process has two complementary dimensions: reflection-in-action, which occurs during direct interaction with students, and reflection-on-action, which occurs after the learning process to assess and improve future practice. Both forms of reflection not only increase teachers' awareness of their actions but also contribute to the formation of a more mature and authentic professional identity.

While reflection plays a crucial role in shaping teachers' professional identity, it is not the only factor. Vygotsky's (1980) social constructivism emphasises that identity also develops through social interaction, collaboration, and collaborative learning. Vygotsky stressed the importance of social interaction during the learning process. He argued that conversation, collaboration, and collaborative learning are how knowledge and

identity are formed in a social context. It suggests that teachers' professional identity emerges and develops through interactions with colleagues, students, and the educational community within the teaching context. Teachers' experiences are enriched through this process, enabling them to adapt to existing social and contextual needs.

In addition, Kolb (1984) added another important element that shapes teachers' professional identity, namely the experiential learning theory, which argues that learning occurs through a cycle of experiences consisting of four stages: concrete experience, reflection on experience, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Teachers who follow this cycle will continue to learn and develop from their experiences in the field, reflect on their previous experiences, and develop their concepts. Therefore, teachers' professional identity is formed and changed through continuous learning from direct experience.

Teacher professional identity is not stable but is formed through a dynamic interplay of reflection, experiential learning, and social interaction. This relationship can be more clearly illustrated through a conceptual model that maps how Schön's reflective practice, Kolb's experiential learning cycle, and Vygotsky's social constructivism intersect in shaping teacher professional development (see figure 1). Conversely, individual reflection, practical experience, and social influences shape and transform it (Ockerman and Bagui, 2024; Tang and Ye, 2023). Continuous learning produces a teacher identity that combines experience, social collaboration, and critical reflection on teaching practice. Therefore, understanding how professional identity emerges and develops provides important insights for supporting teacher professional growth and improving classroom instructional practices.



FIGURE 1. Conceptual model of teacher professional identity formation

This study explores the professional identity journey of an English teacher through a narrative inquiry approach, with reflective interviews as the primary method of data collection. The participant, an English teacher in East Nusa Tenggara named Windi (pseudonym), reflected on her teaching experiences, reflection on teaching practice, self-directed learning, role changes, and environmental support. Interviews were conducted face-to-face in two sessions (40 minutes), using a semi-structured format and open-ended questions. This approach ensured that the data obtained were not merely descriptive but also reflective, thus illustrating how teachers' professional identities are formed, developed, and influenced by experiences and socio-professional contexts. Teaching experience is crucial because, through interactions with students, teachers gain new insights into their roles. Furthermore, ongoing self-reflection helps shape teacher identity, allows for the evaluation and improvement of teaching practices, and identifies elements that need updating for ongoing professional development.

Results and discussion

Transforming teacher professional identity through career trajectories (from the periphery to the center of change)

A teacher's professional identity does not emerge instantly; instead, it develops gradually over time through a complex interaction between personal experiences, critical reflection, and the social and institutional contexts in which the teacher operates. This idea aligns with Beauchamp and Thomas's (2009) view, which states that a teacher's professional identity is a dynamic social construct formed through reflective engagement and ongoing responses to the teaching context. This perspective emphasises that identity continues to form as teachers reflect on their practice, interact with students and colleagues, and adapt to the evolving demands of their work environment. This framework helps explain the professional journey of Windi, who began her career as an English teacher in 2013 at a small private school on the coast of Lembata, East Nusa Tenggara—a geographically remote and resource-limited area. By applying this perspective, we can understand how Windi's experiences, reflections, and contextual responses contribute to the formation and ongoing evolution of her professional identity.

Teaching in a remote area and with minimal professional support made Windi understand that the role of a teacher goes beyond just delivering material. She learned to be a companion, guide, and emotional support for students. Teacher identity is closely related to moral goals, emotional involvement, and social relations (Day et al., 2006). Amid limited learning

facilities, low student interest, and no mentors, Windi began to grow her professional identity rooted in empathy, resilience, and social responsibility. This condition reflects what Sachs (2001) calls *identity sites*—specific contexts where professional identities emerge through negotiations between personal values and structural pressures.

Over time, Windi's professional identity underwent a significant transformation. Her move to a public junior high school in 2019 exposed her to more complex professional demands: a more socially and academically diverse student body and greater administrative responsibilities. This experience placed her in what Coldron and Smith (1999) call a sphere of influence. Within this sphere, identity is shaped through external influences (policies, school culture) and internal agency. Windi became active in the cross-school teacher community at this public school, building pedagogical collaborations and engaging in school program development. Her exposure to a broader professional network accelerated her role shift—from curriculum implementer, a teacher who focuses primarily on delivering content according to the existing curriculum and policies, to school innovator, a teacher who takes the initiative in designing new programs, fostering pedagogical collaborations, and bringing about changes in school culture.

