

Teachers' Digital Identity Management towards Their Current E-Professionalism: A Case in Indonesian EFL Context

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate how teachers portray their digital identity towards their professionalism as a teacher which is manifested online. This descriptive case study involved four participants who were in-service English teachers from four schools in Tasikmalaya, West Java, Indonesia. The data were collected by conducting a semi-structured interview, after that, the data were analyzed by using Thematic Analysis (TA) based on Braun and Clarke framework analysis. Based on the results of the analysis, this case study produced three general aspects, namely social media preferences, teachers' participation in professional development, and teachers' unfamiliarity with digital identity. The findings of this study explain how English teachers describe their digital identity towards their current e-professionalism. Therefore, the results of this study provide empirical evidence and become a reference for other English teachers about the benefits of digital identity management that will help them improve their professional reputation in an online setting.

Keywords: Digital literacy; digital identity; e-professionalism; online identity; teacher's e-professionalism.

INTRODUCTION

Several studies have been conducted in the realm of digital identity. The use of technology, specifically ICT in education, was discussed in small detail at several American universities: American Open University, GLOSAS/Global University, the National Learning Infrastructure Initiative of EDUCOM (an American organization for technology in Higher Education) (Gouveia, 1997). In Portugal, the National Initiative was sponsored by the Portuguese Information Society Mission (Verde, 1997; Gouveia,

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1999). It can be seen how technology was perceived as a great potential at that time, but digital identity was not the main topic.

The rise of digital literacy has been perceived as an important skill for teachers these days (Littlejohn, Beetham, & McGill, 2012). These days, some teachers possess digital competence already of how to present themselves online or it is commonly called digital identity. However, some of them are still not conscious of their identity as professional teachers (Barnable, Cunning, and Parcon, 2018; Carpenter and Harvey, 2019). Griffin and Zinskie (2020) found that some pre-service teachers were still unaware of their e-professionalism on social media. Consequently, a teacher posted an inappropriate post in California expressing her desire to stab some students (Oakley, 2014). Another case occurred in which a teacher was fired because simply she described her students and even their parents negatively on her blog (Balasubramani, 2014).

Ramarajan and Reid (2013) stated that the internet has blurred the boundaries between [teachers'] professional and social lives (p. 624). For professionals who want to protect their credibility as individuals deserving of their professional identity, online disclosure may be beneficial or harmful, depending on how online contact is performed or how their digital footprint is consistent with the professional identity they wish to retain (Kirwan and Guckin, 2014). Additionally, a recent study found that teachers also use social media like Facebook to build their e-professionalism (Poth, McCallum, and Tang, 2016). Undoubtedly, there is a strong consensus that digitalization can promote the quality of education in which it can enhance professionalism (Henderson, 2019; Engeness, 2020; Santiana et al., 2021).

Contextually, this study was conducted because of the in-service teachers' needs of personal branding. They must enhance their professionalism as these days, technology has become a significant element to improve their e-professionalism (Fatimah & Santiana, 2017). Moreover, based on the preliminary observation, the researcher found that those potential participants of the study did not expose themselves as a teacher on social media such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram.

Identifying teachers' professionalism is complex. However, in general, Quirke (2009) explained that there are two criteria of professionalism, namely credibility and legitimacy. Teacher credibility is defined as the teacher's degree of trustworthiness perceived by the student (Pishghadam et al., 2019). Moreover, they also explained that credibility can be categorized into three elements, namely: trustworthiness, mastery, and purpose toward the receiver. Simply, teacher credibility is the real teaching performance received by the students. Another criterion of professionalism in teaching is legitimacy. Coicaud (2002) concisely explained legitimacy as "the recognition of the right to govern" (p. 10). Meyer and Rowan (1977, 1978) stated that certified and licensed professionals indicate their legitimacy to the public. These days, teachers cannot only be credible, but also, they are required to be credentialed in their teaching profession by obtaining a degree, certification, licenses, and badges. Therefore, these two criteria are central to their teaching career as they want to be professional in this field. This notion of professionalism in teaching now has changed as a recent study conducted by Engeness (2020) found a novel understanding that there has been a substantial alteration in the past 20 years in the processes and practices of education, these days, teachers are required to develop their pedagogic potential of digital technology to create a meaningful teaching practice that enhances their digital identity (p. 15-16).

The utilization of social media grows quickly as the internet users rate rises (Kemp, 2018). This issue has become one of increasing research interests, particularly in some areas such as privacy (Ross et al., 2013) and professional boundaries (Hillman et al., 2019). Further, there also arises e-professionalism which also has been at an increasing level of research interest (Duke et al., 2019). E-professionalism refers to the traditional paradigms of professionalism, but these days are manifested through digital media (Javaeed, 2020). This use of social media by teachers is increasing and the advantages and utilization of it are becoming apparent (Fenwick, 2016). On the one hand, it also has a disadvantage in which this social media will depend on the users as they are one of the internet citizens there.

