
Navigating professional identity: A case study of Indonesian EFL non-certified teachers

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Abstract

The Indonesian government has enhanced educational quality and teacher professionalism via teacher certification. This research investigates the professional identity of Indonesian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers, who have not been certified, and how they perceive their teaching career and professionalism. This research employs a qualitative case study design to explore the reflective practices of ten teachers who do not possess certification (or have not undergone a certification program). The data collection involved two primary methods: a modified questionnaire comprising six aspects of teacher professional identity and semi-structured interviews. The research findings suggest a tough professional identity beyond formal credentials, particularly the satisfaction and fulfilment of teachers without certification. Collaborative initiatives between the government, educational institutions, and relevant stakeholders are suggested to create a more conducive and rewarding teacher environment.

Keywords

Certification, EFL, professional identity, teachers

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Introduction

The Indonesian government has been working on improving the quality of education and teacher professionalism through teacher certification (Estriyanto, 2016; Fahmi et al., 2011; Kusumawardhani, 2017). The origins of Indonesian teacher certification can be linked to the 1970s, when the then-president, Suharto, issued a directive to construct tens of thousands of new schools. However, the teacher certification program as it is known today began in 2006 to certify as many as 2.3 million teachers by 2015 (Estriyanto, 2016; Fahmi et al., 2011). The program was established to upgrade teacher quality and has been evaluated by many researchers and educators, mainly regarding its system and its impact on student learning (Fahmi et al., 2011). The acknowledgement of the teacher profession was followed by the Indonesian Law No. 14 of 2005, which became the central regulation on how the teacher profession should be administered (Estriyanto, 2016). It also mandated that teachers undergo certification to ensure their competence and professionalism.

Teacher's certification is significant to some extent (Fahmi et al., 2011; Kusumawardhani, 2017; Sofyan et al., 2019). First, it enhances the quality of teachers, as the teacher certification initiative was created to elevate teacher standards (Kennedy, 2016; Kusumawardhani, 2017). The program guarantees that educators possess the essential skills they need to be effective in their teaching roles. Secondly, it elevates teaching competence, as teacher certification has been shown to positively affect the teaching proficiency of educators in elementary school Indonesian language subjects (Kennedy, 2016; Sofyan et al., 2019). This implies that certified teachers are more adept at instructing their subjects.

Furthermore, certified teachers in Indonesia receive an extra allowance, typically equivalent to one basic salary, as an incentive to enhance their teaching skills (Utami, 2015). Moreover, the program's effectiveness is assessed through various studies conducted by researchers and educators, primarily focusing on its structure and influence on student learning (Fahmi et al., 2011). This evaluation assists in pinpointing the program's advantages and drawbacks, enabling necessary enhancements to be implemented. Moreover, the program emphasizes the need to consider proven competencies, including a minimum threshold of subject-matter expertise, instead of relying solely on indicators like bachelor's degrees or seniority (Utami, 2015). This approach guarantees that teachers possess the essential skills for effective teaching. Lastly, the program stresses the importance of remodelling teacher training and recruitment (Utami, 2015), ensuring well-prepared and qualified educators.

While teacher certification offers substantial benefits to educators, it has not yet reached many teachers. Ministry of Education officials stated that many teachers fail to meet the certification requirements, often because of varying levels of preparedness, resource access disparities, and personal constraints. Additionally, the program has yet to fully include newly recruited teachers, depriving them of its potential benefits. According to the Ministry of Education's 2022 report, approximately 1.2 million teachers in Indonesia remain uncertified. Many teachers are teaching without teacher certification because of these restrictions. The absence of certification will diminish their professionalism because of the lack of necessary training and additional allowances typically received by certified teachers. This issue needs further attention, as teacher professionalism is crucial for overall educational quality (Biesta,

2015; Hilton et al., 2013; Kennedy, 2016; Riadi et al., 2022).