A significant turning point occurred in 2022 when Windi joined the *Pendidikan Profesi Guru* (PPG). This program not only provided formal legitimacy as an educator but also broadened her understanding of the role of teachers within the national education framework. In line with Sachs' (2005) view, her involvement in PPG showed a shift from managed professionalism to activist professionalism, where she began to see herself as an agent of change capable of influencing the broader education ecosystem. Her appointment as a *Guru Penggerak* in 2024 was the culmination of this transition—not just an administrative status, but a manifestation of a new meaning for her profession. She no longer just delivered material but built teacher collaboration, cultivated positive learning, and created innovations based on student needs. This transformation reflects what Olsen (2008) calls the *trajectory of teacher identity*: shifts in context and reflective practice are the primary triggers in a teacher's self-redefinition. Windi's involvement in formal (PPG and *Guru Penggerak*) and informal (experiences in two different institutions) contexts are examples of triggering contexts (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009)—moments and spaces that reshape professional perspectives.

Furthermore, Windi's reflections show that professional identity is not only formed in the classroom but is also influenced by how she interprets her relationship with students, her beliefs about education, and

her values. In one of her reflections, Windi stated that she felt like a «real teacher» when she saw her students grow into confident individuals who dared to voice their opinions. It reflects the affective dimension of teacher identity, as Kelchtermans (2009) explained, which states that the emotional meaning of teaching is a significant component in forming professional commitment.

Windi's professional journey is not just a sequence of career development. It is an integrative process that combines personal experience, critical reflection, social negotiation, and value transformation in one unit that forms her identity as an educator. This process shows that teacher identity is an evolving construction influenced by the relationship between self, institutions, and the broader socio-political context. Windi's case shows that teachers can become agents of change even within structural constraints through reflective and contextual identity work.

Reflection as a driver of change in practice and professional self-perception

Throughout her career as an English teacher, Windi has shown that reflection is a key element that consistently drives role transformation and strengthens her professional identity. She builds reflective habits rooted in real practice, formally through daily journals and informally through personal reflection after learning sessions. These habits have become internal mechanisms that help her evaluate successes and shortcomings in the teaching process, identify student needs, and generate new ideas for developing learning strategies. More than just an evaluation tool, reflection becomes a window for Windi to understand herself as an educator in a deeper and more meaningful way.

A real example of how reflection drives change is seen when Windi realised that the lecture approach to teaching grammar was making students passive and unmotivated. Based on classroom observations and evaluations of learning outcomes, she conducted reflection-on-action—reviewing what had happened—and concluded the need for a more participatory and contextual approach. From this process, an innovative method she called «Grammar Detective» was born, a game-based activity in which students work in groups to find and correct grammatical errors in a story. This method has been proven to increase student participation and strengthen students' understanding of language structures in a practical way. The research results also show that even in the process of implementing this method, Windi engaged in reflection-in-action, namely, spontaneous adjustments and direct decision-making in the midst of the learning process. Thus, reflection in the context of teachers' professional

identity is not only retrospective but also dynamic, responsive, and has a direct impact on the quality of teaching practice.

The reflective thinking model shown in Windi's experience directly reflects the Reflective Practice theory proposed by Schön (1992). In this framework, Schön distinguishes two types of reflection that characterize true professionals: reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action. Reflection-on-action refers to the critical thinking process carried out after the action is completed as an effort to evaluate the successes and shortcomings of the practice that has been carried out. Meanwhile, reflection-in-action is the ability to think and adjust reflectively during the ongoing action process, allowing teachers to respond flexibly and appropriately to classroom situations. In Windi's learning practice, these two forms of reflection complement each other and form a continuous professional learning cycle (see figure 2). She reviews the effectiveness of the methods she uses and makes spontaneous adjustments based on direct interaction with students, the classroom atmosphere, or unexpected obstacles in implementing learning.



FIGURE 2. The cycle of reflection and change in teacher identity based on Schön's (1992)

Reflection in Schön's framework is a retrospective activity and a form of critical and constructive thinking that allows teachers to continuously improve and develop their practices. In this case, reflection becomes a tool for professional transformation, pushing teachers out of conventional techniques' comfort zones towards developing a more contextual and student-centered approach (Hung, 2008). For Windi, reflection is not only a process of evaluating the effectiveness of teaching methods but also a vehicle for building a new perception of her role - from merely a teacher of material to an active learning facilitator sensitive to students' needs, interests, and dynamics. This transformation occurs through a cycle of reflection that continuously enriches her perspective and skills as an educator.

