

# Teacher Identity and Agency Development of an Indonesian Islamic Junior High School: Bourdieu's Lens

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**ABSTRACT.** The construction of professional identity among English teachers in private Islamic junior high schools in Indonesia is a multifaceted process influenced by cultural, religious, and institutional factors. Utilizing Bourdieu's Social Practice theory, which encompasses the concepts of habitus, capital, and field, this study aims to explore how these elements shape teacher agency and professional identity in this unique educational context. Through a qualitative research approach, involving in-depth interviews, data were collected from an English teacher at a private Islamic Junior high school. The participant was selected from among English teachers to represent them at an Islamic private school. The participant is considered to have qualified as a professional English teacher. He has participated in the in-service teacher certification program and has passed, receiving certification benefits. The findings reveal that teachers' professional identities are shaped not only by their pedagogical skills and knowledge (capital) but also by their alignment with the religious and cultural values of the Islamic school environment (habitus). This alignment influences his sense of agency, affecting how he navigates his roles within the institutional structure (field). This research is particularly valuable for educators, school administrators, and policymakers involved in teacher education and professional development. It suggests that teacher education programs should incorporate strategies that address the cultural context of Islamic education while promoting teacher agency, ultimately benefiting those seeking to enhance the quality and effectiveness of English language teaching in similar educational settings.

**Keywords:** *Bourdieu's Social Practice Theory, English Language Teaching, Islamic Education, Professional Identity, Teacher Agency*

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## INTRODUCTION

The construction of professional identity among English teachers is widely acknowledged as a dynamic and contextually situated process, shaped by social, cultural, and institutional forces. Identity is neither fixed nor predetermined; rather, it is continually negotiated through teachers' interactions with students, colleagues, curricula, and broader educational policies (Amirudin et al., 2024; Chen et al., 2023; Flores & Day, 2006; Kartiko et al., 2025; Sachs, 2001). As teachers accumulate experience and critically reflect on their practice, their professional selves evolve, embodying both personal convictions and institutional demands (Johnson & Coleman, 2024; Mockler, 2011; Nargis et al., 2024). Because professional identity underpins decision-making, motivation, and engagement in the classroom, understanding its formation is essential for improving teacher development and educational practice.

For English teachers in Islamic schools, the negotiation of professional identity presents distinctive challenges. Unlike their counterparts in secular institutions, these teachers must

reconcile pedagogical responsibilities with the cultural and religious ethos of their schools (Bhat & Bisati, 2025; Indasari et al., 2024; Sormin et al., 2025). English language teaching, historically embedded within Western traditions, often introduces content or perspectives that may not fully align with Islamic educational values (Matthews et al., 2023; Succarie, 2024). Teachers are therefore required to adapt or reinterpret curricular materials when they conflict with moral or religious principles, a process that can generate uncertainty in instructional practice (Jensen & Kjeldsen, 2022; Latif, 2022; Rohmah et al., 2023). Furthermore, institutional culture plays a decisive role: teachers are expected not only to deliver language instruction effectively but also to exemplify Islamic values in their professional conduct and relationships with students (Almayez, 2022; Goff et al., 2022; Pallathadka et al., 2023; Sijamhodži, 2023). This dual expectation serving simultaneously as language educators and moral exemplars creates a layered and often contested space for identity construction, making Islamic schools a particularly important site for research on professional identity.

Recent academic discourse underscores the significance of Bourdieu's theoretical framework particularly the constructs of habitus, capital, and field in the analysis of such intricacies. Habitus denotes the ingrained dispositions and orientations that individuals cultivate through their experiential trajectories, which subsequently shape their professional engagements (Bourdieu, 1986). Capital, whether it manifests as cultural (encompassing knowledge and qualifications), social (including networks and relationships), or symbolic (such as recognition and prestige), constitutes the resources that educators leverage in navigating their work contexts (Grenfell & James, 2004; Guan & James, 2020; Reay, 2004; Recknagel et al., 2022). Field, in this context, signifies the structured institutional arenas within which educators operate, each distinguished by specific norms, hierarchies, and power dynamics. Within these fields, educators exert agency the ability to make informed choices and instigate change albeit invariably within the confines of their habitus and the capital at their disposal (Biesta et al., 2015; Eteläpelto et al., 2013). Although this conceptual framework has been effectively employed to elucidate teacher identity within secular educational environments, there exists a paucity of knowledge regarding its applicability in Islamic educational institutions, where professional and religious obligations intersect in notably distinct manners (Alramadan, 2023; Anjanillah, 2021).