Despite the absence of teacher certification, many educators continue to work in educational institutions, as teaching remains a popular profession. As noted by the researchers, these teachers demonstrate a strong commitment to their roles, even without formal certification. Furthermore, there continues to be a significant demand for teacher certification programs that produce qualified educators. In 2023, data from PDDIKTI reveals that education programs are the most numerous, with 6,127 programs. Additionally, the most significant number of students enrolled in education programs, totaling 1,371,105, surpasses fields such as economics (1,146,430) and social sciences (1,058,304).

With a high and increasing number of prospective teachers but a low count of certified teachers, it becomes necessary to examine more closely how teachers perceive themselves as professionals. The professional identity of uncertified teachers requires further investigation. Understanding how they maintain professionalism and their future expectations needs to be re-evaluated. This situation raises questions about the resilience and commitment of uncertified teachers who often lack formal recognition but remain dedicated to their roles. Exploring their experiences, challenges, and aspirations can offer useful tips for education authorities and policymakers to better support and integrate these dedicated educators into the formal education system while maintaining high standards of professionalism.

Professional identity refers to teachers' perception of the responsibilities tied to their profession (Qoyyimah et al., 2023). Additionally, this identity encompasses aspects such as teachers' work and their capacity to learn and grow from mistakes, challenges, and reflections (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). Furthermore, identity is shaped by the concepts of 'how to act' and 'how to understand' one's role as a teacher within the broader context of society (Barkhuizen, 2019; Rudolph et al., 2019). It is also influenced by preservice teachers' perspectives on "who we are and who we believe others to be" (Danielewicz, 2001). In the context of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers, professional identity relates to their future preparation. Iswandari (2017) emphasized the importance of teachers understanding their professional identities, enabling them to be more self-aware and shape their educational aspirations. This continuous process involves evaluating their motivations and experiences, answering the question, 'Who am I now?' (Kalaja et al., 2016). In summary, according to Jennifer and Mbato (2020), building a teacher's identity is an ongoing process that begins during professional studies and continues throughout their career, as noted in Botha and Onwu (2013).

Teaching professional identity also refers to how they perceive themselves as educators (Jonker et al., 2018). It is a complex and evolving idea, marked by inner conflicts (Davey, 2010; Norton, 2013). It can be considered an ongoing process of combining personal and professional aspects of becoming and being a teacher educator (Beijaard et al., 2004). Hökkä et al. (2017) examined teacher educators' professional identities in terms of their personal background, skills, and core values. Hökkä et al. (2017) discussed the importance of understanding individual experiences and the development of a collective identity within professional contexts. In addition, Karaolis and Philippou (2019) ultimately identified seven key elements of a teacher's professional identity, encompassing self-esteem, self-efficacy, professional commitment, job satisfaction, work motivation, task orientation, and future perspective. Student feedback shapes self-esteem, while past experiences and emotional

responses shape self-efficacy. Professional commitment includes caring for the profession and measuring interest. Job satisfaction relates to a teacher's emotional response, and work motivation can arise from altruistic, intrinsic, extrinsic, or initial motives. Task orientation can be student-centred or teacher-centred, sometimes both. Lastly, future perspective explores how teachers envision their role in the years to come, collectively shaping their professional identity.

Based on the search results, there is a gap in the literature regarding the perspective of Indonesian EFL non-certified teachers about their future career and professionalism. Most of the studies have focused on the challenges faced by early-career EFL teachers, particularly those who just completed the teacher professional education program (TPE) or the post-bachelor teacher professional education program (e.g., Arias Soto et al., 2011; Mahmud, 2020; Meng & Tajaroensuk, 2013). Other studies have evaluated the performance of certified EFL teachers (Chang, 2018; Zulfikar, 2021) and the impact of the teacher certification program on student learning outcomes (Boyd et al., 2007; Kusumawardhani, 2017; Tjabolo, 2020). However, there is limited research from the perspective of non-certified EFL teachers regarding their future careers and professionalism. This gap in the literature is significant because it is important to understand the perspectives of non-certified EFL teachers to improve the teacher certification program and provide better support for them. Non-certified EFL teachers may have different motivations and challenges than certified EFL teachers and understanding these differences can help develop more effective policies and programs for teacher professional development. To that extent, this research investigates the professional identity of EFL teachers who have not been certified and how they perceive their teaching career and professionalism.

