

The Construction of Female Teachers' Professional Identity in 21st-Century Learning Practices

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the construction of female teachers' professional identity in 21st-century learning practices. The study is grounded in the changing role of teachers in contemporary education, which is no longer limited to transmitting subject matter but also includes acting as learning facilitators, digital educators, inclusive classroom managers, and mentors for students' character development. This study uses a qualitative approach with a library research method. Data were obtained from books, journal articles, international reports, and academic documents relevant to teachers' professional identity, gender in education, female teachers' professionalism, and 21st-century learning. The data were analyzed using content analysis through the processes of selection, grouping, interpretation, and synthesis of the literature. The findings show that female teachers' professional identity is dynamically constructed through teaching experience, personal values, school culture, curriculum demands, technological development, and gender norms. Female teachers do not merely perform teaching functions. They also build professional agency through the use of technology, classroom management, collaborative learning, and the creation of inclusive learning spaces. However, this identity construction still faces gender expectations, social burdens, and limited access to career development. This study confirms that strengthening female teachers' professional identity requires continuous training, digital literacy, a fair school culture, and gender-responsive education policies.

Keywords: *Female Teachers, Professional Identity, 21st-Century Learning*

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Introduction

Twenty-first-century education places teachers in an increasingly complex position. Teachers no longer serve only as transmitters of subject matter. They also act as learning facilitators, designers of learning experiences, character mentors, technology users, and managers of student diversity. This shift occurs because current learning practices are moving toward more active, collaborative, digital, inclusive, and student-centered learning. (UNESCO, 2024) emphasizes that educational technology should be used to support learning processes that continue to place students' interests and human interaction at the center of education, not to replace the role of teachers.

In this context, teachers' professional identity becomes an important issue to examine. Teachers' professional identity can be understood as the way teachers make meaning of themselves, their roles, their professional values, their responsibilities, and the ways they act in learning practices. This identity is not fixed. Teachers' professional identity is shaped by teaching experience, education, school culture, relationships with students, curriculum demands, technological development, and social norms in society. Through a systematic review, (Semjonova, 2024) shows that teachers' professional identity is fluid, contextual, composed of various subidentities, and closely related to teachers' agency in performing their roles.

The study of female teachers' professional identity is relevant because the teaching profession in many contexts, including Indonesia, involves a large number of women. Dapodik Kemendikdasmen provides teacher data by semester and level of education, while a summary of data for the second semester of 2024/2025 referring to Kemendikdasmen shows that approximately 71.97% of teachers in Indonesia are women. This figure indicates that female teachers are not a marginal group in the education system. They are key actors who directly shape learning practices in schools.

However, the large number of female teachers does not necessarily mean that their professional experiences have been adequately understood. Female teachers often work in professional spaces shaped by pedagogical demands, institutional expectations, administrative responsibilities, social relations at school, and gender constructions in society. They are expected to be professional, adaptive, and innovative educators. At the same time, they are often attached to social expectations as figures who are patient, nurturing, obedient, emotionally composed, and capable of carrying domestic roles beyond their work. This condition means that female teachers' professional identity cannot be understood only through teaching competence. It must also be understood through the negotiation of professional roles, personal experience, and gender norms.

Recent research shows that teachers' professional identity is influenced by various personal, occupational, and educational factors. (Herrera-Espinoza et al., 2024) found that personal factors such as sex, age, family burden, and marital status are related to teachers' professional identity. Occupational factors such as type of contract, years of service, remuneration, and training also help explain the formation of teachers' professional identity. This finding is important because it shows that professional identity is not only the result of pedagogical training. It is also shaped by the social and structural conditions embedded in teachers' lives.

In 21st-century learning practices, female teachers also face changes related to educational digitalization. Teachers are required to master learning technologies, select digital learning resources, use learning platforms, manage hybrid classrooms, and adapt teaching strategies to the characteristics of students who are increasingly familiar with technology. Through (OECD, 2025), the OECD reported that around one-third of teachers have used artificial intelligence in teaching, while seven out of ten teachers are also concerned about the risks of plagiarism and academic cheating. These data show that technology does not only change teaching tools. It also changes how teachers understand authority, ethics, assessment, and professionalism.

