



Building Professional Identities as English Language Teachers with Islamic Spiritual Values through Collaborative Digital Storytelling

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APA Citation: Yanda, F. (2026). Building Professional Identities as English Language Teachers with Islamic Spiritual Values through Collaborative Digital Storytelling. <i>iRecall Journal</i> , 4(1), 28-46.	
Received 30/06/2026 Received in revised form 30/06/2026 Accepted 30/06/2026	ABSTRACT Drawing on a larger virtual ethnography study, this case study research examined how digital storytelling affected preservice teachers’ professional identity construction as future English teachers with Islamic spiritual values. Within the context of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, preservice teachers completed movie watching and digital storytelling projects in which they were required to compose and design digital narratives based on their movie watching experiences, reflect during the process, and consider the Islamic values they have learned from the movies within the digital videos they made. Data were collected from 17 teacher candidates from an English language teacher education program in Indonesia and analyzed using qualitative methods. Findings showed that preservice teachers’ experiences with making their own digital stories contributed to their developing professional identities as teachers and shaped their perceptions about how to become better English teachers with Islamic backgrounds. Keywords: Collaborative digital storytelling; English language teacher education; professional identities; situated learning; spiritual values. ABSTRAK <i>Berdasarkan studi etnografi virtual yang lebih besar, penelitian studi kasus ini mengkaji bagaimana penceritaan digital memengaruhi konstruksi identitas profesional calon guru sebagai calon guru bahasa Inggris dengan nilai-nilai spiritual Islam.</i>

Dalam konteks pembelajaran daring selama pandemi COVID-19, calon guru menyelesaikan proyek menonton film dan penceritaan digital di mana mereka diharuskan untuk menyusun dan mendesain narasi digital berdasarkan pengalaman menonton film mereka, merefleksikan proses tersebut, dan mempertimbangkan nilai-nilai Islam yang telah mereka pelajari dari film-film tersebut dalam video digital yang mereka buat. Data dikumpulkan dari 17 calon guru dari program pendidikan guru bahasa Inggris di Indonesia dan dianalisis menggunakan metode kualitatif. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa pengalaman calon guru dalam membuat cerita digital mereka sendiri berkontribusi pada pengembangan identitas profesional mereka sebagai guru dan membentuk persepsi mereka tentang bagaimana menjadi guru bahasa Inggris yang lebih baik dengan latar belakang Islam.

Kata kunci: *Bercerita digital kolaboratif; pendidikan guru bahasa Inggris; identitas profesional; pembelajaran kontekstual; nilai-nilai spiritual.*

Introduction

Learners in today's era are growing up in a technologically-driven society where digital tools and texts are pervasive (Joshi & Rose, 2018; Shinas & Wen, 2022). Young students demand opportunities to use technology in and out of the classroom because they use smartphones, laptops, and tablets for play, communication, and exploration. Thus, in order to engage students and facilitate learning, it is crucial that new teachers enter the classroom prepared to integrate technology (Islim et al., 2018). How to equip preservice teachers (PSTs) to use technology in pedagogically sound instruction has been a long-standing practice issue for teacher education (Farjon et al., 2019; Wilson, 2021). Despite the fact that new teachers frequently use digital tools and technologies adeptly for their own reasons, they frequently do not incorporate technology into their lessons (Tondeur et al., 2017a).

The integration of technology is seen as a complex matter; and novice teachers may not have the pedagogical expertise needed to effectively incorporate digital resources (Tondeur et al., 2017b). Teacher educators are expected to pay attention on how their courses is able to provide teacher candidates opportunities for technology integration (Stewart et al., 2021). Digital storytelling (DST) is one example of an innovative, promising technique that offers chances to teach, model, and scaffold teacher candidates in the practical integration of technology into the teacher education curriculum (Çetin, 2021). With this in mind, the current study is intended to explore how DST projects prepared English language teacher candidates to utilize digital tools, as well as influenced their perceptions of becoming future teachers with spiritual values.

