

Understanding Professional Identity of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Teachers in Digital Islamic Education: A Phenomenological Approach

Dian Anggraini

Universitas Negeri Padang, Indonesia

diananggraini.unp@gmail.com

Article Info

Article history:

Received 30-03-2025

Revised 04-05-2025

Accepted 17-05-2025

Keyword:

Professional Identity,
Madrasah Ibtidaiyah
Teachers, Islamic
Education, Digital Era,
Phenomenological Study,
Teacher Spirituality

ABSTRACT

The professional identity of Islamic education teachers is increasingly recognized as central to pedagogy, particularly in relation to moral and spiritual teaching dimensions. In Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI), the integration of Islamic values and digital tools presents distinct challenges and opportunities for teacher development. Despite its significance, limited research has examined how MI teachers personally experience and interpret these dynamics in their professional lives. This study investigates: How do MI teachers construct their professional identity grounded in Islamic values in the digital era? Employing an interpretative phenomenological approach (IPA), the research captures the lived experiences of eight MI teachers through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, analyzed thematically with NVivo. Findings show that MI teachers view teaching as a spiritual duty, engage in critical reflection on their practice, and navigate digital integration through ethical and religious considerations. Their identity is shaped by self-reflection, communal faith practices, and a commitment to aligning their professional roles with Islamic principles. These results highlight the importance of reflective, values-oriented strategies in teacher education and offer practical guidance for developing culturally grounded pedagogical frameworks.



©2025 Authors. Published by PT Mukhlisina Revolution Center.. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License. (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary Islamic education, teacher professional identity is pivotal in shaping both pedagogical practices and the moral dimensions of instruction. In Indonesia's Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI)—Islamic-based primary schools—teachers serve not only as educators but also as moral agents entrusted with instilling religious values alongside academic content. This dual role embeds their professional identity within a dynamic nexus of faith, cultural norms, and institutional expectations.

The rapid integration of digital technologies in education has significantly altered classroom dynamics. Platforms for online instruction, digital learning tools, and virtual communication are now commonplace, even in Islamic educational settings. While these developments offer pathways for pedagogical innovation, they also present tensions for MI teachers whose teaching philosophies are grounded in religious and ethical commitments. These tensions are not merely technical or institutional, but also existential—challenging how teachers understand their purpose, values, and role in a digital era.

Despite growing scholarship on digital pedagogy and Islamic education, limited attention has been given to how MI teachers personally negotiate these evolving demands. Existing research often emphasizes structural or quantitative analyses, leaving a gap in understanding the nuanced, lived experiences of educators.

This study addresses that gap by exploring how MI teachers construct their professional identity within the intersection of Islamic values and digital transformation. By adopting a phenomenological lens, the research foregrounds the subjective meanings teachers attach to their work and identity, offering insights often overlooked in broader educational discourse.

Understanding the lived experiences of MI teachers within this shifting landscape is essential. Their engagement with digital tools is not merely a question of competency or access but is intrinsically tied to how they perceive themselves as professionals guided by Islamic principles. As educators strive to balance technological demands with religious integrity, they are continuously involved in a process of reflection, negotiation, and identity formation.

Given the deeply subjective nature of this experience, a phenomenological approach is necessary to uncover how MI teachers make meaning of their roles amid these changes. Exploring their professional identity through the lens of lived experience provides insights into the internal processes that shape their teaching, their relationship with students, and their broader contribution to Islamic education in a digital age. Such understanding cannot be fully captured through external observation or quantitative metrics; it requires attentiveness to the voices, emotions, and interpretations of the teachers themselves.

Research on teachers' lived experiences in navigating their professional roles—particularly in faith-based educational contexts—has become an increasingly important area of inquiry. In Islamic education, the role of the teacher extends beyond instructional duties to encompass spiritual leadership, moral modeling, and value transmission. Understanding how teachers internalize and reflect upon these responsibilities is critical to grasping the full scope of their professional identity. However, much of the existing literature in this domain tends to emphasize observable behaviors, institutional structures, or cognitive competencies, often through quantitative lenses that inadequately capture the depth of subjective experience.