Furthermore, consistent reflective practice strengthens Windi's educational professional agency. She does not wait for direction or systemic change to innovate but actively creates a reflective space within herself as a starting point for change. This ability to act consciously and reflectively indicates that professional identity is not formed passively or unilaterally by external structures but results from a dynamic interaction between direct experience, self-awareness, and strategic decisions in daily practice. It confirms the view of Beauchamp and Thomas (2009), who stated that teacher identity is a flexible and continuously evolving social construction formed through dialogue between the self and the social context in which the teacher practices. In this framework, reflection is an evaluative tool and an epistemological foundation for developing, confirming, and sustaining the teacher's professional identity.

Lifelong learning and innovation in strengthening the teacher's role

One of the important results in this research is Windi's high commitment to lifelong learning, which is the primary foundation for forming and strengthening her professional identity. For Windi, learning never stops in the classroom or formal training; she perceives learning as a process that is intrinsic, continuous, and inherent in the daily life of a teacher. She actively seeks knowledge through educational YouTube channels, reads educational articles, discusses online and offline teacher communities, and attends relevant educational webinars. Her involvement in various informal learning spaces shows that she does not see learning as merely an administrative obligation but rather as an expression of curiosity and professional responsibility.

Windi's independent learning enriches her knowledge and skills and gives birth to various contextual innovations that impact the classroom. One example is the «Mini World Class» program, a role-play-based simulation designed to develop students' intercultural communication skills through cross-country scenarios. This innovation was born from Windi's learning about intercultural communicative competence, which she creatively adapted into her classroom. By creating a fun and relevant learning space, Windi improves students' language skills and forms multicultural awareness and the courage to speak in a foreign language—aspects rarely touched on in traditional learning approaches. It proves that lifelong learning encourages the creation of reflective, flexible, and meaningful pedagogical practices.

Windi's learning process is also closely related to UNESCO's four pillars of learning (1996): learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be. Through independent exploration, Windi fulfils

the concepts of learning to know and learning to do by mastering teaching theories and applying them in innovative ways. Meanwhile, learning to live together is reflected in how she teaches cultural tolerance through global simulations, and learning to be is manifested in strengthening her professional identity as an empowered learning teacher, that is a teacher who continues to develop themselves reflectively, has professional autonomy, and can empower students through meaningful learning practices. Thus, her learning process is instrumental and transformative, reshaping her perception and role in the educational ecosystem.

More than just improving technical competence, lifelong learning forms a dynamic and reflective professional identity. Windi realizes that in the ever-changing world of education, teachers are required not only to master the material but also to have cognitive and affective flexibility to adapt to various social and technological challenges. When her teaching experiments did not go as expected, she did not give up but evaluated, reflected, and tried again with a different approach. This attitude shows that lifelong learning forms resilience, courage to experiment, and openness to new ideas—all of which strengthen her identity as a critical and innovative teacher.

In this case, lifelong learning is not merely a concept, but rather the primary foundation for developing a teacher's professional capacity. This principle emphasises that teacher competence is not only formed through formal work experience or position, but also through a reflective awareness to continuously learn, adapt, and renew themselves according to the demands of the times. It aligns with Said and Abdallah's (2024) view that teachers' professional identity develops along with their commitment to internalising the values of continuous learning, so that their orientation and actions do not stop at teaching routines but rather transform into meaningful, reflective practices. For Windi, the teaching profession is not the end point of achievement, but rather the beginning of a long journey as a lifelong learner. This process not only broadens her horizons and skills but also strengthens her contribution to creating relevant, inclusive, and contextual educational practices that can meet the needs of students.

Context-shaped, relation-fueled: Identity in the social arena of schooling

A teacher's professional identity is not a stand-alone construction but rather the result of a dynamic and ongoing interaction between the individual and the social environment in which he or she practices. In Windi's case, the school environment significantly strengthened and shaped her professional identity. She found a more open space to grow professionally

when she joined a public junior high school. Her leadership as the initiator of context-based learning programs, such as the English-Speaking Corner, was validated by the support of the principal and close collaboration with colleagues. This supportive working environment allowed Windi to develop technically and in terms of identity—she felt valued, recognized, and strategically positioned within the school community, which empowered her as an agent of change.