Methodology

Research design

This research employs a qualitative case study design to explore the reflective practices of ten EFL teachers who do not possess certification (or have not undergone a certification program). Meanwhile, phenomenology is used as an approach. Using a case study method is justified because it goes deeper and examines the connections between the elements that describe the current situation and those that impact change or development (Best & Kahn, 2006). This case study will inform us about the unique experiences, perspectives, and challenges that these ten EFL teachers who lack formal certification or have not undergone a certification program face. By adopting a phenomenological approach, we aim to delve deep into their subjective experiences and gain a profound understanding of how they engage in reflective teaching practices.

Participants and technique of collecting data

Fifty-five teachers from North Sumatra Province participated in the research. They were selected purposively, based on specific criteria. They were chosen for their lack of government professional development programs, ensuring they had not undergone recognized certification

and allowances. Additionally, participants possessed relevant teaching experience in EFL, offering diverse insights into reflective practices. By selecting participants based on these criteria, the research aimed to capture a diverse and meaningful range of experiences, ensuring that the research insights would reflect the broader population of uncertified EFL teachers.

Furthermore, the data collection for this research involved two primary methods: a modified questionnaire comprising six aspects of teacher professional identity (Karaolis & Philippou, 2019) and semi-structured interviews. These methods were employed to comprehensively explore and understand various dimensions of the EFL teachers' professional identity, explicitly focusing on uncertified practitioners. The modified questionnaire was a structured instrument to gather quantitative data, while the semi-structured interviews allowed for in-depth qualitative insights.

Data analysis

The researchers used thematic analysis, a standard method for finding and explaining patterns in qualitative data. The process involved getting familiar with the data, making initial codes, identifying recurring themes, defining them, and then creating the research report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These themes were identified by spotting patterns and connections in the data, which helped the researchers answer the research questions and understand the experiences of uncertified EFL teachers during their teaching careers.

Moreover, the researchers safely saved and anonymised all the obtained data to prevent identification. The researchers took measures to ensure the safety of participants and the exclusive use of information for academic purposes.

Findings and Discussion

55 (52 female and three male) non-certified teachers participated in this research. The age group of 20-24 years comprises most respondents, with 29 individuals, followed by the age group of 25-29 years with 20 individuals. Representation became progressively less common in age groups beyond 30 years, with only the rest being individuals who fell within the age ranges of 30-34 years, 35-39 years, and 40-44 years. Meanwhile, based on their teaching period experiences, there are 13 individuals with less than 1 year of teaching experience, 26 individuals with 1-2 years of teaching experience, seven individuals with 2-3 years of teaching experience, one individual with 3-5 years of teaching experience, and seven individuals with over 5 years of teaching experience. The following table displays their teaching job status.

Table 1. *Respondents' teaching job status*

Teaching job status	Status of school	Amounts
Civil servant teacher	Public school	1
Non-civil servant teacher	Public school	13
Permanent teacher	Private school	25
Non-permanent teacher	Private school	15

Meanwhile, only 8 out of all respondents are paid at or above the minimum wage of North Sumatra province. The rest are paid under the minimum wage for workers. The participants were asked to complete a questionnaire comprising six aspects of teacher professional identity (Karaolis & Philippou, 2019).