Such approaches frequently fall short in addressing how teachers make meaning of their professional lives, especially in contexts where identity is shaped not only by external expectations but also by inner faith, ethical deliberation, and personal transformation. The use of surveys or structured assessments, while valuable in mapping general trends, lacks the capacity to explore nuanced interpretations that are essential to understanding identity formation among MI teachers in the digital era.

Furthermore, previous studies on Islamic education and teacher professionalism often rely on normative frameworks, focusing on prescribed roles or ideal standards rather than exploring how these ideals are experienced, contested, and negotiated in everyday teaching practices². These methodological limitations underscore the need for a qualitative, phenomenological approach that privileges the voices of teachers and examines the essence of their lived experience in integrating Islamic values with the demands of digital education.

In addressing the evolving role of MI teachers within the digital era, existing solutions often rely on practical frameworks such as digital literacy training, pedagogical competence models, or character education programs. While these approaches provide instrumental support for improving instructional practice, they tend to adopt externally driven, outcome-focused perspectives that overlook the internal, reflective dimensions of teaching. As a result, the richness of teachers' lived experiences—particularly the spiritual and moral processes involved in shaping their professional identity—remains largely underexplored.

Such limitations are evident in studies that prioritize standardization and measurable competencies over subjective narratives and experiential depth. These methodologies are ill-equipped to reveal how teachers reconcile religious commitments with modern educational demands, how they experience internal tensions, and how they construct a sense of purpose and self in the midst of technological and cultural shifts.

To gain a more comprehensive and authentic understanding of these phenomena, a shift in methodological orientation is required. Phenomenology offers an alternative lens that emphasizes meaning-making and lived experience as central to human understanding. By focusing on the subjective, emotional, and existential dimensions of being a teacher in Islamic contexts, phenomenological inquiry can uncover the essence of professional identity formation in ways that more technical or positivist approaches cannot². This study responds to that gap by exploring the experiences

of MI teachers through a phenomenological lens, allowing their voices and reflections to guide the analysis of identity, faith, and digital transformation.

Previous studies have explored the professional identity of teachers in various contexts, often highlighting institutional expectations, policy influences, and pedagogical practices. Some research in Islamic education has addressed the role of teachers as moral agents, yet few have examined how they personally experience this role in daily practice. Studies such as Junaidi and Hasan (2021) focus on spiritual identity, but tend to describe ideals rather than lived realities. Moreover, research using quantitative tools fails to capture the emotional and reflective processes behind identity formation. This gap reveals the need for deeper inquiry into how MI teachers interpret their roles in the intersection between faith and digital change.

To address this, the present study adopts an interpretative phenomenological approach (IPA), which allows for in-depth exploration of teachers' lived experiences. This method supports the uncovering of subjective meanings and internal reflections, particularly relevant for understanding identity in religious teaching contexts. IPA is appropriate because it centers the participant's perspective and examines how they make sense of their world. Through this lens, the study responds to the knowledge gap by revealing how MI teachers reflect on their identity within Islamic and digital educational spaces. The aim is to grasp not just what teachers do, but how they feel, think, and believe about their roles.

This article is structured in several parts. The introduction presents the background, significance, and aims of the study. The next section describes the socio-cultural context of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah and the relevance of teacher identity in Islamic education. This is followed by the research methodology, including participant selection, data collection, and IPA-based analysis. The results section presents the emergent themes supported by participants' voices, while the discussion connects these findings to existing literature. The article concludes by summarizing the key insights and offering implications for practice and further research.

RESEARCH METHODS

Study Design

This study employed an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to examine the lived experiences of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) teachers in constructing their professional identity within the context of Islamic education and digital transformation. IPA was chosen for its ability to explore how individuals make sense of complex personal and professional phenomena, particularly when shaped by cultural and spiritual dimensions. Grounded in Heideggerian philosophy, IPA allows for contextual interpretation of meaning derived from participants' lifeworlds. This approach aligned with the study's aim to understand how teachers internalize their professional roles amid evolving digital practices while upholding Islamic pedagogical values.