These digital changes have a direct impact on the construction of female teachers' professional identity. On the one hand, technology gives female teachers opportunities to expand access to learning resources, develop pedagogical creativity, build professional networks, and increase autonomy in learning. On the other hand, digitalization can also increase workload, expand demands for responsiveness, and create new pressures in the form of digital administration, online communication with parents, and expectations that teachers must always adapt to technological change. (Kahn, 2021) shows that the integration of artificial intelligence in teacher training produces identity tensions, such as tensions between humans and technology, continuity and openness, and individual and professional group identities.

In addition to digitalization, 21st-century learning practices also require teachers to build classrooms that are inclusive, dialogic, and responsive to student diversity. In this respect, female teachers' professional identity can be formed through everyday classroom practices, such as managing interactions, creating space for participation, resolving conflict, using fair language, and building safe learning relationships. (Lelatobur et al., 2024) show that gender influences classroom management and learning implementation. In that study, female teachers demonstrated very good performance in classroom management and learning implementation, while professional responsibility was rated good among both female and male teachers.

Nevertheless, studies on female teachers need to avoid perspectives that simplify women as naturally more patient, softer, or more suited to becoming educators. Such views can reinforce gender stereotypes. Research on the construction of female teachers' professional identity needs to view female teachers as professional subjects who actively form, negotiate, and reconstruct their identities amid the demands of 21st-century learning. In other words, female teachers should not be understood merely as curriculum implementers. They should be seen as pedagogical actors who possess agency, experience, strategies, and professional reflection.

Based on this discussion, research on the construction of female teachers' professional identity in 21st-century learning practices is important. This study is needed to understand how female teachers make meaning of themselves as professional educators, how they negotiate gender roles and professional demands, and how they build adaptive, digital, and inclusive learning practices. This focus offers novelty because it combines three main issues: teachers' professional identity, women's experiences in the teaching profession, and the transformation of 21st-century learning practices.

Academically, this study can enrich scholarship on teachers' professional identity from a gender perspective. Practically, this study can provide input for schools, education managers, and policymakers in designing teacher professional development that is fairer, more contextual, and more sensitive to female teachers' experiences. Thus, this study does not discuss female teachers merely as research objects. It also positions them as professional subjects who play an important role in shaping the quality of 21st-century learning.

Literature Review

1. Female Teachers' Professional Identity

Teachers' professional identity refers to the way teachers understand themselves as educators, make meaning of their professional duties, and display the values, commitments, and responsibilities of their profession in learning practices. This identity does not stand merely as a formal status. It is shaped by teaching experience, relationships with students, school culture, curriculum demands, technological development, and social expectations toward the teaching profession. (Kimberly R. Logan & James M.M Hartwick, 2019) emphasizes that teachers' professional identity is dynamic, contextual, has subidentities, and continues to be shaped throughout teachers' careers. This means that teachers do not become teachers only because of their position. They become teachers through an ongoing process of reflection, experience, and role negotiation.

In the context of female teachers, professional identity cannot be separated from gendered experience. Female teachers do not only face pedagogical demands. They also face social expectations that often attach women to patience, carefulness, attentiveness, and the ability to nurture. These expectations may recognize the role of female teachers, but they may also limit their professional space if women are seen only as maternal figures rather than as educators with pedagogical, intellectual, leadership, and professional agency. Therefore, female teachers' professional identity needs to be understood as a construction that involves personal experience, gender norms, school culture, and professional demands.

(Herrera-Espinoza et al., 2024) show that teachers' professional identity is influenced by personal, occupational, and educational factors. Personal factors include gender, age, family burden, and marital status. Occupational factors include type of contract, years of service, remuneration, and training. This finding is important because it shows that teachers' professional identity is not only shaped by teaching competence. It is also shaped by social conditions embedded in teachers' lives. In this regard, female teachers may experience a distinctive process of identity formation because they often stand between school demands, family responsibilities, and social norms governing women's roles.

2. Gender, Agency, and Female Teachers' Professionalism

Female teachers need to be positioned as active professional subjects, not merely as implementers of teaching duties. In studies of professional identity, agency is an important concept because it shows teachers' ability to make decisions, develop strategies, adjust learning practices, and respond to educational change. Female teachers build agency through the ways they manage classrooms, select teaching methods, use technology, communicate with students, and negotiate school demands and social responsibilities. (Lupita et al., 2024) positions agency as an important element in research on teachers' professional identity because teacher identity is formed through interaction between the teacher's self and the professional context.