However, Windi's experience also demonstrates that the institutional environment does not always catalyze professional development. Early in her career at a small private school, limited facilities and the absence of formal mentors presented significant obstacles to the development of a professional identity. Without a clear structural direction, Windi had to rely on personal initiative to try various approaches, often leaving her feeling lost. Infrastructure limitations, including a shortage of digital devices and insufficient learning spaces often hindered her innovative learning efforts. This situation confirms that while intrinsic motivation is indeed a key asset, in practice, the work environment significantly determines the space, time, and energy available for teachers to reflect, develop innovations, evaluate practices, and build their professional identity. In other words, the process of teacher reflection and innovation is not a smooth and continuous cycle, but rather a dynamic, challenging journey that requires contextual support for its sustainability.

The phenomenon of Windi's professional identity formation can be analyzed more deeply through the lens of Bourdieu's (1984), which offers an important conceptual framework for understanding how individuals form their social positions in complex structures. Three main concepts in Bourdieu's theory—*habitus*, *field*, and *capital*—help explain the interaction between personal background, social structure, and educational power distribution (see Figure 3). In this context, Windi's *habitus* refers to the values, dispositions, past experiences, and ways of thinking she brings into her professional practice. This *habitus* is formed from education, family environment, early teaching experiences, and interactions with the local community. She brings a *habitus* that is adaptive and open to renewal, which then meets the social field in the form of school institutions and education systems full of power relations, normative rules, and position structures that regulate legitimacy.



FIGURE 3. Interaction between social context and the formation of teachers' professional identity (adapted from Bourdieu, 1984)

Windi tries to build and accumulate various forms of capital in this field. Cultural capital is obtained through formal education, professional training, and her ability to create learning innovations such as Grammar Detective and Mini World Class. Social capital grows through positive and collaborative relationships with colleagues, teacher communities, and professional interactions in educational forums. Meanwhile, symbolic capital comes in formal and informal recognition, such as her status as a driving teacher and the principal's trust in her ideas. When these various forms of capital are supported and recognized by the social structure where she works, Windi's position in education becomes stronger, ultimately accelerating the formation of a solid, reflective, and innovative professional identity.

However, Bourdieu also reminds us that capital is not always distributed evenly and fairly in the field. In Windi's experience, structural support is not always available. Barriers such as limited facilities, lack of formal mentors, or a passive school culture towards change can be symbolic barriers that weaken her position and agency. Forming a professional identity tends to slow down or even be distorted in such conditions. Therefore, teacher identity formation is determined by the individual's capacity to reflect and innovate and depends heavily on how their capital is recognized, transformed, or rejected by the social system they enter.

Moreover, Windi's experience shows that success in building a professional identity stems not only from internal reflection but also from how external recognition is internalised into her self-understanding as a teacher. When the ideas and innovations she initiated were accepted, appreciated, and supported by the school community, Windi felt more professionally confident and gained a place within the broader social structure. Conversely, her professional identity faced invisible resistance when the ideas she proposed were ignored or subtly rejected. In this context, the work environment is not only a space for teachers to carry

out pedagogical practices, but also an arena for complex identity negotiations, where external factors are processed and interpreted internally. Thus, as depicted in Figure 3, teacher identity cannot be separated from the social configuration in which she works, develops, and struggles to be recognised as a legitimate part of the education system.

The dynamics of teacher professional identity as an ongoing process

A teacher's professional identity is one of the results of a reflective process that continues throughout her career. This study confirms that Windi's professional identity is shaped by the accumulation of reflective experiences, pedagogical innovations, lifelong learning, and social interactions in the school environment. Her professional journey shows that self-meaning as a teacher is not solely shaped by formal training or structural positions but through a series of life experiences - both in the form of challenges and successes - that invite her to continue to review, adjust, and strengthen her professional position amidst changing contexts.

In practice, Windi reinterprets her role through various reflective mechanisms that emerge from her experiences. She evaluates the effectiveness of learning methods and re-forms her narrative as an educator who is responsible, creative, and responsive to students' needs. Innovations such as Mini World Class and Grammar Detective are forms of methodological adaptation and concrete representations of the identity being formed and strengthened. It is in line with the view of Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) that a teacher's professional identity results from a dialogue between personal experience and a constantly changing social context. In this case, Windi forms her identity not passively but through active involvement in the learning community, reflective decision-making, and responding to external recognition she receives from the work environment.