Literature Review

Collaborative Digital Storytelling

Digital stories are multimodal literary and nonfiction narratives that take advantage of digital environments' capabilities (Robin, 2016). It involves visual and audio components, such as images, text, music and various audio components, video, and animated features that are seamlessly woven together to produce interactive, immersive stories (Chan et al., 2017; Gregori-Signes, 2014). Authors create original, multimodal texts that enable them to powerfully express their thoughts and identities (Chisholm & Trent, 2013). It is important to note that DST helps EFL (English as a foreign language) primary students in developing their story literacy, digital literacy, learning engagement and motivation (Ferdiansyah, 2023; Lestariyana & Widodo, 2018; Widodo, 2016). It also promotes their vocabulary building as well as cultural identity representation (Kristiawan et al., 2022).

Recent studies support the effectiveness of DST as a tool for K-12 education. It helps students in K-12 enhance their literacy and understand content (Vasudevan et al., 2010). In the K-12 classrooms, students get advantages from authentic opportunities to participate in deep, meaningful learning (Barret, 2006) and to create their own digital, multimodal texts utilizing both traditional and digital writing techniques (Özüdoğru & Çakir, 2020). As digital tools and texts have proliferated in schools, researchers have looked at the advantages of incorporating DST to foster students' engaged learning and develop their digital literacy skills (Mullen & Wedwick, 2008; Vasudevan et al., 2010).

For instance, when participating in a DST project, students create texts for authentic audiences and use technology to apply their growing understanding of novel concepts and vocabulary (Colwell & Hutchison, 2015). Additionally, students' meaning making during a DST project encourages "multimodal expression of emotions" (Mills & Unsworth, 2017: 618) to record and evoke emotions. DST is believed as a pedagogically-sound instructional approach for language learning (Hsieh, 2021) and collaborative learning in the English classroom (Okumus, 2020). It is also evident that DST can support teachers to overcome the ongoing lack of equitable access to high quality teaching to support the 21st century skills (Rowse et al., 2017). To solve this access issue, classroom teachers should have a set of knowledges, namely technology, pedagogy, and content (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). They also need to be aware of the multimodal nature of digital texts and environments (Gregori-Signes, 2014; Kress, 2010). It is considered insufficient to teach students to merely create printed tasks and materials. Learners of today's era are expected to be skilled designers and composers of multimodal, digital texts (Dalton, 2012) that can be shared with authentic audiences (Colwell & Hutchison, 2015).

DST has also been increasingly used in the teacher education sector. It is used to prepare teacher candidates for the technology integration into the learning and teaching process, as well as to develop their digital literacies and skills (Çetin, 2021). Teacher educators may integrate DST into their classrooms as a tool to teach and model pedagogically sound, student-centered technology use while fostering the growth of student teachers' reflective practices and professional identities (Chisholm & Trent, 2013; Kim et al., 2021). Preservice teachers may get benefits DST projects as in designing and creating digital stories for digital literacy development and engagement in authentic content creation (Özüdoğru & Çakır, 2020). Given the importance of preparing preservice teachers to integrate technology along with spiritual values within their teaching, one of the purposes of this research was to investigate if and how the integration of DST into a required teacher education course influenced teacher candidates' spirituality and professional identity in an online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. While most of DST studies focused on DST that was performed individually, the current study provides new insights that the project may be conducted collaboratively.

Teacher Professional Identities

English language teacher development from teacher candidates to professional teachers is a socially constructed process in a situated context that starts in preservice education (Sutherland et al., 2008). The construction of teacher identity encompasses an element of that process that includes learning to teach (Britzman, 2003). Nevertheless, because preservice teachers build their professional identities through participation in a complicated process, they are informed and influenced by their prior interactions with their teachers at schools and learning environments, by courses in their pre-service programs, as well as "by field placements and by societal expectations" (Beltman et al., 2015: 225). Additionally, during their teacher training courses, professional identity construction is a constant developmental stage of (re)interpretation (Schepens et al., 2009).