Table 2. *Results of self-esteem aspect*

Statements	Score average
I feel confident in my abilities as an uncertified English language teacher	4.14
I feel confident in my ability to overcome challenges in teaching even without certification	4.09
I am satisfied with my achievements as an English language teacher even without certification	3.67
I feel appreciated by students, fellow teachers, and the school for my contributions, even though I am not certified	4.12

In terms of self-esteem, most respondents feel confident in their ability. Participants exhibit a high average confidence level in their teaching abilities (4.14) and express assurance in overcoming challenges without formal certification (4.09). While satisfaction with achievements scores lower at 3.67, indicating various perspectives on personal accomplishments, the overall sentiment is positive. Additionally, uncertified teachers report feeling appreciated by students, fellow educators, and the school for their contributions, garnering a commendable average score of 4.12. This suggests a strong sense of recognition and value within the educational community despite the absence of formal certification. Moreover, the respondents provided a range of responses regarding their self-efficacy.

Table 3. *Result of self-efficacy*

Statements	Score average
I am confident that I can achieve the learning goals I set in the classroom.	4.36
I feel equipped with the necessary skills to teach English effectively even without certification.	4.23
I have the belief that I can overcome obstacles that arise in the teaching process.	4.09
I feel capable of inspiring students to learn English with enthusiasm.	4.23
I feel confident in designing and implementing effective lesson plans, even though I am not certified.	4.12

In this context, the teacher reports a high confidence in achieving classroom learning goals, as reflected in the substantial average score of 4.36. Additionally, the teachers express confidence in possessing the necessary skills to teach English effectively even without formal certification, with an average score of 4.23. The belief in overcoming teaching process obstacles receives a positive average score of 4.09, indicating a strong mindset. The teacher also feels capable of inspiring students to learn English with enthusiasm (average score 4.23) and demonstrates confidence in designing and implementing effective lesson plans, despite lacking certification, as suggested by an average score of 4.12. These scores collectively show high self-assurance

and competence in the respondents' professional abilities. In addition, the respondents indicate that their answers reflect their professional commitment.

Table 4. *Professional commitment results*

Statements	Score average
I feel committed to continuing my work as an English language teacher, even without certification.	3.83
I view the job as an English language teacher as a calling and not just a job.	4.32
I feel a significant responsibility for the development of my students.	4.54
I want to continue improving myself as an English language teacher, regardless of certification.	4.58
I take pride in being part of the English language teacher community, even though I am not certified.	4.41

The table outlines the perspectives and commitments of an English language teacher, emphasizing their views on professional commitment. While the commitment to teaching without certification receives a moderate score of 3.83, the teacher strongly regards their role as a calling, reflected in an impressive score of 4.32. The teachers feel a significant responsibility for student development, with a high average score of 4.54. Regardless of certification, the commitment to continuous self-improvement is firm at 4.58. Additionally, the teachers take pride in being part of the English language teacher community without certification, receiving an average score of 4.41. These scores show a strong sense of responsibility, dedication, and professional pride, emphasizing a commitment to ongoing growth and community engagement. Moreover, in terms of job satisfaction, the answers vary.

Table 5. *Job satisfaction results*

Statements	Score average
I am delighted with my job as an uncertified English language teacher.	3.96
I feel fulfilled by the students' learning outcomes and the relationships I have built with them.	4.16
My work provides personal meaning and satisfaction, even without certification.	4.23
I perceive this job as a place where I can grow and make a positive impact.	4.49
I feel that my role as an English language teacher offers opportunities for creative exploration and innovation in teaching.	4.45
	4.26

The scores in the table portray a highly positive and fulfilling experience for the individual working as an uncertified English language teacher. Expressing delight in the job with a solid average score of 3.96, the teacher particularly feels fulfilled by the students' learning outcomes and the relationships established with them, evidenced by a score of 4.16. The work is perceived as a source of personal meaning and satisfaction, even without certification, with an average score of 4.23. Moreover, the teacher sees the job as a platform for personal growth

and the opportunity to make a positive impact, reflected in a high average score of 4.49. Additionally, the role as an English language teacher is viewed as providing chances for creative exploration and innovation in teaching, with an average score of 4.45. These scores collectively underscore a deeply fulfilling and meaningful experience in the teaching profession, stressing personal satisfaction, growth, and creative opportunities despite the absence of formal certification. In addition, the respondents gave various answers regarding work motivation.