The broader literature confirms that professional identity is shaped by pressures such as accountability reforms, policy mandates, and shifting pedagogical expectations (Day & Kington, 2008; Mockler, 2011; Rusmini & Alfiandi, 2025). Yet religious-based educational settings remain comparatively underexplored. Although some studies have examined the integration of faith and pedagogy (Bridi et al., 2023; El-Soussi, 2022), the specific case of English teachers in Islamic schools who must align global language instruction with the ethical frameworks of Islamic education has not received sufficient attention (Beijaard et al., 2004; Zembylas, 2003). This oversight limits the field's ability to account for how identity is constructed in contexts where professional practice cannot be separated from cultural and religious commitments. Addressing this gap is essential if the scholarship on teacher identity is to reflect the diversity of educational environments in which teachers work.

Therefore, this study aims to answer the question: *How does an English teacher in an Islamic school construct and negotiate his professional identity through the interplay of habitus, capital, and field?* By addressing this question, the study contributes theoretically by extending Bourdieu's framework into an underexamined educational setting and practically by generating insights to guide teacher education programs tailored to the realities of Islamic schools. Such insights may strengthen teacher agency, offer strategies for integrating moral and cultural values into English instruction, and foster supportive professional environments that respect both pedagogical and religious commitments. Ultimately, this research seeks to advance a more culturally grounded understanding of professional identity, one that acknowledges the complex intersections of education, faith, and society.

## METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study design to examine the professional identity and agency of an English teacher in a private Islamic junior high school in Indonesia. A case study was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of lived experiences within a specific context rather than broad generalizations (Creswell, 2018; Pacho, 2015; Schoch, 2020; Tadesse et al., 2021). The participant was a 36-year-old male teacher with nine years of teaching experience, a bachelor's degree in English education, and an official teaching credential. He was deliberately selected as a single case because of his professional qualities that extend beyond certification, including strong pedagogical competence, consistent participation in professional development training, mastery of English subject matter, psychological maturity, and a well-integrated understanding of Islamic values. These attributes positioned him as a reflective and experienced professional whose insights could reveal how identity is shaped in Islamic schooling contexts.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which provided flexibility to probe the teacher's beliefs, experiences, and perceptions of his role (Alhoussawi, 2022; Karim et al., 2020). The interviews focused on the influence of cultural and religious values on teaching practices, his sense of professional agency, and the impact of institutional expectations. Each interview lasted 60–90 minutes, was audio-recorded with consent.

Thematic analysis was conducted following (Braun & Clarke, 2006)'s six phases. First, the researcher familiarized with the data through repeated reading and transcription. Second, open coding was used to generate initial codes directly from the participant's narrative. Third, axial coding grouped related codes into broader categories that captured emerging patterns. Fourth, the themes were reviewed for coherence and consistency. Fifth, selective coding refined the themes and connected them with Bourdieu's theoretical constructs of habitus, capital, and field. Finally, the themes were defined and integrated into a coherent account of professional identity development. This blend of inductive and deductive coding allowed both the participant's lived experience and theoretical insights to shape the findings.

To enhance clarity, the results were presented through narrative descriptions supported by direct quotations, and thematic tables. These representations highlighted the interplay between habitus, capital, and field in shaping the teacher's agency and professional identity within his school environment. Ethical considerations were strictly observed: the participant was fully informed about the study's aims and procedures, gave written consent, and was assured of his right to withdraw at any point. His identity was anonymized using a pseudonym, and all potentially identifying information was removed from the transcripts to ensure confidentiality while authentically presenting his perspectives.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Result

This Section presents the data analysis addressing the research question. A table illustrating the findings is provided below, illustrating how the perspectives of agency, habitus, capital, and field shape the professional identities of an English teacher in a private Islamic Junior school.