The constantly changing nature of teacher professional identity includes the self-

understanding of the preservice teachers (Kelchtermans, 2005) and focuses on inquiries, like “who am I as a teacher at this moment and who do I want to become as a teacher” (Schepens et al., 2009: 364). As student teachers engage in social activities and demonstrate their performance as group members, their identities also develop (Castañeda, 2011). This process of development includes different knowledge sources (Surgue, 1997), such as “students’ personality, their family or significant others, their teaching practice experiences, atypical teaching episodes, the policy context and teaching traditions and culture and tacitly acquired understandings” (Schepens et al., 2009, p. 364). Teacher candidates do not approach the field as laypeople or outsiders; instead, they base their decisions and worldviews on procedural knowledge, scientific ideas, and professional standards. Thus, teacher candidates do not approach the teaching profession as laypeople or outsiders, but they make decisions and frame their worldviews based on the professional practices, scientific concepts, and procedural knowledge (Day et al., 1995). Moreover, as “teacher education lays the foundations of professional identity” (Castañeda, 2011: 31) and helps preservice teachers as prospective English language teachers, teacher educators in programs of teacher education should present chances for preservice teachers to concentrate on their professional identities to generate a “clear self-image and ownership of an emerging professional identity” (Bennett, 2013: 55). It assists students in effectively transferring the theoretical knowledge and abilities learned in pre-service teacher education courses to real-world professional situations in the future.

In EFL situations, in which novel identities are formed as a result of learning English as a lingua franca (EFL) and international language (EIL), the notions of identity, its development, and transformation, are prominent. A study by Jackson (2015) looked into English language preservice teachers’ identities and efficacy in literacy conceptions and its teaching. The results showed that teacher candidates embraced a multifaceted literacy understanding that included both critical and sociocultural understandings. Additionally, as they were completing their teacher education, preservice teachers were constantly engaged in theorizing. Trent (2011) also carried out a qualitative study on English language student teachers’ identities that were constructed in a brief period of time while participating in an international teacher education program. The results imply that identity conflicts had an effect on the way preservice teachers perceived this program. Further, Kayi-Aydar (2015) investigates the negotiations and experiences of a student teacher in Spain in her identity change process as a narrative.

Some other researchers have also investigated preservice teachers’ professional identities through drawings (Beltman et al., 2015; Safari, 2019). For instance, Beltman et al. (2015) used drawing to study the professional identities of preservice primary teachers and discovered that they are able to create enjoyable learning environments, develop strong bonds with their students, and feel confident about their abilities as teachers. There was, however, little proof of the complexity of teaching. This presented a challenge for educators in regards to preparing preservice teachers for the realities of both the educational workplaces and settings. In the context of English language teacher education, Safari (2019) also uses drawings to explore their professional identities and found that preservice teachers have developed and reconstructed their identities in the rapidly changing global and cultural milieu produced by postmodernism perspectives and new

insights.

While there have been a body of research on the teacher professional identity construction and the benefits of movies and digital storytelling for educational purposes as previously demonstrated, it supports the novelty and uniqueness of the current study since there have been few studies undertaken to use the following resources, namely movies and digital storytelling, to uncover the professional identities of preservice teachers. Of the few studies, in the context of primary teacher education, Coggin et al. (2019) utilizes digital storytelling for student teachers to interpret personal experiences, their depiction of an ideal teacher, method coursework, and the internal conflict present in these occasionally divergent views of learning to teach. The results show that digital storytelling enhances student teachers' capacity for reflective practice in the nurturing setting of a teacher education program. In an interdisciplinary study that includes preservice teacher participants, Marín et al. (2017) also reports on the benefits of digital storytelling on the formation of student teachers' professional identities. Due to the lack of studies in the use of digital storytelling and movies for teacher professional identity construction, the recent study is intended to explore the use of such resources for the professional identity formation of English language student teachers.

Methodology

Research Context

The current study was established in an English language teacher education (ELTE) program in an Indonesian university, Uni B. The university is affiliated with Muhammadiyah, one of the largest moderate Muslim mass-based organizations in Indonesia. Like other Islamic educational institutions, the university is based on Islamic values and principles. For instance, it offers mandated Islamic courses for all programs, including ELTE, such as Islamic education, Islamic prayers, Islamic morality, and *Kemuhammadiyahan* or Muhammadiyahism (a course on Muhammadiyah ideology and history). As mandated by its affiliated organization (Muhammadiyah), its Islamic identity and values are to be incorporated into the courses. Initially founded as a nursing academy, the university has offered a variety of programs including ELTE. Like other universities in Indonesia, Uni B emphasized the use of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The framework stated that teacher candidates were expected to have teaching competencies and additional of supporting competencies, including character or moral values. To obtain this goal, the university's ELTE program offered three categories of courses, namely three-level English language courses, e.g., Basic English, Advance English 2, and Academic English; teaching courses, e.g., Introduction to Pedagogy, Curriculum and Material Development, and Teaching English as a Foreign Language; and research courses, e.g., Quantitative Research and Qualitative Research. The program employed seven permanent teacher educators with one to eighteen years of service. All of them held Masters' degrees in education. In support of the academic duties, they are sometimes assisted by non-permanent teacher educators. The number of teacher candidates enrolled in the program varied each year with an average of forty-four teacher candidates.

