ENGLISH TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY IN THE ERA OF GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

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ABSTRACT

The rapid advancement of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) has transformed educational practices and redefined the professional roles of English teachers. While previous studies have primarily focused on the pedagogical applications of AI, limited attention has been given to how English teachers construct and negotiate their professional identity in AI-enhanced educational environments. This study explores English teachers' professional identity in the era of Generative Artificial Intelligence through a qualitative narrative inquiry approach. Ten English teachers from public and private senior high schools in East Java, Indonesia, were purposively selected based on their experience integrating Generative AI into English language teaching. Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis. The findings revealed three major themes: (1) reconstructing professional identity through AI-enhanced pedagogy, in which teachers redefined their roles from knowledge transmitters to learning designers, facilitators, and critical evaluators; (2) negotiating professional agency in human–AI collaboration, highlighting teachers' efforts to balance AI utilization with pedagogical judgment, ethical responsibility, and the promotion of students' critical thinking; and (3) embracing lifelong professional learning amid AI transformation, demonstrating teachers' commitment to continuously developing AI literacy and digital pedagogical competence. The findings indicate that Generative AI does not replace English teachers but reshapes their professional identity by emphasizing uniquely human capacities, including pedagogical reasoning, contextual decision-making, ethical leadership, and interpersonal engagement. This study contributes to the emerging literature on teacher professional identity by positioning AI integration as an identity-related process rather than merely a technological innovation. The findings further suggest that teacher education programs and professional development initiatives should prioritize identity development, critical AI literacy, and ethical AI integration to support sustainable English language teaching in the age of artificial intelligence.

Keywords: teacher professional identity; English language teaching; Generative Artificial Intelligence; human–AI collaboration; professional development

INTRODUCTION

The emergence and rapid advancement of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) have introduced substantial changes to contemporary educational systems, influencing pedagogical practices, learner engagement, and instructional innovation. Since the public release of large language models such as ChatGPT in late 2022, AI-assisted technologies have rapidly expanded beyond simple information retrieval to support lesson planning, instructional material development, assessment design, feedback generation, language practice, and administrative tasks (Al-Abri, 2025; Teng et al., 2025). Consequently, educational systems worldwide have entered a new stage in which teachers are no longer

merely technology users but are increasingly expected to become critical designers of AI-supported learning environments. Rather than replacing teachers, Generative AI is reshaping the nature of teaching by redistributing cognitive, pedagogical, and professional responsibilities between humans and intelligent technologies. This transformation has been particularly evident in English Language Teaching (ELT), where language-based AI systems demonstrate remarkable capabilities in producing authentic texts, correcting grammar, generating classroom activities, facilitating speaking practice, and providing individualized feedback (AbuSahyon et al., 2023; Roe et al., 2023). As a result, English teachers are experiencing unprecedented opportunities while simultaneously confronting profound professional challenges regarding their evolving roles in AI-mediated classrooms.

Within teacher education research, these transformations have shifted scholarly attention from technological adoption toward the broader issue of teacher professional identity. Professional identity refers to teachers' continuously evolving understanding of who they are, what they believe, and how they position themselves within changing educational, institutional, and social contexts (Day et al., 2006; Sachs, 2001). Contemporary perspectives conceptualize professional identity as dynamic, socially negotiated, and continuously reconstructed through interactions among personal beliefs, pedagogical experiences, institutional expectations, and educational reforms. During periods of educational disruption, professional identity becomes particularly significant because teachers are required to reinterpret their professional roles while maintaining educational quality and ethical responsibility (Karousiou et al., 2019; Lieberman, 2009). Recent technological innovations, especially Generative AI, have accelerated this identity reconstruction by challenging long-established assumptions regarding teachers' expertise, authority, instructional autonomy, and professional legitimacy (Bengesi et al., 2024). Instead of functioning solely as transmitters of knowledge, English teachers are increasingly expected to act as facilitators, learning designers, critical evaluators, ethical decision-makers, and AI-literate professionals capable of integrating human judgment with artificial intelligence.