**Table 1. Domain Habitus, Capital, Field, and Agency**

Domain	Definition	Data from the Interview
<b>Habitus</b>	Internalized disposition shaped by background and experience	The participant's habitus is visible in his lifelong aspiration to teach (P.A.7), his family-driven motivation (P.A.8), and his blending of religious study with teaching (P.A.1, P.A.9). He frames teaching as a spiritual calling and a way to help others, showing how personal values and habitus intersect with professional identity.

<b>Cultural Capital</b>	Knowledge, skills, and qualifications that provide social advantage	Religious knowledge, bilingual workshops, and leadership experience (P.A.10, P.A.11, P.A.12) enhance his credibility. As TPQ principal (P.A.2), he draws on both secular and religious training to strengthen his professional status and create opportunities for other teachers.
<b>Social Capital</b>	Relationships, networks, and trust that facilitate social mobility	The participant builds strong community ties and networks as TPQ coordinator and MGMP participant (P.A.12–P.A.15). His collaborative approach and willingness to share responsibilities (P.A.14) expand his reach and create reciprocal support systems between teachers and community stakeholders.
<b>Field</b>	The social space where individuals compete for capital and navigate power dynamics	The participant operates across multiple fields Islamic education and formal schooling as reflected in his multi-role schedule (P.A.3, P.A.13) and his adaptation to institutional norms while maintaining his identity rooted in religious values.
<b>Teacher Agency</b>	The ability to make decisions and shape professional identity	He demonstrates agency by introducing innovative teaching methods such as games and digital platforms (P.A.16, P.A.17), emphasizing moral development, and continuously learning (P.A.18). These examples show his proactive stance in shaping pedagogy and student outcomes.
<b>Constraints</b>	Barriers within the field that limit agency	Digital administration challenges and balancing institutional and religious expectations. Digital administrative burdens (P.A.5, P.A.19), limited preparation time (P.A.20), and the need to support struggling teachers (P.A.21) illustrate these constraints. Despite this, he uses scaffolding and collaboration to mitigate these challenges.

### Habitus in Teacher Identity

The professional identity of the participant is fundamentally established upon his enduring aspiration to pursue a career in education, which has been significantly molded by his academic experiences and religious background. He elucidated the manner in which his fervor for pedagogy and intrinsic values shape his pedagogical approach:

Excerpt 1

*“I love teaching... although I'm not only teaching here, I have afternoon school like teaching Quran recitations.”* (P.A.1)

Excerpt 7

*“Being a teacher is my purpose when I was senior high school... in this school I need to change my mind about students-centred learning and make them more active.”* (P.A.7)

Excerpt 8

*“My family, and my students are the great reasons why I become a teacher; I should be a good parent, good friend, and also good motivator.”* (P.A.8).

Excerpt 9

*“I do love study, everything... religion or Qur'an I'd like too. Being a teacher... one of them is how to help people and give them better information.”* (P.A.9).

These assertions demonstrate that his habitus is shaped not solely by scholarly instruction but also by familial principles, religious affiliations, and a commitment to assist others. His identity as an educator synthesizes professional obligations with individual spiritual beliefs.



*Figure 1: Teacher greets, prays, and took attendance*

### **Cultural and Social Capital**

The participant asserted that he occupies positions of considerable responsibility within his educational and religious community. He delineated his functions as both an educator and a leader in the academic setting: The participant conveyed that he fulfills substantial roles of accountability within both his educational institution and religious community. He elaborated on his duties as a facilitator of learning as well as a leader within the academic environment:

Excerpt 2

*"I have afternoon school like teaching Quran recitations... I'm the principal."* (P.A.2)

Excerpt 10

*"I got so many English activities to improve my English skill: workshop, teaching experience, English teacher community and so on. That change everything."* (P.A.10).

Excerpt 11

*"I once held a workshop for bilingual students... we also worked with Professor Unnes twice to improve teachers' English delivery."* (P.A.11).

Excerpt 12

*"In TPQ itself we have so many activities... I also conduct the whole TPQ in Kecamatan Ngaliyan (Ngaliyan District) as one of the coordinators."* (P.A.12).