The university's ELTE program was conveniently selected for several reasons. Firstly,

the ELTE program offer specializations in creating English language teachers with Islamic identity and values. The program's PSTs are expected to work as English teachers at schools, both Islamic-based or secular-based. Secondly, I gained entry access to the university research project that was relevant to the university's vision and mission: preparing for and creating high-value and pious Muslim English teachers (The University Official Website, accessed in 2021). Additionally, since 2011, the Government of Indonesia has enacted the character or moral education policy in 2011 that all school subjects must be cultivated with character or moral values, including English (Mambu, 2015; Widodo, 2018). Therefore, English teachers have been encouraged not only to incorporate these values into their materials, but also perform these values in their daily lives, so they can be the role models of morality to the students. This study, therefore, takes an effort to contribute in preparing the English teacher candidates who can perform moral values that are driven by their spiritual beliefs. Thirdly, the university administrators, represented by the dean, showed positive response with this research project with a belief that the teacher educators and candidates may learn something useful from it. The study is also considered as part of teacher educator and teacher candidate professional development. Fourthly, the university was religious-based with a goal to prepare for its graduates having religious or spiritual values. Finally, the dean who was also a teacher educator was a closed colleague of mine. She was also a member of the Indonesian Researchers for Language Learning and Teaching (iRecall), a professional learning community for language education practitioners and researchers which I lead. This closed professional relationship helped me to easily access to the PSTs and adapt to the virtual sociocultural dimensions of the university, particularly during data collection in virtual settings. For ethical considerations, the real names of the university, her, and the PSTs were not mentioned throughout the paper. In exchange, I used the following names: Uni B for the university, Dira for the dean/teacher educator whose class I used for the study, and other pseudonyms for the PSTs (see Table 1 for more details).

To complete a teaching education program and obtain a bachelor degree in education –an essential requirement to become a teacher in Indonesia, as also demanded in the university, a teacher candidate is required to pass at least 144 credits including the submission of a thesis or final project. In addition to this, he/she still must complete a teacher certification program called *Program Pendidikan Guru* (PPG). Once these all requirements are fulfilled, one is eligible to apply for teacher position in any schools possible.

Concerning the significance of character or moral, as well as spiritual, education in English teaching, the ELTE program has designed and implemented certain curriculums based on the NQF to prepare English language preservice teachers who can perform and teach these spiritual values in their classrooms. Therefore, there has been a need to design courses incorporated with spiritual values.

Participant

The PSTs were in their second year (semester 3) and at the time of study took the course Listening 2. Following Dira's considerations, I chose the PSTs within the course for the study. While the university inclusively opens admission not only for Muslim students but

also non-Muslim students, the PSTs in this study were all Muslims. There were 30 PSTs in total. However, there were only 17 PSTs who filled in the biodata Google Forms participating in the study. Therefore, the study focuses only on data collected from these PSTs filling the online forms. Based on their answers on the forms, there were only ten PSTs who were certain to become English language teachers once they graduate. The other seven PSTs had different visions, such as becoming a translator or interpreter. For ethical considerations, they were asked to write consent letters allowing me to access their data for the sake of the study.

--Put Table 1. Participant demography here--

Research Design

Spanning 6 months, the case study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the interactions between the PSTs and the researcher, as well as the classes, were virtually done via Zoom. This virtual setting allows me to proceed the study despite of physical distance restrictions. The goal of this study is to explore how movie watching and DST project were able to assist PST in projecting their identities as future English teachers performing Islamic spiritual values. To achieve this goal, I adopted Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning. This theory views learning as a process of identification in which learners develop from merely marginal to active participants in a community of practice. In this study, the community of practice that was expected for the PSTs to join in was English teachers performing and teaching Islamic spiritual values.