Table 6. *Work motivation aspect*

Statements	Score average
I feel motivated to give my best in my job as an uncertified English language teacher.	4.43
I am energized and enthusiastic about teaching and helping students grow.	4.54
I sense that my work holds meaningful and significant values.	4.60
There is an internal drive within me to continuously improve myself and my teaching practices.	4.32
I am motivated to achieve the learning goals of students and prepare them for a better future	4.52
Average	

The table reflects high levels of motivation and enthusiasm of respondents working as uncertified English language teachers. Expressing a strong commitment to giving their best, the teacher scores an average of 4.43. The enthusiasm and energy dedicated to teaching and aiding student growth receive an outstanding average score of 4.54. The teacher strongly believes that their work holds meaningful values, as reflected in a remarkably high average score of 4.60. Furthermore, there is an internal drive to continuously improve personal skills and teaching practices, with an average score of 4.32. Finally, the teacher expresses high motivation to achieve students' learning goals and prepare them for a better future, with an average score of 4.52. Despite lacking formal certification, these scores collectively portray the teachers as deeply motivated, passionate about teaching, and committed to meaningful and impactful education. Additionally, the responses regarding task orientation vary significantly.

Table 7. *Task orientation results*

Statements	Score average
I have a clear focus in carrying out my duties as an uncertified English language teacher.	4.32
I have plans and strategies to address my teaching tasks.	4.36
I possess a strong awareness of the tasks that need completion.	4.50
I prioritize teaching tasks as the main part of my job.	4.36
I have a tendency to work diligently and meticulously in carrying out my teaching responsibilities.	4.34

The table illustrates the teachers' approach and commitment to their uncertified English language teacher role. The individual consistently demonstrates a clear focus in carrying out

duties, evidenced by a notable average score of 4.32. Moreover, the teacher actively formulates plans and strategies to address teaching tasks, scoring an average of 4.36. The possession of a strong awareness of tasks to be completed is particularly emphasized, garnering a high average score of 4.50. Prioritizing teaching tasks as the primary aspect of the job receives notable recognition, as reflected in the average score of 4.36. Additionally, the teachers tend to work diligently in executing teaching responsibilities, with a solid average score of 4.34. These scores collectively paint a picture of teachers with a focused, strategic, and meticulous approach to their duties, underscoring a strong commitment to the teaching profession despite lacking formal certification. Lastly, in terms of income and future perspective, the teachers possess different points of view.

Table 8. *Future perspective results*

Statements	Score average
I am satisfied with the level of compensation I receive as an uncertified English language teacher.	3.43
I believe that my income as an English language teacher is sufficient to meet my basic needs and those of my family.	3.05
I feel that the recognition and appreciation for my work are proportional to the income I receive.	3.16
I see the potential for future income improvement as an uncertified English language teacher.	3.52
I feel that my income level as an English language teacher reflects the dedication and effort I invest in teaching.	3.34

The table indicates a mixed sentiment regarding compensation and financial aspects for the uncertified English language teacher. The teacher reports a moderate level of satisfaction with the current compensation, with an average score of 3.43. However, the average score of 3.05 indicates a belief that the income is sufficient to meet basic needs and family requirements. Similarly, the perception of recognition and appreciation being proportional to income receives a modest average score of 3.16. On a more positive note, the teacher sees potential for future income improvement, indicated by a relatively higher average score of 3.52. Additionally, there is a belief that the current income level reflects the dedication and effort invested in teaching, with an average score of 3.34. These scores indicate an alternative viewpoint on financial matters, highlighting the potential for improvement and a wish for better alignment between recognition, dedication, and compensation.

