

Societal Pressures Shaping Professional Identity and Motivation among Indonesian EFL Teachers' Experiences

Nonny Basalama^{1*}, Haris Danial²

^{1,2}English Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Letters and Culture,
Universitas Negeri Gorontalo, Gorontalo, Indonesia

* Corresponding Author:

Email: nonnybasalama@ung.ac.id

Abstract.

The professional identity and motivation of English as Foreign Language (EFL) teachers are shaped not only by pedagogical experiences but also by the broader social and economic contexts in which they work. In Indonesia, limited teacher remuneration and culturally embedded gender expectations continue to influence teachers' professional engagement; however, the interaction between these factors remains underexplored in EFL research. This study aims to examine how economic constraints and gender expectations influence the professional identity and motivation of Indonesian EFL teachers. A qualitative narrative inquiry was employed involving twenty secondary school EFL teachers from Indonesia. Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns across participants' experiences. The findings reveal that inadequate remuneration negatively affects teachers' motivation, professional development, instructional creativity, and participation in continuous learning. Nevertheless, teachers with a strong sense of professional vocation demonstrated sustained commitment despite financial challenges. The study also found that gender expectations significantly shaped teachers' career decisions and professional identity. Male teachers commonly undertook additional employment to fulfill their responsibilities as family breadwinners, whereas married female teachers prioritized domestic and caregiving responsibilities, resulting in different forms of professional engagement. These findings indicate that professional identity is dynamically negotiated through the interaction between personal agency and contextual pressures rather than being determined solely by individual beliefs or professional competence. The study highlights the importance of improving teacher welfare and developing context-sensitive educational policies that recognize the influence of economic conditions and sociocultural expectations on teacher motivation, professional identity, and long-term career sustainability.

Keywords: professional identity, teacher motivation, EFL teachers, economic constraints, gender expectations and Indonesia.

I. INTRODUCTION

The quality of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education is closely associated with teachers' professional identity and motivation, both of which influence instructional quality, professional commitment, and student learning outcomes. Professional identity is increasingly understood as a dynamic and socially constructed process that evolves through teachers' interactions with institutional, cultural, and personal contexts rather than as a fixed professional attribute (1), (2). Contemporary research further emphasizes that teachers' professional identities are continuously negotiated through the interplay between individual agency and contextual influences, including educational policies, workplace environments, social recognition, and economic conditions (3). In many developing countries, however, EFL teachers continue to face structural challenges such as inadequate remuneration, increasing workloads, and limited opportunities for professional development, all of which may weaken motivation and reduce long-term professional commitment (4). These contextual realities suggest that understanding teacher professionalism requires moving beyond classroom practices to examine the broader societal pressures that shape teachers' everyday professional experiences.

Among the contextual factors affecting teachers, economic constraints remain one of the most persistent concerns in many educational systems. Although numerous governments have introduced reforms aimed at improving educational quality, teachers in developing countries frequently report that their salaries remain insufficient to support their professional and personal needs. Financial insecurity often limits teachers' participation in professional development, reduces access to instructional resources, and constrains pedagogical innovation, particularly in EFL classrooms where authentic learning materials and technological resources require additional investment (5), (6). Previous studies have also demonstrated that teacher well-being and motivation are closely associated with perceived organizational support and economic security (7). Consequently, economic hardship extends beyond financial concerns and becomes a significant determinant

of teachers' professional identity, influencing how they perceive their profession, responsibilities, and future career aspirations.

In addition to economic challenges, teachers' professional identities are shaped by sociocultural expectations embedded within their communities. Gender remains a significant social construct influencing career opportunities, work-family balance, and professional engagement, particularly in collectivist societies such as Indonesia. Traditional gender norms often position men as primary economic providers while assigning women greater responsibility for domestic and caregiving roles. Such expectations inevitably affect teachers' professional decision-making, career development, and participation in continuous learning (8). Recent studies on language teacher identity increasingly acknowledge that professional identity cannot be separated from teachers' personal lives because identity is constructed across multiple social roles, including teacher, parent, spouse, and community member (9). Nevertheless, empirical evidence examining how gender expectations interact with economic pressures in shaping Indonesian EFL teachers' professional identity remains relatively limited, despite Indonesia's unique sociocultural and educational landscape.