Furthermore, the identity teachers share over Facebook should be different from the one they share over LinkedIn. The way they describe themselves as someone who is teaching as their profession. Some teachers might say "I'm a teacher". However, while these statements are accurate, they do not say anything about their profession. Developing an elevator pitch to help teachers present themselves in a positive, interesting, and convincing way is fundamental to increasing their professionalism. According to Manjusha and Vijayalakshmi, an elevator speech is a concise message or an advertisement about oneself. It conveys who an individual is, what the company expectations are, and ways the individual can profit an institution (2016). In short, as a teacher, their elevator pitch should include a specific description of their degree, what professional teaching certificates they have, how much research the teachers have published, etc. In other words, what teachers present to the media will impact their reputation in their field. For example, presenting who they are, their skill set, teaching experience, and interests on LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, etc.

Thus, this case study investigated deeply how teachers have managed their digital identity in the Indonesian English as Foreign Language (EFL) context. As educators, teachers are also required to enhance their teaching professionalism digitally. Finally, this study was expected to contribute to building EFL teachers' awareness towards this issue and can be a reference for them to conduct a further study in this area of research.

METHOD

This descriptive qualitative research was conducted by way of a case study. It is a research approach to discover relatively new phenomena because of its early stage based on the existing body of knowledge (Yin, 2003). Simply, a descriptive case study is a detailed description of a phenomenon in its context (Salminen, Harra, & Lautamo, 2006). Moreover, this study was also conducted in some institutions in which this type of case study is often termed as multiple case studies. A multiple case study is a tool for a researcher to examine and contextualize the events of a real-life phenomenon by analyzing and exploring some small events from which generalizations can be drawn (Yin, 2017).

This study was conducted at 4 schools in Tasikmalaya, West Java, Indonesia. 4 random in-service EFL teachers were selected irrespective of what their genders were as participants in this research and they also actively engage in an online community, but they did not expose themselves as a teacher and they would be the identified case that was investigated by the researcher. Besides, the researcher utilized an audio recorder and a semi-structured interview as the instrument to get the data required to be gathered for the study. It is a qualitative interview form in which interviewees are asked a series of predetermined yet open-ended questions (Ayres, 2008). In terms of

analyzing the data, the researcher used Thematic Analysis (TA). TA is a method for analyzing classifications and recognizing patterns (Boyatzis, 1998). It explains the data deeply and offers examples on several explanations (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this research generated three themes 1) teachers' social media preferences, 2) teachers' participation in professional development 3) teachers' unfamiliarity with digital identity.

1. Teachers' Social Media Preferences

The teachers' preferences on social media have an impact on their e-professionalism and digital identity. It will be seen as the first phase of managing their digital identity more broadly. In addition, the results of this study now provide evidence that some teachers are accustomed to being active on certain social media, and they did not consider other media platforms to manage their digital identities, especially social media that are widely used for professional purposes. One of them is LinkedIn. The result can be seen below:

Table 1. The Extracts of Teachers' Professional Use on WhatsApp

| Participants | Extracts |
|--------------|---|
| Teacher #1 | "Yes, in online study system, at that time, will be more available in WhatsApp ..." |
| Teacher #2 | "... I used almost 70% to 80% of WhatsApp media ..." |
| Teacher #3 | "That's usually on WhatsApp, mostly on WhatsApp." |
| Teacher #4 | "Yes, right, WhatsApp is the most active one." |

The use of WhatsApp for their professional purposes is higher because they use this application for various reasons, but an important point that should be emphasized is the degree of frequency of use, such as "more", "almost", "usually" and "most" demonstrating their high availability on this social media. In addition, according to Supriadi et al. (2020), their case study found that WhatsApp is the most commonly utilized platform for online learning, especially during the recent Covid-19 pandemic. Mahyoob (2020) also discovered that WhatsApp is the most preferred application by students and teachers. Similarly, Martins et al. (2021) also found in their descriptive study that WhatsApp is the most used application during the Covid-19 for online learning.