Initially, I designed a lesson plan for the course for a semester period. I chose three tasks and projects for their synchronous and asynchronous activities, namely movie watching, listening circles, and DST. Here, movie watching is regarded as the main activity from which the other activities were based on. However, the current paper provides only data driven from DST activities. The videos they created were commentary and reflection on the movies they watched. The movies were carefully selected by the researcher within these criteria: 1) it has Muslim characters; 2) it provides positive representation of Muslims; 3) the Muslim characters in the movie perform Islamic spiritual values, such as honesty, respect, and patience. To find movies with these criteria, I use the Google search engine as well as my knowledge on such movies. As a result, there were eight movies that met the criteria (see Table 2). Regarding investigative practice, both I, as the researcher, and the participants worked together to generate data throughout the study. Empirical data were collected from PSTs' DST videos and reflective Google Forms.

--put Table 2 List of movies showing Islamic values--

Findings

While other scholars have investigated the use of digital videos in teacher education as a multimodal reaction to textual material and as a useful way to connect with new technologies, there has no research on the use of digital storytelling for building teacher professional identities as English teachers with spiritual values. The participatory aspect of digital literacies and the advantages of videos including digital video production in teacher education courses are discussed in recent teacher education studies (e.g., Albers, 2006, 2011; Beach, 2014; Pandya, 2014; Rish, 2013) and the application of performance

pedagogies in literacy methods courses that allow for a critical attention on the PST as an active participant whose identities, experiences, and modes of knowing are central to the teacher education curriculum (Sydnor et al., 2015; Medina et al., 2014). In this research project, therefore, we address a digital storytelling task as a final project in order for the PSTs to develop their professional identities as English language teachers with Islamic spiritual values. In this collaborative project, they were to make a digital video on what they have learned from watching the movie in the previous task. The video must also contain their explanation on how the movie had inspired them to be future English teachers, and what values from the movie that can be implemented in their classroom. Central to the findings was how digital storytelling to imagine classroom practice provided a space for PSTs' reflective negotiation of the complex discourses of learning to teach. The following are the findings.

A summary of the research findings across the four collaborative digital stories produced by PSTs from Uni B's ELTE program is shown in Figure 1. It shows how PSTs used the digital text in three ways: 1) to demonstrate how the movies they watched inspire them in conceptualizing a teacher identity with Islamic spiritual values; 2) to establish and negotiate their pedagogical practices informed by Islamic spiritual values generated from the movies they watched; and (3) to show the Islamic spiritual values learned from the movies they watched.

--put Figure 1 Summary of findings here--

The Islamic Spiritual Values Learned from The Movies

Throughout all of the digital stories that were examined (four videos), PSTs learned various Islamic spiritual values, such as respect, tolerance, and identity pride, from the movies they watched. They used various related images found on Google in their videos. The images they used in their videos are such as images of the actors and actresses played the characters in the movies, some scenes of the movies that show the values they have learned, and random images that demonstrate these values. For instance, PST Group 1 revealed the values they learned from Abdul, the Muslim character in *Victoria & Abdul*. As shown in their video, Abdul has inspired them to be proud of their own religion (Islam), identity (Muslim), and culture (Indonesian). They also learn from the movie on how to be a patient teacher, as Abdul shows in the movie by teaching Victoria, the queen of England, despite the denials of other members in the palace. Table 4.20 provides an example of value learning from PST Group 1's video.

--Put Table 3 here--

Reflecting that "how to be a good and proud Muslim in a foreign country", PST Group 1 shows the importance of identity pride to survive in a foreign country. As shown in their video, they learned about the challenges and difficulties to maintain faith of God and identity as a Muslim in a non-Muslim country like England. The value of patience is also found in the movie that Abdul "successfully approaches the queen of Britain and becomes a good friend and teacher to her." The PSTs also learn about respect to others despite their religious, cultural, and social backgrounds. It is shown from the Abdul character who respected non-Muslim British people although they did not respect him as he did to them. As inspired from the movie, the PSTs also learned on how to be kind no matter what

happens and wherever they are.

--Put Table 4 here--

As shown in the video made by PST Group 2, they learned various Islamic spiritual values from Kingdom of Heaven. Saladin, as the Muslim king in the movie, was the main character who inspired them the most. From Saladin, they learned on how to be tolerant and respectful to non-Muslims, like Christians in the movie. It is particularly shown by the scene where “Saladin enters a church after the war is over, Saladin takes a cross from the ground and puts it back properly on the table”. Thus, the PSTs prioritized to be tolerant and respectful people as Islam does not “force people to embrace a certain religion, including Islam”. They also acknowledge religious diversity.