Participants

Participants were MI teachers with a minimum of three years' experience, actively integrating digital tools and Islamic values into their instructional practices. Purposive sampling ensured alignment with the research focus. Eligibility criteria included ongoing employment in MI settings, demonstrable use of Islamic principles in pedagogy, and willingness to engage in reflective dialogue.

A total of 8 participants (5 women, 3 men), aged 28 to 45 (mean: 36), were selected. All were certified in Islamic primary education and worked in both urban and semi-rural settings, providing variation in digital access and religious environments that enriched the data set.

Data Collection

Data were gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, guided by open-ended questions designed to elicit reflection on teaching roles, spiritual values, and digital engagement. Interviews were conducted face-to-face in locations chosen by participants, each lasting 60–90 minutes,

and were audio-recorded with consent. Follow-up communication and clarification were arranged as needed.

Field notes captured non-verbal cues and contextual insights. Participants were invited to share relevant documents (e.g., reflective journals or lesson plans). The interview protocol was adapted from Smith et al. (2009) to accommodate the Islamic educational context.

Data Analysis

The data analysis followed IPA procedures to identify recurring themes and underlying meanings. Transcripts were read repeatedly for immersion, followed by initial noting of expressive, emotional, and contextual elements. Meaning units were then inductively coded.

NVivo 12 software was used to manage and organize codes, chosen for its ability to support thematic clustering, facilitate coding transparency, and provide an audit trail. Emergent themes were grouped into superordinate categories through abstraction and thematic mapping.

Thematic convergence and divergence were examined to balance individual distinctiveness with shared experiences. An audit trail was maintained through coding memos, reflective notes, and iterative revisions, ensuring methodological rigor and transparency. Final themes reflected essential aspects of professional identity, Islamic values, and responses to digital integration.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board. Written informed consent was secured after a full explanation of study aims, procedures, and confidentiality measures. Participation was voluntary, with the right to withdraw at any stage. Anonymity was preserved using pseudonyms, and data were stored securely in encrypted digital formats.

The research complied with the Declaration of Helsinki and applicable local ethical standards.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study explored the lived experiences of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) teachers in reflecting upon and shaping their professional identity within the context of Islamic education and the challenges of digital transformation. Through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), several major themes emerged from the data, each representing a dimension of meaning experienced by the participants.

Teaching as an Act of Worship and Devotion

A dominant theme that emerged was the perception of teaching as a spiritual calling, deeply rooted in Islamic values. Participants consistently emphasized that their role as teachers transcended professional duties and was aligned with religious obligations.

“I do not just come to school to teach subjects; I come with the intention of fulfilling my duty to Allah. Teaching is part of my ibadah.” (Participant A)

This view contributed significantly to how teachers constructed their professional identity. Their work was imbued with moral accountability, leading them to internalize teaching as both a sacred trust (*amanah*) and a means of personal spiritual growth.

“When I face my students, I see them as *amanah*. I always remind myself: how I treat them will be questioned in the Hereafter.” (Participant E)

Such perspectives show how religious consciousness shaped their sense of professionalism and impacted their daily pedagogical practices.

Negotiating Digital Change with Islamic Pedagogical Values

The integration of digital tools and online platforms into MI classrooms was met with a complex interplay of adaptation and resistance. Teachers expressed both enthusiasm and anxiety in reconciling digital technologies with their religious pedagogical philosophies.

“It’s not just about using technology. I must make sure that everything I share online reflects Islamic values. I cannot just copy from the internet and give it to my students.” (Participant B)

Some teachers viewed digital transformation as an opportunity for dakwah, enabling them to extend Islamic values into digital spaces. Others, however, struggled with balancing technological competence and maintaining spiritual integrity.