Recent scholarship on language teacher identity has increasingly focused on psychological constructs such as teacher agency, resilience, emotional labor, and professional well-being (10). These studies have substantially advanced understanding of how teachers respond to educational reforms and workplace challenges. However, much of the existing literature has concentrated on institutional contexts, classroom practices, or psychological dimensions, while giving comparatively less attention to the broader societal pressures surrounding teachers' professional lives. In particular, studies rarely integrate economic constraints and gender expectations within a single analytical framework to explain how these contextual factors jointly influence teachers' motivation and professional identity. Furthermore, most previous investigations have been conducted in Western or high-income educational settings, leaving developing countries underrepresented in the international discourse. This limitation creates an important knowledge gap because contextual realities differ considerably across educational systems, particularly regarding teacher welfare, cultural expectations, and employment conditions.

This study addresses these gaps by examining Indonesian EFL teachers' professional identity through the combined perspectives of economic constraints and gender expectations. Rather than viewing motivation as merely an individual psychological characteristic, this research conceptualizes professional identity as a dynamic process negotiated through continuous interaction between personal agency and contextual pressures. By integrating theories of professional identity, teacher motivation, and sociocultural perspectives, this study provides a more comprehensive understanding of how teachers negotiate professional commitments while responding to financial limitations and culturally embedded gender roles. Consequently, the study extends current discussions on language teacher identity by highlighting the interconnected influences of teacher well-being, economic security, and social expectations within a developing-country context. This integrated perspective represents the primary novelty of the study and contributes to the growing body of research on language teacher identity by incorporating macro-level societal influences that have received relatively limited empirical attention.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to examine how economic constraints and gender expectations shape the professional identity and motivation of Indonesian secondary school EFL teachers. Specifically, the study investigates how teachers perceive remuneration, negotiate professional responsibilities alongside family obligations, and maintain motivation under varying socioeconomic conditions. By revealing the interaction between societal pressures and teachers' professional identity, the findings are expected to contribute both theoretically to the literature on language teacher identity and practically to educational policies concerned with teacher welfare, professional development, and the sustainability of the teaching profession in Indonesia and other comparable developing-country contexts.

II. METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative narrative inquiry design to investigate how societal pressures shape the professional identity and motivation of Indonesian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers.

Narrative inquiry was selected because it enables researchers to understand how individuals construct meaning from their lived experiences within particular social, cultural, and institutional contexts (11). Rather than measuring causal relationships, the study sought to explore how economic constraints and gender expectations were interpreted and negotiated by teachers throughout their professional lives. Accordingly, the study focused on two interrelated contextual dimensions, economic constraints and gender expectations, as the primary factors influencing teachers' professional identity and motivation.

Research Participants

The participants consisted of twenty Indonesian secondary school EFL teachers purposively selected to represent diverse demographic and professional backgrounds. The participants included both male and female teachers with different marital statuses, teaching experiences, and family responsibilities. Purposive sampling was adopted because it enabled the selection of information-rich participants who had substantial experience in English language teaching and could provide comprehensive narratives regarding their professional lives. The diversity of participants allowed the study to capture variations in teachers' perceptions of remuneration, professional commitment, work-family responsibilities, and career development.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted over approximately five months. Each interview lasted between 60 and 120 minutes and was conducted in Indonesian to facilitate participants' comfort and encourage detailed narratives. Follow-up interviews were conducted when clarification or additional information was required. Semi-structured interviews provided sufficient flexibility for participants to describe their personal experiences while allowing the researcher to explore emerging issues concerning teacher motivation, professional identity, remuneration, and gender roles. Throughout the interview process, field notes were also recorded to document contextual observations and non-verbal expressions that supported interpretation of the interview data.

Research Procedure

The study followed four stages of qualitative inquiry. The first stage involved identifying participants who met the research criteria and obtaining informed consent. The second stage consisted of conducting individual interviews that explored teachers' perceptions of professional identity, economic challenges, family responsibilities, and career experiences. The third stage involved transcribing interview recordings verbatim and repeatedly reviewing the transcripts to obtain a holistic understanding of participants' narratives. The final stage consisted of coding, categorizing, and interpreting the narratives to identify recurring themes explaining how societal pressures influenced teachers' professional identity and motivation.

Data Analysis

The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis following (12) reflexive thematic analysis framework. The analysis began with familiarization through repeated reading of interview transcripts, followed by initial coding of meaningful statements. Similar codes were subsequently grouped into broader categories representing recurring patterns across participants' experiences. These categories were then refined into overarching themes describing the influence of economic constraints and gender expectations on teachers' professional identity and motivation. Throughout the analytical process, constant comparison was employed to identify similarities and differences among participants' narratives, while researcher reflexivity was maintained to minimize interpretative bias. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, credibility was established through prolonged engagement with participants and repeated verification of interpretations across interview transcripts. Dependability was strengthened by maintaining a transparent audit trail of coding decisions, whereas confirmability was supported through systematic documentation of analytical procedures. Thick descriptions of participants' experiences were provided to facilitate the transferability of the findings to similar educational contexts.