Movie-Inspired Pedagogical Practices with Spiritual Values

From the movies they watched, the PSTs had created imaginary pedagogical practices when they are finally becoming teachers. For instance, PST Group 3 narrated in their video on how they would become teachers in the future. Inspired by Victoria & Abdul, they imagined themselves as English teachers who would teach their students to become proud Muslims and Indonesians. They would also respect their non-Muslim students if they would be situated in such a religiously diverse classroom. Table 3 is an example of PSTs’ reflective implementation of their vision for their own students and classrooms.

--Put Table 5 here--

In their video, PST Group 3 declared that they would treat their students equally, despite their religious difference, “we put them all, Muslim and non-Muslim students, equally without discrimination.” In a reflective entry, one of the PSTs stated that these series of tasks started from movie watching, literature circles, and digital story telling have influenced him to be “a respectful, caring, and tolerant English teacher” (Arfa, A Reflective Entry).

--Put Table 6 here--

In their video, PST Group 4 demonstrated how the movie Kingdom of Heaven had influenced them to become teachers who respect non-Muslim students if they were going to be situated in such a circumstance. They also believed that diversity, including religious diversity, is a fact that cannot be avoided, yet “makes life more colorful”.

Using Movies as Inspirations for Becoming Teachers with Spiritual Values

In the videos they made, the PSTs clearly stated that the movies, namely Victoria & Abdul and Kingdom of Heaven, have inspired and helped them to conceptualize the identity of teachers with Islamic spiritual values. They declared that they would become teachers who perform respect, tolerance, patience, and equality in their future classrooms. They would also teach their students these values. “These values make us true Muslims” (Angga, A Reflective Entry). From the reflection data, it is also revealed that the PSTs enjoyed having and doing the digital storytelling task.

It may be challenging because we have never done this before. However, we learned so much from this task. For example, I finally understand the goal of my learning in this course, which is to prepare myself to be teachers. Not just ordinary teachers. But teachers with Islamic spiritual values. (Sara, A Reflective Entry)

Conclusion and implications

The focus of this study is exploring how PSTs' professional identity was constructed by working with movie watching and DST tasks. The PSTs worked on the movies, the tasks, and the activities beyond the language knowledge and skills (grammar, vocabulary, listening, speaking, reading, and writing). They both learned the language skills and constructed their professional identities as future English language teachers with Islamic spiritual values in an integrated approach. They constructed these identities from a series of synchronous and asynchronous tasks and activities that was centered in movies as the main materials. The movies were carefully selected by the researcher and the TEs. They were selected based on a strict list of criteria. In particular, the movies should demonstrate Islamic spiritual values. Movies were viewed as the appropriate tools to build PSTs' identity as future English teachers with spiritual values. To achieve this goal, Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning was adopted. SL was believed to be the perfect tool to extend ELTE conceptualization regarding spiritual teacher professional identity construction and professional development. Additionally, there is a change from language knowledge transmission to a situate learning approach, which was the basis of the activities from which the PSTs worked on. These tasks and activities involve movie watching and digital storytelling. These activities were intended to improve their language knowledge and skills as well as develop their professional identities.

To expand the study scholarship, in other ELTE contexts, more future case studies could investigate: 1) how digital reflective tools using Google Forms help PSTs to self-assess their own professional learning; 2) in what strategies TEs and PSTs construct their professional identities in an offline setting and provide reflections on their learning experience with the resources on an everyday basis; 4) the effect of SL-informed materials on PSTs' professional development and awareness.

Acknowledgements

The authors acknowledge the Indonesian Researchers for Language Learning and Teaching (iRecall) from which the article project commenced.

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Fikri Yanda is the president of Indonesian Researchers for Language Learning and Teaching (iRecall) that is based in Bandung, Indonesia. He has published numerous scholarly articles in respectable journals, such as Journal of Education for Teaching, System, Educational Philosophy and Theory, Asian Studies Review, and Educational Action Research. His interdisciplinary research interests include language education, language teacher education, language curriculum and policy, materials development, and shadow/supplementary education.

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