Job satisfaction

In this field, the average score achieved is 4.26. These scores collectively underscore a deeply fulfilling and meaningful experience in the teaching profession, stressing personal satisfaction, growth, and creative opportunities despite the absence of formal certification. In the interview, one of the respondents elaborated on the reason.

"I value this job as a place where I can grow and contribute positively for several reasons. Firstly, my workplace can provide clear instructions that must be accomplished within given deadlines, fostering discipline among educators to complete tasks according to set targets. Secondly, my workplace offers various training opportunities to develop skills for all members in the school, consistently making a positive impact on the teaching and learning activities for staff, educators, and students. Thirdly, the workplace has a close-knit sense of family, creating a peaceful and harmonious environment throughout the teaching and learning process." -Teacher 1

"Firstly, as a guideline, there is an intention to develop the potential of students. Secondly, there is a sense of joy and happiness in encountering students with various characters." -Teacher 1

Teachers here attain satisfaction in their work even without certification, as they believe in the positive impact on students and feel valued within the school community. Their fulfilment arises from tangible evidence of dedication through students' progress, recognition, and opportunities for growth, fostering a positive work environment. The results align with the statement that teacher professional identity refers to teachers' perceptions of the responsibilities associated with their profession (Qoyyimah et al., 2023). Furthermore, this identity includes elements such as teachers' work and their ability to learn and evolve through mistakes, challenges, and reflections (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). The research findings suggest a tough professional identity beyond formal credentials, particularly the satisfaction and fulfilment of teachers without certification. Teachers in this context determine a sense of identity through their positive impact on students, recognition within the school community, and opportunities for continuous growth, supporting the notion that professional identity is multifaceted and extends beyond certification status.

Task orientation

In this aspect, the average score achieved is 4.48. These scores collectively paint a picture of teachers with a focused, strategic, and meticulous approach to their duties, underscoring a strong commitment to the teaching profession despite lacking formal certification. One of the teachers elaborates on the reasons:

"I strongly agree with the statement "I possess a strong awareness of the tasks that need completion" because I teach at a *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school), where sincerity in teaching is highly emphasized. In our context, tasks are rarely evaluated or rewarded monetarily but are carried out purely out of sincerity. For example, when correcting assignments, we do not receive payment for assessing students' answers. In contrast to other schools where grading may come with compensation or administrative support, at the *pesantren*, our efforts are driven solely by sincere dedication. The same applies when taking on roles as committee members; we are simply asked to contribute sincerely." -Teacher 2

This result indicates that at the school where Teacher 2 teaches, the emphasis on sincerity in teaching is a fundamental aspect of the educational ethos. The acknowledgment that tasks are rarely evaluated or rewarded monetarily underscores the unique values and motivations within this educational setting. The results align with the statement that identity is shaped by the concepts of 'how to act' and 'how to understand' one's role as a teacher within the broader context of society (Barkhuizen, 2019; Rudolph et al., 2019). The experiences described, such as the emphasis on sincerity and the lack of monetary rewards in specific tasks, indicate that the teachers' professional identity is influenced by societal norms and expectations, underscoring the broader cultural context in which they operate. The absence of financial incentives, particularly in tasks like correcting assignments or serving on committees, highlights a commitment to sincere dedication and service, reflecting a particular school environment's distinctive character and principles.

Income and future perspective

On this matter, the average score is 3.30. This score is the lowest among all aspects. The income is the primary issue for them. The score suggests a different perspective on financial aspects, with room for improvement and a desire for better alignment between recognition, dedication, and compensation. The teachers highlight some reasons.