Overall, the methodological approach enabled an in-depth understanding of how Indonesian EFL teachers negotiated their professional identities within the intersecting influences of economic hardship and

sociocultural gender expectations, thereby providing a comprehensive explanation of the contextual factors shaping teacher motivation and professional engagement.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Economic Constraints and Teacher Motivation

The analysis revealed that economic constraints constitute one of the most influential contextual factors shaping Indonesian EFL teachers' professional identity and motivation. Although almost all participants acknowledged teaching as a meaningful profession, the majority perceived their remuneration as insufficient to support both their professional and family responsibilities. Financial limitations influenced teachers' instructional practices, professional development, and long-term career commitment rather than merely affecting their personal welfare.

The thematic analysis generated four interrelated dimensions describing the impact of economic constraints on teachers' professional lives.

Table 1. Themes Emerging from Economic Constraints

Theme	Description	Professional Implications
Inadequate remuneration	Teacher salary insufficient to meet living expenses	Reduced professional satisfaction
Limited professional development	Financial barriers to seminars, books, and training	Lower participation in lifelong learning
Restricted instructional creativity	Teachers financed instructional materials personally	Limited pedagogical innovation
Professional commitment	Individual vocation moderated financial dissatisfaction	Different levels of motivation

The findings indicate that financial pressure affected teachers in multiple ways. Teachers who experienced greater economic hardship tended to perceive teaching as financially undervalued, reducing enthusiasm for investing additional resources into classroom instruction. Professional development activities, such as attending workshops, purchasing English-language teaching materials, and adopting innovative instructional media, were frequently viewed as financial burdens rather than opportunities for professional growth.

Interestingly, the findings also demonstrate that remuneration alone did not determine professional commitment. Several teachers maintained strong instructional motivation despite experiencing similar financial conditions. Their narratives reflected a strong sense of professional vocation characterized by intrinsic satisfaction, responsibility toward students, and commitment to educational service. This finding supports Self-Determination Theory (7), which argues that intrinsic motivation enables individuals to sustain professional engagement despite external constraints. Similarly, Mercer (2023) emphasizes that teacher well-being is influenced not only by financial conditions but also by teachers' psychological resources and professional purpose (13).

These findings further extend previous studies by suggesting that economic hardship functions as a contextual pressure rather than a deterministic factor. Professional identity is therefore negotiated through teachers' interpretation of financial realities rather than being directly determined by salary levels alone.

Gender Expectations and Professional Identity

The second major finding concerns the influence of gender expectations on teachers' professional identity construction. Analysis revealed substantial differences between male and female teachers regarding career decisions, work-family balance, and professional engagement.

Male teachers generally perceived themselves as primary financial providers within their families. Consequently, most male participants undertook additional employment after school hours to supplement household income. However, the nature of these secondary occupations differed considerably. Some teachers accepted employment unrelated to education, while others chose additional teaching activities such as private tutoring or English courses.

Conversely, married female teachers rarely engaged in secondary employment. Instead, they consistently emphasized balancing professional responsibilities with domestic obligations. Household

responsibilities, childcare, and caregiving emerged as important considerations influencing career decisions, participation in professional development, and willingness to undertake additional teaching activities.

Table 2. Gender Expectations and Professional Identity

Male Teachers	Female Teachers
Breadwinner responsibility	Caregiving responsibility
Additional employment common	Secondary employment uncommon
Financial obligation influenced career	Family obligation influenced career
Professional identity linked with economic responsibility	Professional identity linked with work-family balance

Rather than representing unequal professional commitment, these findings illustrate different pathways through which teachers negotiate their identities. Male teachers tended to interpret professionalism through economic responsibility, whereas female teachers emphasized maintaining harmony between professional and family roles.

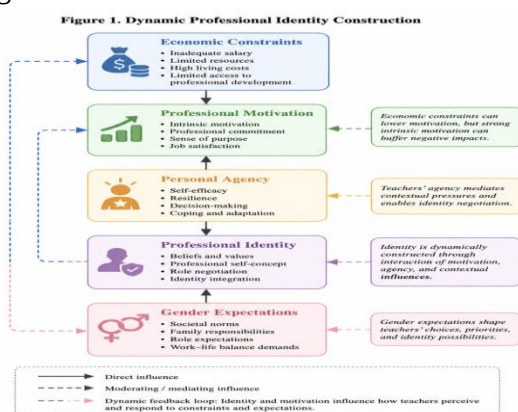
These findings resonate with Sociocultural Theory, which views identity as socially negotiated rather than individually constructed. Barkhuizen (2022) argues that language teacher identity emerges through continuous interaction between individual agency and contextual expectations (10). Likewise, Widari & Jazari (2024) highlights that language teachers simultaneously negotiate multiple identities across professional, familial, and community contexts (14).

