

Reconstructing Teacher Identity in the Digital Age: A Critical Discourse Study of Influencer Practices in Madrasahs

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Article history: Received: October 06, 2023 | Revised: Desember 26, 2023 | Available
Online: Januari 27, 2025

Abstract

This study examines the growing phenomenon of influencer teachers in Islamic educational institutions known as Madrasah, focusing on how they discursively shape and negotiate their professional identities in digital spaces. Using a qualitative approach with Fairclough's critical discourse analysis framework, this study explores the intersection between Islamic scientific values and social media performativity on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Research data consists of 30–40 social media posts, non-participatory observations, and semi-structured interviews with 5–8 teacher influencers who meet the following criteria: consistent in creating educational or religious content, having significant digital followers ($\geq 5,000$), and receiving academic recognition. Findings reveal that the construction of teacher professionalism in digital spaces is ambiguous: on the one hand, digital engagement expands the dissemination of Islamic knowledge and strengthens teachers' public role; on the other hand, they face algorithmic pressures and performative demands that potentially reduce ethical and epistemic depth. This study identifies ideological tensions and hybrid identities in teachers' digital discourse through Fairclough's three-dimensional framework of text analysis, discourse practices, and social context. It proposes a conceptual model of Reflective Digital Professionalism, encompassing four main dimensions: epistemic identity, digital ethics, media literacy, and reflective criticism. This model expands the traditional understanding of teacher professionalism by incorporating digital socio-cultural dynamics within the context of Islamic education. Practically, this study encourages Islamic educational institutions to develop strategic internal policies that regulate and facilitate teachers' digital role through ethics training, media literacy programs, and reflective community monitoring.

Keywords: influencer teachers, digital professionalism, Islamic education

INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation in the education sector has given rise to a new phenomenon known as "influencer teachers," educators who utilise digital platforms not only to deliver learning materials but also to shape public opinion and build their professional identities. This trend is skyrocketing in Indonesia, particularly in Islamic educational institutions, with internet penetration reaching 77% in 2022 (APJII, 2022). Teachers at Islamic campuses now play a dual role: they are not only educators in the classroom but also public communicators who disseminate values, ideas, and professional images through social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube (Fadil, Alfaien, & Kosim, 2023).

This phenomenon opens up new opportunities for disseminating Islamic values contextually and innovatively. However, the presence of teachers as digital public figures also raises critical questions about the meaning and direction of teacher professionalism. On the one hand, they can expand the influence of their education and religion more broadly; on the other hand, pressure from algorithms and the demand to appear attractive on social media can push teachers toward forming superficial images, moving away from academic substance and Islamic ethical values. This challenges the principles of teacher professionalism emphasised in Law Number 14 of 2005 on Teachers and Educators, emphasising pedagogical, personal, social, and professional competencies (Ramli et al., 2023). According to Susilawati et al. (2021), the role of influencers can be value-added if developed reflectively and based on educational research. However, if not critically evaluated, this can reduce the role of teachers to mere visual images.

This study specifically focuses on how influencer teachers shape and negotiate their professional identities through discourse practices on social media. Unlike previous studies that only examine the impact of digital presence on professionalism, this study focuses on the process of professional identity construction, namely, how the language, symbols, and performative narratives used by teachers on social media reflect and shape new understandings of teacher professionalism in the context of Islamic education.

Previous studies have addressed related themes but remain partial. For example, Nurhayati, Siraj, and Yaumi (2020) discussed the influence of madrasah principals' supervision on teacher quality but did not address the digital realm. Desiriyanti (2019) highlighted the role of social media in enhancing teacher professionalism in madrasahs but did not explore identity construction. Misniati (2022) highlighted the disruption of online learning by the presence of influencers but did not relate it to the teaching profession. Ilyas

et al. (2023) analysed lecturers' competencies in the digital context without highlighting social media as a professional space. Syah & Jaeni (2023) discuss teachers' competencies in developing students' critical thinking without involving the digital influence dimension. This indicates that the intersection between digital influence and the formation of professional identity among teachers in Islamic educational institutions remains under-explored.