However, it simply did not make them fully available on other social media. Moreover, it comes to know that social media has a huge impact on personal branding. In this research, it was found that they were not that available on some social media. The detailed finding can be seen below:

Table 2. The Extracts of Teachers' Professional Use on Other Social Media

| Participants | Extracts |
|--------------|---|
| Teacher #1 | - "... so, I rarely open Facebook." (Facebook) - "Umm, when it comes to Instagram, well, it is 60%." (Instagram) - "no" (LinkedIn) |
| Teacher #2 | - "... I don't really use Instagram or Facebook itself." (Facebook & Instagram) - "... then also Instagram, well I use it even though not very often." (Instagram) |

| Participants | Extracts |
|--------------|--|
| Teacher #3 | - "Umm... how often the last time I open LinkedIn a few or a half years ago ..." (LinkedIn) - "... when it comes to Facebook, it's been a long time, I haven't used it for a long time ..." (Facebook) - "Oh yeah, I am not often on Instagram, at least once in a while..." (Instagram) |
| Teacher #4 | - "Umm... I have it but I haven't used it for a long time." (LinkedIn) - "When it comes to Instagram and Facebook, I rarely even make posts about teachers, ..." (Facebook & Instagram) - "LinkedIn, oh yes, right, I don't have LinkedIn." (LinkedIn) |

Based on the result of the analyzed data above show that teachers are not active on some social media for several reasons. Koosel (2013) explained that a teacher can use their online identity "to extend their offline identity" and in this case as a professional teacher or to cover themselves to become someone else or something else. Since these social media are considered as a platform of media that can be used to enhance teachers' reputation, it describes them as not considering the first step of enhancing their online identity as professional teachers. Aside from that, they also did not consider Instagram as an opportunity to improve their professionalism. Lastly, the frequent activity on LinkedIn is also considered as one of the influential ways that can improve their professionalism. In short, from those cases above, it can be concluded that from this study, it was found that most teachers rely on a particular social media and do not consider other platforms of media to enhance their professionalism.

2. Teachers' Participation in Professional Development

It has been explained the way representing an individual through digital tools is important to enhance teachers' e-professionalism. Developing professionalism on the internet is significant for teachers these days. Havea and Mohanty (2020) defined professional development as a consciously designed systematic process that helps professionals acquire, use and maintain knowledge, skills, and experience. The results of this study found clear support for the first finding. Moreover, the analyzed data can be seen as follows:

Table 3. The Extracts of Teachers' Participation in Professional Development

| Participants | Extracts |
|--------------|--|
| Teacher #1 | - "when it comes to the online course for teaching, I have not yet, ..." - "... I immediately thought of using technology or the internet because at first I only used WA ..." - "I did when it was 4 years ago" |
| Teacher #2 | - "If it's on Facebook, hmm, no, ..." - "so far I have never been done it" - "... so, I try to come up with an idea by browsing on the internet..." - "...for now, I have not done it yet ..." |
| Teacher #3 | - "...so, I enter a group outside of my profession" - "not yet, I haven't done it ..." - "..., I immediately opened the website" - "it's been a long time, a year ago" |
| Teacher #4 | - "that would be all the groups of all English tutors in Indonesia" - "..., almost all of them took part in the online class ... I did." |

| Participants | Extracts |
|--------------|--|
| | - "... I automatically went to several websites on the internet ..." |
| | - "It's been quite a long time; it was about 2 years ago" |
| | - "... but if it's like EFL Teachers or so on, it's not on Facebook" |

The first result shows that the three teachers had not joined yet some Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), although there was a teacher "PG 2" who joined the course because it was a must for him to prepare for online teaching during the pandemic. Simply, these cases describe them as a teacher who knew already the importance of joining MOOCs to develop their teaching career, but they showed no initiative for joining MOOCs until there should be a situation that could lead them to join the courses. Moreover, the MOOC programs usually give the students a digital certificate of specialization. This certificate can be used to develop their digital identity by uploading it on the internet. This result agrees with Shulman (2019) who reported that teachers still do not accept this way of branding their profession or simply they assume it as unnecessary.

The second result revealed that somehow the teachers were still literate towards the technology because of their professional purpose as a teacher. It demonstrated teachers' curiosity because they wanted to enhance their teaching performance. It implied that they utilized the digital tools as an information source rather than taking the advantage of web 2.0 which allows the internet users to leave their digital footprint to form their digital identity. This result may further be explained by Koosel (2013) who stated that the emergence of web 2.0 means the internet users are given a chance to share their ideas, thoughts, opinions, and other information. Simply, it means that they created and maintained their digital identity.

The next finding showed that reputation checks by teachers on the Internet were very rare. It turned out that they had not searched for themselves on the Internet for a long time. In addition, this reputation check is the foundation because it is part of digital identity management. Nguyen (2020) stated two important points in defining Search Engine Optimization (SEO), they are making a website credible for both readers and search engines. However, SEO strategies are not only used to increase the visibility of a website but also to increase the visibility of them as a teacher, which means how often teachers leave their footprints on the Internet as a teacher.