Studies on female teachers must also avoid gender stereotypes. For example, when female teachers are considered better at building emotional closeness or managing classrooms, this should not be directly interpreted as a natural female trait. Such findings need to be understood as part of social experience, professional practice, workplace culture, and opportunities for self-development. (UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2025) found that gender influences classroom management and learning implementation. Female teachers in that study showed higher scores in the domains of classroom management and learning implementation, while professional responsibility was rated good among both female and male teachers. This finding supports the importance of reading gender critically, not stereotypically.

Female teachers' professionalism in this article is understood as the ability to carry out pedagogical roles reflectively, adaptively, and responsibly. Professionalism is not only visible in the completeness of teaching administration. It is also visible in how female teachers build pedagogical relationships, manage student diversity, use technology meaningfully, and maintain professional ethics. Thus, the construction of female teachers' professional identity is a complex process because it brings together agency, gendered experience, school culture, and the structure of professional opportunities.

3. 21st-Century Learning Practices

Twenty-first-century learning requires teachers to perform roles that are broader than those in traditional learning models. Teachers can no longer be only transmitters of content. They must also be facilitators, mentors, learning designers, inclusive classroom managers, technology users, and student character mentors. This shift affects teachers' professional identity because teachers must continuously reinterpret their roles amid the demands of active, collaborative, creative, critical, digital, and diversity-responsive learning. (Fauzi, A., &

Sulistyo, 2024) emphasizes that technology in education should be used for learning, equitable access, and educational quality, not simply to follow the trend of digitalization.

Educational digitalization is an important factor in the construction of female teachers' professional identity. Female teachers are required to use digital platforms, interactive media, online learning resources, and artificial intelligence-based technologies. On the one hand, technology creates opportunities for female teachers to develop creativity, expand learning resources, build professional networks, and improve the quality of learning. On the other hand, technology can also increase workload, such as digital administration, online communication with parents, adaptation to learning applications, and pressure to keep up with technological innovation. (UNESCO, 2023a) reminds us that educational technology must be positioned as a tool controlled by pedagogical goals, not as a substitute for human relationships in education.

Research Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach with a library research design. Library research was selected because this study aims to examine the construction of female teachers' professional identity based on theories, previous research findings, and relevant academic documents. The focus of the study is not directed toward field data collection but toward a review of literature on teachers' professional identity, gender in the teaching profession, female teachers' professionalism, and 21st-century learning practices. Through this approach, the study seeks to formulate a conceptual understanding of how female teachers' professional identity is formed, negotiated, and displayed in contemporary educational contexts.

The data sources consist of academic books, scholarly journal articles, proceedings, international institutional reports, and relevant educational policy documents. The literature was selected based on several criteria, namely whether it discusses teachers' professional identity, female teachers, gender and education, learning digitalization, 21st-century learning, or teacher professionalism. Journal articles published within the last five years were prioritized to reflect recent developments. However, classical or theoretical literature was still used when it had strong relevance as a conceptual foundation. Sources that were not directly related to the research focus were not used as primary data.

Data were collected through documentation, namely by searching, reading, taking notes on, and grouping various sources of literature according to the research focus. The literature search used keywords such as teacher professional identity, female teachers, gender and education, women teachers, 21st-century learning, digital pedagogy, teacher agency, and teacher professionalism. The collected literature was then classified into three main themes: female teachers' professional identity, gender and female teachers' professionalism, and 21st-century learning practices.

The data were analyzed using content analysis. The analysis was conducted by critically reading the sources, identifying the main ideas, comparing findings across studies, and developing a conceptual synthesis. The stages of analysis included data reduction, data presentation, interpretation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was carried out by selecting relevant information. Data presentation was conducted in the form of thematic descriptions. Interpretation was carried out by connecting theories of teachers' professional identity, gender perspectives, and the demands of 21st-century learning. The conclusion was then formulated based on the patterns and conceptual relationships found in the literature.

Results

Based on the literature review, this study found that the construction of female teachers' professional identity in 21st-century learning practices is formed through three main dimensions. First, female teachers' professional identity is shaped by teaching experience, professional values, pedagogical relationships, and self-awareness as educators. Second, this identity is influenced by gender constructions, social burdens, and professional opportunities within the school environment. Third, 21st-century learning, especially digitalization, inclusive

learning, and the use of technology, encourages female teachers to continue negotiating their professional roles.