These illustrations elucidate the mechanisms by which cultural capital (comprising knowledge, training, and bilingual workshops) and social capital (encompassing networks, collaboration, and coordination roles) are leveraged to enhance his authority in the dual capacities of an English educator and a community leader.

### **Navigating the Educational Field**

When speaking about his daily schedule and duties, the participant noted the overlapping demands of his teaching and administrative roles. He said: The participant engaged in a critical analysis of the various contexts within which he functions—formal education, religious instruction, and professional entities. He emphasized the converging requirements inherent in these domains:

Excerpt 3

*"In TPQ we have in the afternoon. In MGMP we have in the morning."* (P.A.3).

Excerpt 13

*"Multi jobs usually happen in this school... but if we really care about this school, school as part of your life, that would be easy to do." (P.A.13).*

Excerpt 14

*"Sometimes I should refuse [a task] because I am in duty for another jobs... in another case we need to share the jobs to give chance for another teacher." (P.A.14).*

Excerpt 15

*"When I start teaching because I have been teaching before this foundation... in total, I have ten years in teaching experience." (P.A.15)*

These narratives elucidate how he adeptly maneuvers among diverse obligations, harmonizing commitment with the capacity to assign tasks and establish priorities. His maneuvering within the domain exemplifies a flexible methodology in response to intersecting institutional exigencies.

### Teacher Agency

The participant elucidated the manner in which he proactively influences his pedagogical methodologies and institutional engagements, thereby exemplifying his aptitude for innovative practices and leadership. He provided illustrative instances of initiative and accountability:

Excerpt 4

*"I handle the activities... activities school is a school that has been established for five years." (P.A.4)*

Excerpt 16

*"I like to be a curious teacher to find the new way of teaching, sometimes using traditional games, also digital like Kaboot, Wordwall, and Quizizz." (P.A.16).*

Excerpt 17

*"My responsibilities of being a teacher is to deliver the materials based on their need and give meaningful experience... and also we always remind them everyday of being good people." (P.A.17).*

Excerpt 18

*"I have passion for continuous learning and excellence... as much I learn as much I need to study because the time flies like a water." (P.A.18)*

These excerpts underscore his profound sense of agency, in which he not only navigates institutional responsibilities but also pioneers pedagogical innovations, incorporates values-driven education, and promotes lifelong learning as an integral component of his professional practice.

### Challenges and Constraints

The participant also acknowledged the barriers he faces in fulfilling his responsibilities. He reflected on administrative tasks, time management, and classroom readiness:

Excerpt 5

*"In TPQ we have online administration... because they're really confused with like administration with online with application." (P.A.5)*

Excerpt 19

*"My weakness as a teacher is in administration... when I am focusing in administration, I am not ready for my class and that makes me stuck." (P.A.19).*

Excerpt 20

*"Sometimes we don't have any time to prepare well... at least we think what we are going to teach, we think the steps, activities, and also the results." (P.A.20).*

Excerpt 21

*"Sometimes giving scaffolding and guiding to them who still have difficulties in teaching will be more helping section to them." (P.A.21).*

These contemplations elucidate the manner in which constraints arise not solely from institutional mandates but also from the necessity of reconciling administrative responsibilities with pedagogical readiness. In spite of these obstacles, he discovers methods to assist students through the implementation of scaffolding and adaptive methodologies.



*Figure 2: A student is presenting his discussion result*

### **Balancing Professional and Personal Life**

Ultimately, the respondent articulated the imperative of reconciling his rigorous occupational obligations with familial responsibilities. He emphasized the manner in which familial support underpins his educational persona:

Excerpt 6

*"The most important is to communicate with my wife and son to handle some activities outside both TPQ." (P.A.6)*

Excerpt 22

*"Actually, there are so many things to do. But I need to stop everything because I need to... have time for my family. They need me." (P.A.22).*

Excerpt 23

*"After Maghrib... we gather at home. So, we study together like the Tafidh, juz'ama, and reciting the Quran." (P.A.23).*

Excerpt 24

*"The most important is to communicate with my wife and son... really understanding." (P.A.24).*

These assertions emphasize that the construction of professional identity is upheld not solely by individual values and organizational duties but also by the relational endorsement of familial

connections. His capacity to articulate and distribute responsibilities within the domestic sphere is essential for sustaining equilibrium between personal existence and professional identity.