This study addresses this gap through a critical discourse analysis of social media content produced by influencer teachers at PTKI. By analysing how they construct narratives, respond to public expectations, and digitally convey scientific and Islamic values, this study offers a new conceptual framework: Digital-Reflective Professionalism. This framework integrates the epistemological dimensions of Islam with the demands of digital visibility, offering theoretical innovations and practical policy directions for the development.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative approach with a critical discourse analysis method. The primary focus of the research is to understand how teacher influencers shape, convey, and negotiate the meaning of teacher professionalism in the context of Islamic education through social media. Critical discourse analysis was chosen because this method allows researchers to examine not only the content of the message but also the social context and ideology that shape it (Fairclough, 1995).

The subjects in this study are teachers of Islamic Education Institutions who are active on social media and known as *educational influencers*. The subject selection criteria include: first, actively uploading educational or Islamic content on digital platforms (such as Instagram, TikTok, or YouTube). Second, having a significant number of followers ($\geq 5,000$). Third, being recognised by the academic community or the public. Second, having a significant number of followers ($\geq 5,000$). Third, being recognised by the academic community or the public. The primary data studied are captions and narratives in social media posts. Second, Videos or visual uploads with educational or religious messages. Third, public comments and interactions (comments, reposts, discussions).

Data was collected by documenting influencer teachers' social media posts (30-40 posts over the past 3 months). Second, non-participatory observation of teachers' social media activities to see communication patterns, audience responses, and central themes of the content. Third, semi-structured interviews with 5-8 teachers to explore their motivations, values, and views on teacher professionalism in the digital era.

The analysis was conducted by referring to Norman Fairclough's (1995) framework, which consists of three stages: first, Text Analysis; analysing the language structure, delivery style, word choice, and central message in social media posts. Second, Discourse Practice analyses how teachers produce and disseminate discourse through social media and how audiences respond to it. Third, Social Context: Examining the relationship between the discourse built and the socio-professional structure of teachers in Islamic education. To ensure the validity of the data, researchers used several steps, including the following: first, collecting data from uploads, interviews, and institutional documents. Second, confirm results with several key informants. Ethical aspects were maintained by keeping identities confidential, seeking participants' consent, and not publishing personal content without permission.

DISCUSSION

Convergence of Public and Academic Spaces in Teacher Influencer Discourse

The phenomenon of influencer teachers reflects a structural shift in the teaching profession, where professional identities are no longer limited to classrooms and formal institutions but are also formed in digital public spaces. The concept of *context collapse* (Marwick & Boyd, 2011) provides an initial framework for understanding how the boundaries between personal, professional, and public communication are blurred, especially on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube.

In the discursive practices of influencer teachers, there is what Fairclough (1995) calls the *textualisation of ideology*, where Islamic scientific and religious values are negotiated through language, symbols, and visual narratives. The discourse they build reflects an epistemological position and an identity strategy in responding to digital audience expectations.

Sánchez-Tarazaga and Ferrández-Berrueco's study (2022) introduces the concept of *networked professionalism*, a model of professionalism supported by digital networks. Teacher influencers represent this model- they mobilise content to expand their educational influence, but also face the risk of reducing professionalism to mere visual images or impressions. This aligns with Nesje, Carrinus and Strype's (2018) critique of the increasing pressure on teachers to appear "inspirational" while neglecting the depth of pedagogical and ethical substance.

Repositioning Professionalism in the Digital Age

Teacher professionalism in Islamic Education Institutions has been based on the normative framework of four competencies: pedagogic, professional, social and personality (Law No. 14 of 2005). However, as highlighted by Eraut (2002), modern professionalism includes technical mastery reflective skills, and the capacity to adapt to rapid socio-cultural change.