1. Female Teachers' Professional Identity as a Dynamic Process

The review shows that female teachers' professional identity is not formed instantly. It develops through teaching experience, interaction with students, curriculum demands, school culture, and personal reflection on the teaching profession. Female teachers do not only understand themselves as instructors. They also understand themselves as mentors, classroom managers, learning facilitators, character guides, and actors who help determine the quality of the learning process.

This finding is consistent with (Mhd. Habibu Rahman, 2025; Semjonova, 2024), who explains that teachers' professional identity is fluid, contextual, consists of several subidentities, and develops throughout a career. In other words, teachers' professional identity is not fixed. It continues to be shaped by experiences, relationships, and social changes in education. In the context of female teachers, the process of forming professional identity becomes more complex because it intersects with gendered experience. Female teachers are often positioned as patient, careful, gentle, and nurturing figures.

This view may strengthen social recognition of female teachers' roles, but it also risks limiting their professional identity if their competence is only associated with maternal qualities. In fact, female teachers also build their professionalism through pedagogical capacity, reflective ability, technological mastery, classroom management, and learning decision-making. (Mulyasa, 2021) show that teachers' professional identity is influenced by personal, occupational, and educational factors. Personal factors include gender, age, family burden, and marital status. Occupational factors include type of contract, years of service, remuneration, and training. This finding strengthens the view that female teachers' professional identity is not only shaped by teaching competence. It is also shaped by the social and structural conditions attached to their professional lives. Based on this synthesis, this study finds that female teachers' professional identity is the result of negotiation among three elements. The first element is personal experience as women. The second is professional demands as teachers. The third is the transformation of 21st-century learning practices. These three elements influence one another and shape how female teachers understand themselves, perform their duties, and display professionalism in learning.

2. Gender, Agency, and Female Teachers' Professionalism

The literature review shows that female teachers need to be understood as active professional subjects, not merely as curriculum implementers. Female teachers have agency in choosing learning strategies, managing classrooms, using digital media, building communication with students, and responding to changes in education policy. This agency is an important part of professional identity construction because it shows female teachers' ability to act, interpret situations, and make pedagogical decisions.

In practice, female teachers often face dual demands. They are required to be professional at school, but they also often face social expectations in their families and communities. This condition can influence how female teachers build their professional identity. If schools provide support, development opportunities, and professional recognition, female teachers' identity can develop more strongly. Conversely, if schools continue to place female teachers within gender stereotypes, their space for agency may become limited.

(Lelatobur et al., 2024) found that female and male teachers were equally able to design learning well. However, female teachers demonstrated very good performance in classroom management and learning implementation, while professional responsibility was rated good in both gender groups. The study also showed that gender influences classroom management and the implementation of learning.

However, these findings should not be read stereotypically. Female teachers' performance in classroom management does not mean that women are naturally more suited to becoming teachers. The results need to be understood as part of social experience, professional training,

school culture, and work processes that shape pedagogical ability. Therefore, discussions of female teachers need to move from the view of 'women as natural caregivers' toward the view of 'women as professional actors with competence, reflection, and agency'.

Another issue found in the literature is the limited representation of women in educational leadership. UNESCO, in the 2024/2025 Global Education Monitoring Report, highlights that although many women are involved as teachers, educational leadership is still more often occupied by men. UNESCO's gender report also confirms that most teachers are women, but educational leadership remains dominated by men. This finding shows that the construction of female teachers' professional identity does not occur only in the classroom. It also occurs within the institutional structure of schools. Female teachers may have strong pedagogical capacity, but they do not necessarily have equal access to leadership, strategic training, and decision-making. Therefore, female teachers' professionalism needs to be read in relation to gender justice, access to career development, and recognition of their professional roles.

3. 21st-Century Learning Practices as a Space for Identity Negotiation

The review shows that 21st-century learning practices are an important space for female teachers to form and display their professional identity. Twenty-first-century learning requires teachers to develop learning that is active, collaborative, creative, critical, digital, inclusive, and student-centered. These demands shift the teacher's role from content transmitter to facilitator, mentor, learning designer, and manager of the learning environment.

Digitalization is one of the strongest factors in changing teachers' professional identity. Female teachers are required to use learning technologies, digital platforms, interactive media, online learning resources, and artificial intelligence appropriately. (Russell & Norvig, 2021) emphasizes that educational technology should be used based on relevance, equity, scalability, and sustainability. Technology should support the quality of learning, not replace human relationships in education.