"LOL because the teacher's salary here is low. I teach English for only 6 hours at the *pesantren*. That is 15k Rupiah per hour. That is why I said it is not enough. Maybe the government can increase the LOL honorarium." -Teacher 3

"I teach at elementary, junior high, and high school levels. So, it seems like I am placed in both categories. It is like non-civil servant teachers teach, but we are more directed, everything that non-civil servant teachers should do. We are asked to do anything. So, the salary is not much, but there are many demands. We have to do this and that." -Teacher 3

"I teach exceptionally well. There is a lot of effort in teaching students. It is extraordinary to make students understand the material. But, you know, it is tiring to teach with so much effort, yet the compensation does not match. It is like that, sir." -Teacher 3

These data indicate dissatisfaction among teachers regarding the salary they receive. The compensation they receive does not match the efforts they have to put in. This result contradicts Iswandari's (2017) statement about the significance of teachers understanding their professional identities. Iswandari (2017) emphasized that such understanding enables teachers to enhance self-awareness and shape their aspirations in the field of education, involving a continuous process of evaluating motivations and experiences to answer the question, 'Who am I now?' (Kalaja et al., 2016). However, the expressed dissatisfaction among teachers in the current context, particularly regarding their salary, suggests a misalignment between their professional aspirations and the existing conditions. The contradiction lies in the possible distinctions between the idealized process of self-awareness and professional identity

development, as stated by [Iswandari \(2017\)](#), and the practical challenges faced, such as inadequate compensation, impacting their overall job satisfaction.

Work motivation

In the work motivation aspect, the average is 4.48. Despite lacking formal certification, this score collectively portrays the teachers as deeply motivated, passionate about teaching, and committed to meaningful and impactful education. The teacher expresses their feelings on this matter.

“Teaching holds significance for me because it provides an opportunity to get to know various student characters. By understanding the characteristics of the students, I can tailor learning and teaching activities to suit their individual traits. Moreover, teaching is meaningful as I can witness the daily development of students, from knowing nothing to gaining knowledge. Especially as I teach at the elementary school level, where students are like clean sheets of paper. So, it is a challenge for me to provide good examples and teachings to students so that what is instilled in them is also something positive. Therefore, teaching is meaningful to me, and it has nothing to do with whether I am certified or not.” -Teacher 4

“I feel energetic and enthusiastic about teaching and helping students develop because there is no reason for me not to be energetic and enthusiastic. Students cannot choose, request, or know what kind of teacher will teach them, but as teachers, we can choose what kind of teacher we want to be. So, I choose to strive to be a teacher who is always energetic and enthusiastic so that students are also excited in my class.”-Teacher 4

This statement indicates that the teacher places great value on the personalized approach to education, tailoring teaching methods to each student's unique characteristics. The researchers see teaching as a dynamic process, observing and contributing to the daily development of students, particularly at the elementary level. The researchers emphasise the responsibility and challenge of imparting positive values and knowledge by comparing students to blank sheets of paper. Notably, the researchers emphasize the intrinsic motivation to be an energetic and enthusiastic teacher, recognizing the impact of this choice on creating an engaging learning environment. This definition fits with the concept of teaching professional identity, as discussed by [Jonker et al. \(2018\)](#), which encompasses how educators perceive themselves in their roles. This multifaceted idea is acknowledged as complex and continually evolving, involving inner conflicts, as [Davey \(2010\)](#) and [Norton \(2013\)](#) noted. The construction of this professional identity is considered an ongoing process, as articulated by [Beijaard et al. \(2004\)](#), involving integrating personal and professional aspects in becoming a teacher educator.

Professional commitment

In the context of professional commitment, most teachers are firmly committed to their profession, regardless of certification. The average score is 4.33. The score shows a strong sense of responsibility, dedication, and professional pride, emphasizing a commitment to

ongoing growth and community engagement. The teachers highlight the following reasons for their commitment.