Guru influencers present an ambivalence. On the one hand, they open new channels for contextualised and innovative dissemination of Islamic values. On the other hand, they are also under the pressure of algorithmic logic and the culture of virality. Bayne (2016) calls this "performative tension," a situation where educators are caught between pedagogical idealism and the demands of media visibility. Welagedara's (2024) research strengthens this argument by asserting that *digital pedagogical literacy*, the ability to use social media in a reflective and value-based manner, is an important marker of new professionalism in the digital era.

Literature Integration: From Sectoral Approaches to Interdisciplinary Models

Previous studies have shown that teacher professionalism and digital media research is still largely sectoral. For example:

1. Supervision and Academic Competence: Pipin (2024) highlights the importance of principal supervision, but has not linked it to the digital space as a professional ecosystem.
2. Disruption in Learning: Azman et al. (2024) noted the challenges of online learning in madrasas, but did not link it to teachers' self-representation as public figures.
3. Academic Ethics and Technology: Fadhilah (2024) found a gap between the use of technology and scholarly ethics in Islamic universities.

This research aims to bridge the fragmentation through a critical discourse analysis approach, which sees texts as linguistic objects and social practices. Thus, influencer teachers are not only positioned as media users but as producers of meaning, ideology, and professional identity.

This research introduces a new conceptual model, Digital-Reflective Professionalism, which combines Islamic, academic and digital dimensions in the framework of teacher professionalism. The model is built from four main components:

1. Scholarly Identity Affirmation of Islamic epistemic values in digitally delivered public narratives.

2. Digital Ethics Strengthening the principles of civilisation and academic integrity in online content production.
3. Media Proficiency Mastery of algorithms, visual narratives and audience engagement strategies used to convey educational value.
4. Reflective Criticality. The ability to assess the socio-psychological impact of a digital presence, including power relations, public acceptance, and the impact on the profession's image.

This model not only develops theories about the teaching profession, but also becomes an evaluative framework that LPTI can practically apply in fostering and directing lecturers or teachers who are active on social media.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This research contributes to expanding professionalism theory in the context of Islamic education and digital culture. This study enriches the *networked professionalism* approach (Kelchtermans, 2017; Sánchez-Tarazaga & Ferrández-Berruico, 2022) with Islamic values and academic ethics dimensions.

Practically, the results of this study can be used as a basis for: the Development of digital ethics policies in Islamic Education Institutions, Islamic value-based media literacy training and evaluation instruments for teachers' digital roles reflectively and contextually.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that the emergence of influencer teachers in Islamic Education Institutions is a contemporary phenomenon that represents the convergence between academic and digital public spaces. In this context, teachers act as conventional educators and discourse producers who shape and spread professionalism, Islamic and academic values through social media platforms. The findings show that the representation of teacher professionalism in social media is ambivalent. On the one hand, it opens space for disseminating knowledge and Islamic values in a contextualised manner and strengthens the relationship between teachers and the wider community. On the other hand, teachers are also faced with algorithmic pressure and the logic of digital performativity that can potentially reduce professionalism to a superficial symbolic image. This condition creates a real ethical dilemma in the practice of Islamic higher education.

Through a critical discourse analysis approach, this study has identified that the discursive practices of influencer teachers reflect the tension between Islamic epistemic

values and the demands of digital platforms. An exploration of teachers' social media texts and narratives reveals the existence of ideological practices that mediate the role of teachers as scientific actors and socio-cultural actors at the same time. This study proposes a conceptual framework of Digital-Reflective Professionalism, which includes dimensions of scholarly identity, digital ethics, media savvy and reflective criticality. This model extends the traditional understanding of teacher professionalism and offers a new framework for reading professional identity in the digital transformation era. The practical implications of this research emphasise the importance of establishing internal policies in Islamic Education Institutions that not only limit but also direct and foster the digital activities of lecturers and teachers. The development of digital ethics training, the integration of media literacy in professional development, and community-based monitoring are strategic steps to maintain harmony between digital performance and the value of professionalism in Islamic education.

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