In this context, female teachers face both opportunities and challenges. Technology provides opportunities to develop learning creativity, broaden access to materials, increase variation in teaching methods, and build professional networks. However, technology can also increase workload, such as digital administration, online communication with parents, the creation of learning media, and the demand to continuously follow new applications.

Through (OECD, 2025), the OECD shows that around one-third of teachers use artificial intelligence in teaching work. Teachers use AI to summarize topics, prepare lesson plans, and create learning activities. However, many teachers are also concerned about the risks of plagiarism and academic cheating. These findings show that 21st-century learning does not only change teaching tools. It also changes the meaning of teacher professionalism. Female teachers must build an identity as educators who are adaptive to technology while maintaining ethics, assessment validity, pedagogical closeness, and human values in learning. Thus, technology becomes a space for identity negotiation. Female teachers need to balance demands for innovation with pedagogical values that remain centered on students.

In addition to digitalization, 21st-century learning also requires teachers to build inclusive and gender-responsive classrooms. Female teachers can play an important role in creating learning spaces that are safe, communicative, and respectful of student diversity. However, this role should not be understood as a natural obligation of women. Inclusive classrooms are a professional competence for all teachers. In this study, female teachers are positioned as professional subjects who build inclusive learning through competence, experience, reflection, and agency.

4. The Construction of Female Teachers' Professional Identity in Learning Practices

Based on the synthesis, the construction of female teachers' professional identity in 21st-century learning practices can be explained through four main forms.

First, identity as a learning facilitator. Female teachers do not only deliver subject matter. They also help students understand concepts, develop thinking skills, collaborate, and solve

problems. This identity is reflected in the use of discussion methods, projects, collaborative learning, and student-centered approaches.

Second, identity as a reflective classroom manager. Female teachers build their professionalism through the ability to manage interactions, maintain classroom order, create space for participation, and respond fairly to students' needs. The findings of (Kattan, 2023) support the view that classroom management is one important domain that shows differences in performance by gender, although it must still be read critically so as not to reinforce stereotypes.

Third, identity as a digital educator. Female teachers form their professional identity through the ability to use technology meaningfully. Technology is not used only to make learning attractive. It is used to strengthen students' access, participation, and understanding. This aligns with (UNESCO, 2023), which positions technology as an educational tool that must be controlled by learning goals.

Fourth, identity as an agent of justice and inclusive learning. Female teachers can build classrooms that respect differences, reduce gender bias, and provide equal learning opportunities for all students. This identity shows that female teachers do not only play a role in academic instruction. They also help shape a learning culture that is ethical, fair, and humane.

The findings of this study show that female teachers' professional identity cannot be explained only through pedagogical competence. This identity is the result of interaction among personal experience, gender norms, school culture, digitalization demands, and learning practices. Thus, female teachers' professional identity is relational and contextual.

This discussion also shows that female teachers should not be positioned only as maternal figures in education. Such a view is too narrow because it ignores the intellectual, pedagogical, leadership, and professional agency dimensions of female teachers. Female teachers need to be viewed as professional educators who can think reflectively, make decisions, develop learning strategies, and shape classroom culture.

In 21st-century learning practices, female teachers face the demand to continue changing. They must understand the curriculum, master technology, manage student diversity, maintain digital ethics, and build meaningful learning. These demands can become a burden, but they can also become a space for strengthening professional identity if supported by training, a fair school culture, and gender-sensitive policies. Thus, the construction of female teachers' professional identity needs to be understood as an active process. Female teachers do not merely accept roles given by schools or society. They also interpret, negotiate, and reshape those roles through everyday learning practices.

Conclusion

The construction of female teachers' professional identity in 21st-century learning practices is a dynamic, contextual, and continuously developing process. This identity is not only formed by formal status as educators, but also by teaching experience, personal values, relationships with students, school culture, curriculum demands, technological development, and gender norms in society. Female teachers build their professional identity through their roles as learning facilitators, classroom managers, digital educators, character mentors, and agents of inclusive learning. This study also shows that female teachers need to be understood as professional subjects with agency, not merely as caregivers or implementers of teaching duties. In 21st-century learning, female teachers face both opportunities and challenges from digitalization, collaborative learning demands, and the need for inclusive classrooms. Therefore, strengthening female teachers' professional identity needs to be supported through continuous training, a fair school culture, digital literacy, and education policies that are more gender-sensitive and provide equal space for female teachers' career development.

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