“Sometimes I feel lost... I want to be relevant and digital, but not at the expense of the Islamic soul of my teaching.” (Participant F)

This theme underscores the tension between modern pedagogical demands and the teachers’ commitment to Islamic ethical frameworks.

Reflective Practice as a Spiritual and Professional Journey

Participants engaged in self-reflection not only to improve their teaching performance but as a process of spiritual self-assessment. Reflective journaling, prayer, and contemplation were frequently cited as strategies to align their identity with both professional standards and Islamic teachings.

“Every night, after prayer, I reflect. I ask myself, ‘Have I been fair to my students today? Have I taught with sincerity?’” (Participant C)

This continuous reflection fostered a deeper sense of integrity, humility, and purpose. It allowed teachers to navigate the dynamic context of digital education without losing their moral compass.

“When I fail in class, I return to Allah. I ask for guidance. This is not just about being a good teacher—it’s about being a good Muslim.” (Participant D)

Reflection thus served a dual function: as a tool for pedagogical improvement and as an expression of personal piety.

Building Identity Through Community and Shared Faith

Participants reported that their sense of professional identity was also shaped through interaction with peers who shared similar religious commitments. Collegial discussions, joint religious practices, and participation in Islamic teacher forums provided emotional and spiritual reinforcement.

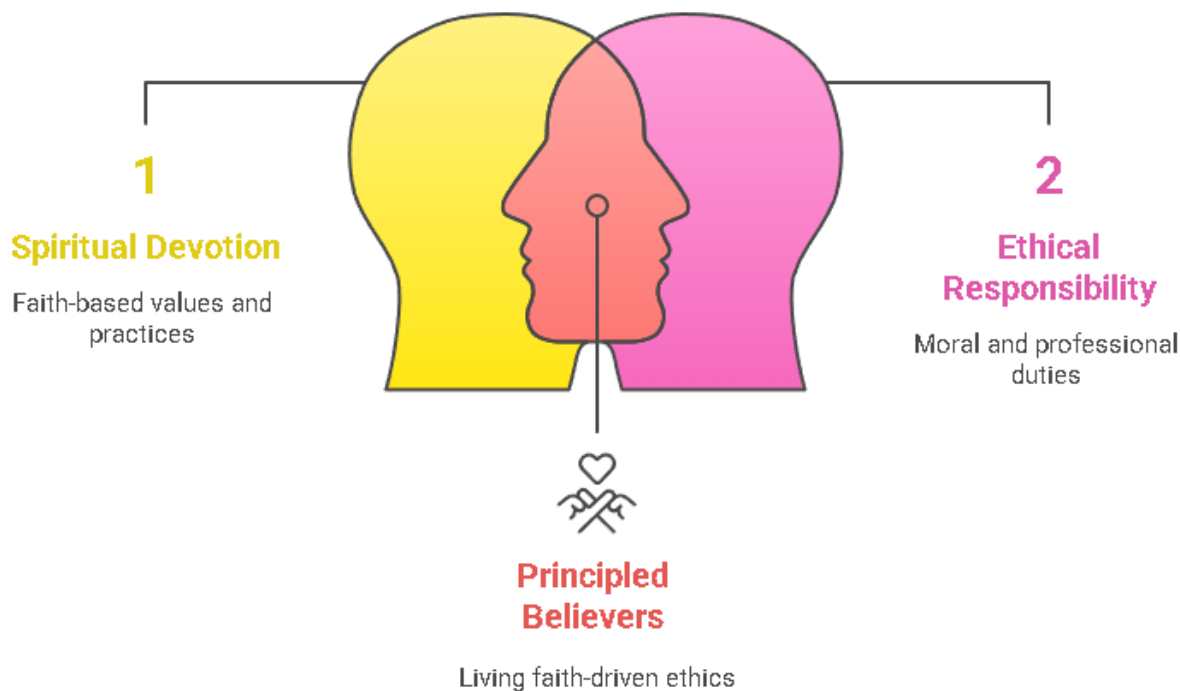
“In our community, we remind each other. We discuss teaching, but also how to stay true to Islam in everything we do.” (Participant G)

This sense of belonging offered a support system that validated their experiences and strengthened their confidence in their roles as Islamic educators.