“The reason I strongly agree here is that even though I am not certified yet, I feel a significant responsibility. It is not about the certification; it's about the entrusted responsibility of the job. Honestly, with the children understanding and acknowledging, "I know this from Miss A," brings a sense of satisfaction for myself. I am content even though teaching is tiring because I am pleased to see their progress. Initially, they might not have known certain things, but since I started teaching, they have become more confident in answering questions, and their responses have improved. It is satisfying to witness their development, such as progressing from not being able to speak to becoming proficient in speaking. For example, they used to write English words according to pronunciation, like writing "wan" instead of "one," but suddenly they can write it correctly. In my opinion, it brings personal satisfaction, and I am grateful that what I learned in college and in the training program is yielding positive results, even without the justification of certification.”-Teacher 5

“Actually, sir, honestly, being a teacher was not my desired profession when I graduated from college or during high school. However, it has been my dream since elementary school. I genuinely enjoy learning English, so I'm very enthusiastic during English lessons. No matter how painful it is, I still attend. I love expanding my knowledge in the field of English. Regardless of certification, wherever I am, I continue to improve my English skills with enthusiasm. For example, on social media, I often follow English learning centres, language villages, and Lucy English. Since a long time ago, I have enjoyed it. Regardless of certification, I love learning English, and I may learn to become a professional English teacher. Although I am currently guiding myself here, I hope to become a professional English teacher who can be emulated and respected. I hope for blessings, sir, genuinely aside from seeking money. Certification, in my opinion, is a bonus. The main thing is that I genuinely enjoy my profession, sir, because it has been my dream since forever. Certification is an extraordinary bonus if I get it, sir. I want to keep learning and improving my abilities in teaching English.” -Teacher 5

These two responses demonstrate the teachers' deep fulfilment and passion for their profession. Despite challenges such as insufficient compensation and the absence of formal certification, they express satisfaction in the positive impact on students' learning and personal growth. Their dedication to teaching, driven by intrinsic motivation and a genuine love for the subject, underscores their commitment to continuous improvement and a desire to be exemplary educators. While acknowledging the existing challenges, the teacher emphasizes the joy of witnessing students' progress and the gratification of fulfilling a long-standing teaching aspiration. This intense feeling aligns with the statements that professional identity is a complex and evolving concept, characterized by inner conflicts (Davey, 2010; Norton, 2013). It can be viewed as a continuous process of integrating personal and professional aspects in becoming and being a teacher educator (Beijaard et al., 2004). Despite challenges and uncertainties, the passion and dedication expressed by these teachers reflect the intricate and

dynamic nature of professional identity, which involves ongoing negotiation and synthesis of personal and professional dimensions in the context of teaching.

Conclusion

In summary, the teachers investigated in this research consistently demonstrate a credible professionalism in fulfilling their roles. Their commitment is evident through high motivation, a strong sense of professional dedication, enthusiastic engagement in their work, and a heightened focus on their responsibilities. Despite these positive attributes, the monthly salary is a notable source of dissatisfaction for these teachers. The report emphasizes the need to address compensation concerns to ensure that the overall professional well-being of these educators aligns with their exemplary commitment to their roles. It is suggested that the government and stakeholders address the concerns raised by teachers, particularly focusing on the issue of salary dissatisfaction. There is a need for a comprehensive review and potential reform in the compensation structures for educators, recognizing their high motivation, commitment, and enthusiasm. Additionally, efforts can be directed towards providing avenues for professional development and recognition, contributing to teachers' overall satisfaction and well-being. Collaborative initiatives between the government, educational institutions, and relevant stakeholders may create a more conducive and rewarding environment for educators.

However, this research is limited by the specific context and sample size, which may impact the generalizability of the findings. The participants were drawn from a particular setting, and their experiences may not fully represent the diversity of teacher perspectives. Therefore, caution should be exercised when extending the results to a broader population. Therefore, future research is suggested to investigate a more diverse and extensive sample, encompassing various educational contexts and backgrounds. This would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of teacher experiences and perceptions. Additionally, studying the various facets of teacher satisfaction, beyond salary concerns, could provide a nuanced view of the factors influencing professional contentment. This approach would enhance the applicability of research outcomes and contribute to more informed policy recommendations aimed at improving the teaching profession.

Disclosure statement

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest.

Use of AI Statement

The authors declared that they had not used any AI tools in their manuscript preparation and submission.

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