## Discussion

The participant's professional identity is deeply intertwined with his habitus, which is shaped by his upbringing, religious values, and community-based educational experiences. Bourdieu (1984) defines habitus as a set of durable dispositions that structure perceptions, practices, and aspirations, and this theoretical lens helps illuminate how the participant constructs his teacher identity. His statements regarding his passion for both formal teaching and Quranic recitation for example, *"I love teaching... although I'm not only teaching here, I have afternoon school like teaching Quran recitations"* (P.A.1) reveal how personal belief systems inform professional practices, suggesting that his teaching is not merely a career but also a spiritual vocation. He further underscores this in *"Being a teacher is my purpose when I was senior high school... in this school I need to change my mind about students-centred learning and make them more active"* (P.A.7) and *"My family, and my students are the great reasons why I become a teacher; I should be a good parent, good friend, and also good motivator"* (P.A.8). Such findings align with existing literature indicating that habitus plays a pivotal role in teacher identity formation, particularly within contexts where religious and cultural backgrounds exert strong influence (Beijaard et al., 2004; Clarke, 2009; Eteläpelto et al., 2013). By situating his professional self within both educational and religious communities, the participant exemplifies how habitus acts as a bridge between personal convictions and institutional expectations. Previous research has also demonstrated that teachers' pedagogical choices and commitment to their profession are often rooted in deeply internalized dispositions acquired through long-term socialization processes (Day, 2018; Flores & Day, 2006b; Graven & Lerman, 2003; Kelchtermans, 2009; Sachs, 2001). In this way, the participant's narrative reinforces the argument that professional identity is not static but continuously reconstructed through lived experience, guided by a combination of internalized values and external structural demands.

Equally important in the participant's professional journey is the role of cultural and social capital, both of which significantly enhance his ability to navigate and exert influence within his educational field. Bourdieu (1986) conceptualizes capital as resources whether cultural, social, or symbolic that individuals mobilize to secure recognition and authority. The participant's leadership as a TPQ principal and coordinator of district-level programs *"I have afternoon school like teaching Quran recitations... I'm the principal"* (P.A.2) illustrates the mobilization of cultural capital through pedagogical expertise and religious knowledge, which are highly valued within his community. His participation in workshops and bilingual initiatives further highlights this: *"I got so many English activities to improve my English skill: workshop, teaching experience, English teacher community and so on. That change everything"* (P.A.10), and *"I once held a workshop for bilingual students... we also worked with Professor UNNES twice to improve teachers' English delivery"* (P.A.11). Simultaneously, his strong networks of trust and collaboration with peers and community members *"In TPQ itself we have so many activities... I also conduct the whole TPQ in Kecamatan Ngaliyan as one of the coordinators"* (P.A.12) demonstrate the accumulation of social capital, which grants him access to influence and leadership opportunities. Research underscores that cultural and social capital substantially contribute to teachers' professional status and their capacity to shape educational practices (Canrinus et al., 2012; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Lareau & Weininger, 2003; Lasky, 2005; Swartz, 2003). Moreover, studies have emphasized that teachers who command significant cultural and social capital can more effectively negotiate institutional constraints and advance community-oriented goals (Faizah et al., 2025; Jannah et al., 2023; Lapasere et al., 2025; Sechandini et al., 2023). The participant's case echoes this evidence, illustrating how his position as both a formal educator and religious leader is reinforced by the accumulation and strategic deployment of various forms of capital. Importantly, his narrative suggests that capital is not merely a personal possession but also a collective resource embedded in his reciprocal relationships with students, families, and colleagues, which further legitimizes his authority and professional identity.