The findings reveal that the professional identity of MI teachers is constructed at the intersection of spiritual devotion, ethical responsibility, and digital adaptability. Their experiences reflect an ongoing negotiation between modern educational demands and enduring Islamic values, with reflection serving as the core mechanism for aligning their professional journey with their faith.

The findings of this study reveal that Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) teachers experience their professional identity as a form of spiritual devotion, shaped by Islamic values and continuously negotiated in the context of digital transformation. These lived experiences reflect a deep sense of ethical commitment and internal reflection, which directly respond to the central research question: How do MI teachers construct their professional identity based on Islamic values in the digital era?

The Integrated Identity of Islamic Educators



This study contributes to answering that question by showing that professional identity among MI teachers is not merely formed through formal training or institutional expectations, but through a personal and ongoing process of meaning-making rooted in faith. The participants' reflections indicate that teaching is perceived as an act of worship, and that digital tools are not neutral instruments but are evaluated through an Islamic ethical lens. Teachers actively engage in spiritual reflection to align their pedagogical practices with their religious principles, demonstrating that their identity is shaped as much by internal conviction as by external conditions. This understanding adds depth to the existing discourse on teacher professionalism, emphasizing the subjective and spiritual dimensions that are often overlooked in mainstream educational research.

The results align with and extend previous studies on Islamic education, such as Junaidi and Hasan (2021), who explored spiritual identity in Islamic teaching but focused more on normative ideals than lived realities. In contrast, this study reveals the tension and negotiation involved in embodying those ideals amid digital demands. Furthermore, the findings support the interpretative phenomenological view proposed by Smith et al. (2009), which highlights the role of personal meaning and identity in professional contexts. However, while earlier studies often focused on pedagogical challenges or structural issues, this research offers a more holistic and human-centered perspective by foregrounding teachers' voices and spiritual agency. It confirms that identity construction is a dynamic, reflective, and contextually embedded process, especially within religious educational settings.

The findings have important implications both for the field of Islamic education and for the broader discourse on teacher professionalism in value-based pedagogical settings. By revealing how MI teachers perceive their teaching as a spiritual responsibility and navigate digital tools through an ethical-religious lens, this study highlights the need to design teacher development programs that address not only technical competencies but also reflective and spiritual dimensions. These insights suggest that policy frameworks and school leadership practices should recognize and support teachers' inner values and reflective practices as central to their professional identity. At a societal level, the study underscores the relevance of understanding educators not only as knowledge transmitters but also as moral actors engaged in meaning-making within their cultural and religious communities.

Nevertheless, several limitations must be acknowledged. As a phenomenological inquiry focused on a small group of MI teachers, the findings are context-specific and not intended for generalization to all Islamic educational settings. The purposive sampling approach, while appropriate for exploring lived experiences, may not capture the full diversity of perspectives across different

regions or institutional types. Furthermore, the study relied primarily on verbal narratives, which, although rich and insightful, may be complemented in future research by visual or participatory methods to deepen interpretative layers. These limitations invite caution while interpreting the findings but also point toward valuable directions for further inquiry.

Future research may build on these findings by exploring the intersections of digital transformation, teacher identity, and religious ethics in other educational contexts, including secondary Islamic schools or interfaith teaching environments. Longitudinal studies could also investigate how MI teachers' professional identities evolve over time, particularly in response to curriculum changes or emerging technologies. Moreover, comparative studies involving teachers from different cultural or religious backgrounds could enrich our understanding of how identity, spirituality, and professionalism converge in educational practice. This study serves as a starting point for such explorations, offering a human-centered lens for understanding the moral and existential dimensions of teaching in a digital age.