The present findings contribute additional evidence from Indonesia by demonstrating that gender expectations remain deeply embedded within teachers' professional decision-making, despite increasing opportunities for women's participation in education.

Professional Identity as Dynamic Identity Negotiation

Across participants, professional identity emerged as a dynamic process rather than a stable professional characteristic. Teachers continually negotiated competing expectations originating from schools, families, communities, and government policies.

Three major forms of identity negotiation were identified.



The model illustrates that professional identity develops through continuous interaction between contextual pressures and teachers' personal agency. Economic constraints and gender expectations simultaneously shape teachers' motivation, while intrinsic professional commitment moderates their influence.

Teachers demonstrating stronger intrinsic motivation were better able to maintain instructional quality despite experiencing considerable financial challenges. Conversely, teachers experiencing prolonged economic stress without sufficient institutional support reported declining professional enthusiasm.

This finding supports the concept of teacher agency proposed by (15), suggesting that teachers actively negotiate contextual constraints rather than passively responding to them. Similarly, Hiver et al. (2024) argue that teacher resilience develops through continuous interaction between environmental challenges and individual professional resources.

The Interrelationship among Economic Constraints, Gender Expectations, and Motivation

A particularly important finding emerging from this study concerns the interaction between economic constraints and gender expectations. Rather than functioning independently, these two contextual dimensions mutually reinforced one another in shaping professional identity.

For male teachers, financial pressure was intensified by cultural expectations regarding breadwinner responsibilities. Consequently, professional identity frequently became divided between teaching responsibilities and economic survival. Additional employment reduced opportunities for lesson preparation, professional learning, and reflective practice.

In contrast, female teachers experienced fewer pressures to supplement family income but faced stronger expectations regarding caregiving responsibilities. These expectations frequently limited participation in professional development activities requiring travel or extended absence from home.

These findings suggest that professional identity cannot be adequately understood through economic or sociocultural perspectives alone. Instead, teacher identity should be conceptualized as the outcome of intersecting contextual influences operating simultaneously throughout teachers' professional lives.

This integrated perspective represents the principal contribution of the present study. While previous language teacher identity research has emphasized psychological constructs such as agency, resilience, and emotion (10), (16), comparatively few studies have simultaneously examined the interaction between economic well-being and gender expectations within developing-country contexts.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The findings extend current theories of language teacher identity by demonstrating that professional identity is not solely determined by pedagogical competence or professional beliefs but is continuously negotiated through economic realities and sociocultural expectations.

Theoretically, this study integrates three complementary perspectives: Professional Identity Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and Sociocultural Theory. Together, these perspectives explain how individual agency interacts with contextual pressures to shape teachers' motivation and professional engagement.

Practically, the findings suggest that educational reforms aimed at improving instructional quality should move beyond curriculum and pedagogical interventions. Improving teacher welfare, expanding equitable access to professional development, providing institutional support for work-life balance, and recognizing teachers' diverse sociocultural responsibilities are equally important for sustaining teacher motivation and strengthening professional identity.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that professional identity among Indonesian EFL teachers is a dynamic, context-sensitive, and socially negotiated construct. Teachers continuously balance economic realities, professional aspirations, and gender-based societal expectations, making professional identity an ongoing process of negotiation rather than a fixed professional attribute.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the professional identity and motivation of Indonesian EFL teachers are dynamically shaped by the interaction between economic constraints and sociocultural gender expectations rather than by individual professional competence alone. The findings reveal that inadequate remuneration influences teachers' motivation, instructional practices, and opportunities for professional development, while gender-based societal expectations create distinct patterns of professional engagement for male and female teachers.

Despite these contextual pressures, teachers with a strong sense of professional vocation and personal agency are able to sustain their commitment to teaching, indicating that professional identity is continuously negotiated through the relationship between personal values and external conditions. By integrating economic well-being and gender expectations within a single analytical framework, this study extends current scholarship on language teacher identity beyond predominantly psychological perspectives and provides a more comprehensive understanding of how contextual realities shape teachers' professional lives in developing-country settings.

The study contributes both theoretically by proposing a contextual model of professional identity negotiation and practically by highlighting the importance of educational policies that strengthen teacher welfare, promote equitable professional development opportunities, and acknowledge teachers' diverse social responsibilities to enhance motivation, professional sustainability, and the quality of English language education.

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