Furthermore, understanding that teachers' professional identities are dynamic has important implications for both individual career development and the broader education system. Teacher identity cannot be understood as fixed and final, but rather as a social construct that continues to evolve through the interaction of personal experience, professional reflection, pedagogical innovation, and the social context in which teachers carry out their roles. When this identity is viewed as a growing journey, educational institutions need to create spaces that encourage exploration, in-depth reflection, and meaningful collaboration among teachers. Consistent with Beauchamp and Thomas's (2009) view, teacher training and institutional support play a crucial role in shaping professional identity, as they provide opportunities for teachers to reflect, collaborate, and develop diverse pedagogical approaches. Hence, educational institutions

must provide an ecosystem that supports identity formation through access to reflective training, involvement in school decision-making, and a culture that values diverse teaching approaches.

As emphasized by Sachs (2001), the formation of teacher identity includes two main dimensions that are intertwined, namely the personal dimension that reflects the values, beliefs, and subjective experiences of teachers and the social dimension that is influenced by expectations, institutional structures, and power dynamics in the education community. Both are inseparable and must be consciously accommodated in professional development policies. When the education system fails to accommodate these dimensions, the teacher's growth space is narrowed, ultimately impacting educational practices' decreasing effectiveness and relevance. Therefore, the professional development approach must focus on improving technical skills and include support for constructing an authentic and sustainable professional identity.

This research emphasises that the quality of education is not solely determined by the quality of the curriculum, evaluation system, or administrative regulations but is greatly influenced by the extent to which teachers are empowered to shape and strengthen their professional identity. When teachers are given trust, space for reflection, and recognition for their innovative capacity, they will be better able to adapt to the dynamics of the times and more open to contextual and meaningful renewal. This dynamic model can be seen in Figure 4, which shows how reflection, innovation, lifelong learning, and environmental support interact in sustainably shaping and strengthening the teacher's professional identity. This model emphasizes that identity development is not a linear process but a dynamic cycle that continues to develop following experience and changes in context.

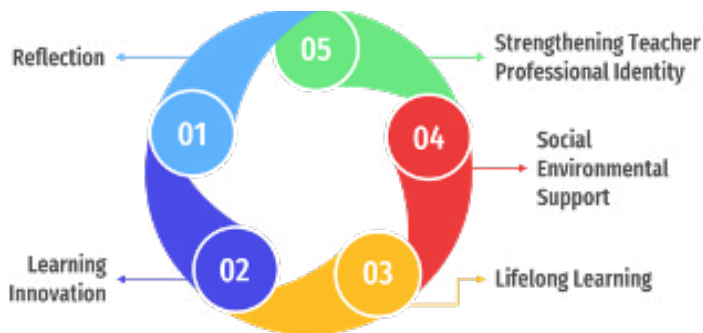


FIGURE 4. Dynamic model of teacher professional identity formation based on research

Teachers like Windi are concrete examples of how professional identity is formed in the classroom and through life experiences as reflective practitioners in various social and structural contexts. She shows that the learning process of a true teacher goes beyond the boundaries of curriculum and teaching materials and involves a continuous process of recognizing, reviewing, and affirming one's role in society. When teachers have the opportunity to grow through a meaningful reflective process, education becomes a process of knowledge transfer and a space for social transformation. Therefore, strengthening teachers' professional identity is not only an individual effort but also a structural investment to build the foundation of a more humane, adaptive, and sustainable education system.

Conclusion

This study aims to explore how teachers' professional identity is formed through reflective experiences, and results indicate that this identity is a dynamic process shaped by teaching experiences, critical reflection, learning innovations, and social interactions in the workplace. Through a narrative inquiry approach, a teacher named Windi shows that being a teacher is not simply about mastering material, but also the ability to continuously learn, adapt, and discover the meaning of the profession in a constantly changing context. Reflection is a key driver of identity transformation, as it encourages teachers to critically evaluate teaching practices and generate learning innovations relevant to students' needs. At the same time, lifelong learning strengthens readiness to face the challenges of modern education. Supportive work environment factors—such as community support, principal trust, and peer collaboration—play a crucial role in accelerating identity strengthening, while structural limitations can hinder it. Hence, teacher identity can be understood as the result of a dialectic between individual agency and the socio-institutional context, not simply a personal construct. Theoretically, this study expands the discussion on teachers' professional identity by emphasising the importance of both psychological and sociological dimensions (*habitus*, domain, and capital). Practically, it underscores the need for education systems to create spaces for reflection, collaboration, and innovation to strengthen teacher identity. Although this research is limited to one case and therefore cannot be generalised, the results enrich the understanding of teacher professional identity as a transformative process that is essential for improving the quality of education.

Author' contribution

Andi Anugrah Surya Ardhy contributed to all CRediT roles.

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Conflicts of interest

The author declares that he has no conflict of interest.

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