In ensuring the teachers' participation on the internet, the researcher interviewed the in-service teachers regarding their engagement in online teacher communities they had joined. The result indicated that most teachers already join the group on WhatsApp and the scope is in Indonesia. Further, the result of this study explained more why the participants are inactive e-professionally. Gonne-Victoria et al. (2017) found that the participants wanted to identify themselves as a 'normal' individual and it is not 'appropriate' to use it as a place to take a political position. While in job seeking, surprisingly, some human resources in a company utilize social media to review the potential candidates (Stevens, 2016). Moreover, it is suggested by Johnson (2017) that educators should integrate e-professionalism into the course as it can prepare them for their careers in the future.

3. Teachers' Unfamiliarity with Digital Identity

The third result of this study is that the researcher tried to identify how far teachers have been familiar with digital identity. McKnight et al. (2016) found that the existence of technology-enhanced communication in a way that teachers used e-mail, online forums, websites, and virtual classrooms to communicate. Whether it is realized or not, the teachers have left their digital footprints that will form their identity on the internet and it can impact their reputation as professional teachers. The collected data were analyzed, and the results are as follows:

Table 3. The Extracts of Teachers' Unfamiliarity with Digital Identity

| Participants | Extracts |
|--------------|--|
| Teacher #1 | - "Digital literacy huh? Umm. <u>maybe</u> about..." - "I've heard of it, but don't understand it" - "Umm, haven't heard of it yet, what is that?" |
| Teacher #2 | - "Digital literacy, so if I'm not mistaken, digital literacy is..." - "... as an English teacher, but it's just wishful thinking." - "Someone is looking for on the internet, right?" |
| Teacher #3 | - "Information that is spreading in the media, isn't it?" - "Well, actually, I don't understand..." - "Umm no" |
| Teacher #4 | - "digital literacy might be more about..." - "... personal branding vaguely and don't understand it." - "... the search engine optimally, that's it maybe" |

Initially, the researcher found that the participants' responses indicated some uncertainty as they uttered some lexical choices that indicate uncertainty such as maybe if I'm not mistaken, isn't it and might be. The questions asked were regarding their understanding of digital literacy. White et al. explain that digital literacy is the ability to understand and use information in various formats from a variety of courses when presented on computers (2017). Being aware of their identity presented on a computer can also be said as being literate digitally. Digital identity is one of the key issues in digital literacy and hence it is necessary to question the basic things about digital identity and that is digital literacy.

The most obvious finding to emerge from the analysis is that most of the participants said that they were not familiar with what personal branding is. It has been known that personal branding nowadays can be conducted online so that it makes it the teachers easier to promote themselves as a professional teacher. This finding was also reported by Sedereviciute-Paciauskiene (2018) who claimed that teacher personal branding has become one of the strategies to pedagogical impacts by exhibiting them in such characteristics as a teacher.

Lastly, the result showed that the two teachers were not familiar with what search engine optimization was and how it could help them enhance their identity as a teacher on the internet. Meanwhile, the other two teachers even were not familiar with it. Further, as was mentioned in the previous explanation that the use of search engine optimization is used to develop the popularity of a website (Nguyen, 2020) and this can give a chance to teachers in promoting their identity as professional teachers on their website (Koosel, 2013).

Overall, these findings are by findings reported by Nykvist and Mukherjee (2016) that the participants in their study who updated their profile were only 36.39 % and who updated their portfolio were only 11.8 %. Further, they also conducted a post-survey after all the participants are enrolled in a course to build

their professional identity. Around 63.49 % of participants' responses were positive toward creating an online portfolio and professional identity. Another study also found that the participants were asked about building a personal website and most of them did not want to have it, even if it is one day in the future (Ružić et al., 2018). Both the previous and current results of the studies indicated that they were not certain and did not understand the importance of digital identity these days.

CONCLUSION

These days, during the Covid-19 pandemic, digital identity management has become a significant factor in enhancing their e-professionalism. In addition, the use of social media is central because it provides teachers with opportunities to promote their profession widely. Apart from that, managing their online activities such as reputation checking, joining some online courses, and developing their teaching ability through the internet is fundamental to enhancing their e-professionalism. Predominantly, teachers need to familiarize themselves with digital literacy, personal branding, and SEO as they are essential to fostering their online reputation.

This current research focuses on how teachers manage their digital identity to develop their e-professionalism. Moreover, the presented data cannot fully describe their digital identity management as some in-depth data can make this study well described. Therefore, the researcher recommends that future studies should provide more enriched data.

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