CONCLUSION

This study explored how Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) teachers reflect on and construct their professional identity grounded in Islamic values within the evolving landscape of digital education. Utilizing an interpretative phenomenological approach, the research found that teaching is understood as a spiritual responsibility, shaped by faith and sustained through continuous self-reflection. MI teachers were shown to negotiate the use of digital tools in ways that align with their ethical and religious commitments, resulting in a professional identity that is integrative—balancing spiritual, pedagogical, and technological dimensions. This nuanced understanding addresses a critical gap in the literature, which often emphasizes structural or technical aspects while overlooking educators' lived experiences and spiritual orientations.

The findings offer valuable insights for designing teacher development programs that are not only skill-based but also attentive to the reflective and faith-informed practices of Islamic educators. While this study provides context-rich interpretations, its findings are not intended for broad generalization. Instead, they offer transferability to similar educational settings where Islamic values and digital adaptation intersect. Researchers and practitioners should consider contextual variations when applying these insights. Additionally, as the analysis involved interpretative engagement with participants' narratives, the potential for researcher bias—particularly in framing and interpreting meaning—must be acknowledged. Steps such as memo writing, audit trails, and peer debriefing were employed to enhance credibility, but future research should consider triangulating perspectives or incorporating participant validation to deepen interpretive accuracy. Future studies may build on this work by examining identity formation across different Islamic schooling levels or tracing how digital and religious commitments evolve over time within teachers' professional trajectories.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

REFERENCES

- Beijaard, D., Meijer, P. C., & Verloop, N. (2004). Reconsidering research on teachers' professional identity. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 20(2), 107–128. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2003.07.001>
- Borko, H., Whitcomb, J., & Byrnes, K. (2008). Genres of research in teacher education. *Handbook of Research on Teacher Education*, 3, 1017–1049.
- Day, C., Kington, A., Stobart, G., & Sammons, P. (2006). The personal and professional selves of teachers: Stable and unstable identities. *British Educational Research Journal*, 32(4), 601–616. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01411920600775316>

- Elstad, E. (Ed.). (2022). *Teacher education in the 21st century: Emerging skills for a changing world*. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-99868-0>
- Gu, Q., & Day, C. (2007). Teachers' resilience: A necessary condition for effectiveness. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 23(8), 1302–1316. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2006.06.006>
- Hargreaves, A. (2000). Four ages of professionalism and professional learning. *Teachers and Teaching*, 6(2), 151–182. <https://doi.org/10.1080/713698714>
- Junaidi, A., & Hasan, N. (2021). The construction of spiritual identity among Islamic teachers: A phenomenological perspective. *Journal of Islamic Education Studies*, 9(2), 123–138. <https://doi.org/10.1017/jies.2021.09>
- Korthagen, F. A. J. (2004). In search of the essence of a good teacher: Towards a more holistic approach in teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 20(1), 77–97. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2003.10.002>
- Lasky, S. (2005). A sociocultural approach to understanding teacher identity, agency, and professional vulnerability. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 21(8), 899–916. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2005.06.003>
- Oolbekkink-Marchand, H. W., van der Steen, J., & Nijveldt, M. (2017). Teacher identity in the context of education reform. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 40(1), 102–117. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2016.1246535>
- Pantić, N., & Wubbels, T. (2010). Teacher competencies as a basis for teacher education: Views of Serbian teachers and teacher educators. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26(3), 694–703. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2009.10.005>
- Sachs, J. (2001). Teacher professional identity: Competing discourses, competing outcomes. *Journal of Education Policy*, 16(2), 149–161. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680930116819>
- Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research*. SAGE Publications.
- Tondeur, J., van Braak, J., Ertmer, P. A., & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, A. (2017). Understanding the relationship between teachers' pedagogical beliefs and technology use in education: A systematic review of qualitative evidence. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 65, 555–575. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-016-9481-2>
- Wong, C. Y., & Teo, T. (2021). Exploring teachers' beliefs about digital technology use and professional identity in Singapore. *Computers & Education*, 166, 104172. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2021.104172>