The participant's experience also highlights the dynamic interplay between field, agency, and structural constraints within the educational arena. According to Bourdieu (1990, 2013), the field represents a structured social space where individuals compete for legitimacy and resources, guided by rules that both enable and constrain action. The participant's ability to balance his responsibilities across formal schooling (MGMP) and religious education (TPQ) *"In TPQ, we have in the afternoon. In MGMP, we have in the morning"* (P.A.3) reflects his strategic navigation of this field. He explains his multi-role reality in *"Multi jobs usually happen in this school... but if we really care about this school, school as part of your life, that would be easy to do"* (P.A.13) and *"Sometimes I should refuse [a task] because I am in duty for another jobs... in another case we need to share the jobs to give chance for another teacher"* (P.A.14). These accounts demonstrate how teacher agency is exercised through the interplay of habitus and capital, enabling him to negotiate overlapping institutional spheres while sustaining his professional identity.

At the same time, his struggles with digital administrative requirements underscore the tension between traditional pedagogical values and modern institutional demands. *"In TPQ we have online administration... because they're really confused with like administration with online with application"* (P.A.5) and *"My weakness as a teacher is in administration... when I am focusing in administration, I am not ready for my class and that makes me stuck"* (P.A.19) reveal how structural constraints can limit agency. Yet, his narrative also demonstrates resilience: *"Sometimes we don't have any time to prepare well... at least we think what we are going to teach, we think the steps, activities, and also the results"* (P.A.20) and *"Sometimes giving scaffolding and guiding to them who still have difficulties in teaching will be more helping section to them"* (P.A.21). This duality resonates with scholarship arguing that teacher agency is simultaneously shaped and limited by structural contexts, requiring constant negotiation and adaptation (Abdullah, 2024; Aprilianto et al., 2025; Prismadianto et al., 2025; Zainuddin et al., 2025).

Furthermore, his reliance on familial collaboration to manage professional responsibilities reveals the relational dimension of agency, affirming research that emphasizes the importance of social support systems in sustaining teacher identity (Day, 2018; Kelchtermans, 2009; Sachs, 2001). He underscores this in *"The most important is to communicate with my wife and son to handle some activities outside both TPQ"* (P.A.6) and *"Actually, there are so many things to do. But I need to stop everything because I need to... have time for my family. They need me"* (P.A.22), showing that his family is a critical factor in maintaining balance. His evening routine *"After Maghrib... we gather at home. So, we study together like the Tafidh, juz'ama, and reciting the Quran"* (P.A.23) reinforces this integration of personal and professional life. In this sense, his narrative exemplifies the complex ways in which habitus, capital, and field interact to shape teacher identity within culturally specific contexts. Far from being a passive subject of structural constraints, the participant demonstrates how educators can exercise transformative agency, strategically aligning personal values with institutional demands to construct resilient and contextually embedded professional identities.



Figure 3. A professional identity pattern of english teacher at Al-Azhar Islamic middle School

## CONCLUSION

This study found that the participant's religiously grounded habitus and his ability to mobilize cultural and social capital have a greater impact on professional identity formation and teacher agency than typically acknowledged in mainstream literature. Rather than seeing teacher identity as primarily driven by institutional policies or pedagogical training, this case shows that deeply internalized values, community leadership roles, and reciprocal trust networks decisively shape how teachers in Islamic school contexts enact their professional roles. This result challenges the assumption that teacher identity development follows universal patterns, opening up new discussions about the role of religion, community embeddedness, and multi-role leadership in shaping teacher agency.

This study strengthens previous findings that teacher identity is socially constructed but also challenges the idea that it is solely a response to institutional conditions. By showing how habitus, cultural and social capital, and the educational field interact dynamically, it highlights the importance of context-sensitive frameworks over standardized models of teacher development. It also introduces a more integrated perspective that positions teacher agency not only as an individual

capacity but as a relational and community-rooted practice. This contribution enriches scientific discussions on teacher professional identity by extending Bourdieu's framework to account for religious schooling contexts and multi-role teacher leadership, underexplored areas.

This study is limited to a single teacher in one Islamic junior high school, which makes it challenging to generalize findings to broader populations. The data set, while rich in narrative depth, does not include variations across gender, age, or institutional type. Further research with larger and more diverse samples, including comparative studies across different regions, school types, and teacher demographics, would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how habitus, capital, and field shape teacher identity and agency. Longitudinal studies could also reveal how these dynamics evolve, especially as digitalization and educational reforms reshape teaching practices.

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