The implications of Generative AI are especially profound in English language education because language is both the medium and the object of instruction. Unlike previous educational technologies that primarily supported content delivery, Generative AI can independently produce coherent essays, classroom dialogues, lesson plans, grammar explanations, vocabulary exercises, translations, and even personalized writing feedback (Dwivedi et al., 2023; Nah et al., 2023). Such capabilities inevitably influence how English teachers perceive their instructional expertise and professional value. Traditional conceptions of teacher authority, which were largely based on content knowledge and linguistic expertise, are now being questioned as students gain immediate access to sophisticated AI-generated language support. Consequently, English teachers are increasingly required to redefine what distinguishes human teaching from AI-generated assistance, emphasizing pedagogical reasoning, emotional support, ethical judgment, intercultural competence, and meaningful human interaction that cannot be fully replicated by intelligent systems.

Although numerous educational institutions have encouraged teachers to integrate AI into classroom practice, the transition has not been entirely smooth. Many English teachers continue to experience uncertainty regarding the appropriate pedagogical use of Generative AI, ethical concerns surrounding academic integrity, reduced student autonomy, algorithmic bias, data privacy, and the possibility that excessive dependence on AI may diminish critical thinking and language production skills (Abedin et al., 2026; Ho & Lee, 2025; Nkopuruk, 2026; Xiao et al., 2026). Simultaneously, teachers are expected to master emerging technologies despite receiving limited professional development, inconsistent institutional policies, and rapidly changing technological environments. These circumstances create tensions between technological innovation and professional responsibility, requiring teachers to negotiate multiple identities simultaneously—as educators, technology users, curriculum designers, ethical gatekeepers, and lifelong learners. Rather than representing merely a technological challenge, AI integration has become an identity-related phenomenon that influences teachers' beliefs, emotions, agency, confidence, and professional self-understanding (Isma'il & Ibrahim, 2025; Kale & Altun, 2024).

The emergence of these tensions indicates that the impact of Generative AI extends beyond instructional practice to the very foundation of teacher professionalism. Professional identity influences teachers' instructional decisions, willingness to adopt innovation, resilience during educational change, commitment to professional learning, and long-term career satisfaction (Day & Gu, 2007). Teachers with a well-developed professional identity are generally more capable of adapting to educational reforms while maintaining pedagogical integrity and learner-centered practices (Cochran-Smith, 2001). Conversely, uncertainty regarding professional identity may result in resistance toward technological innovation, reduced teaching efficacy, professional anxiety, and diminished confidence in navigating AI-enhanced educational environments. Therefore, understanding how English teachers construct, negotiate, and reconstruct their professional identities amid the rapid advancement of Generative AI has become an increasingly important area of educational inquiry (Chen et al., 2026).

The urgency of investigating English teachers' professional identity has increased substantially because AI adoption is progressing much faster than empirical research examining its implications for teachers' professional lives. While educational policies increasingly encourage AI integration, relatively little is known about how English teachers interpret these technological changes, reconcile traditional pedagogical values with AI-supported instruction, or negotiate tensions between human expertise and algorithmic assistance. Furthermore, educational discourse often emphasizes AI competence, digital literacy, and technological readiness while overlooking the subjective experiences through which teachers reconstruct their professional identities. Without a comprehensive understanding of these experiences, teacher education programs and professional development initiatives may fail to address the deeper psychological, ethical, and professional dimensions of AI integration. This gap is particularly relevant in English language education, where teachers must continuously balance technological innovation with communicative pedagogy, learner interaction, critical thinking, and language authenticity.

The Indonesian educational context further reinforces the importance of this investigation. As Generative AI becomes increasingly accessible to teachers and students, English teachers are expected to integrate AI responsibly while simultaneously preserving educational values, fostering learner autonomy, promoting critical literacy, and ensuring ethical language learning practices. However, institutional readiness, technological infrastructure, professional support, and AI-related policies remain uneven across schools. Consequently, English teachers must independently negotiate their professional identities amid rapidly changing technological expectations, making Indonesia an important context for exploring how professional identity evolves within AI-mediated language education. Understanding these experiences will contribute not only to the growing literature on teacher professional identity but also to the development of sustainable AI integration policies that prioritize human-centered language education. Accordingly, this study aims to explore how English teachers construct and negotiate their professional identity in the era of Generative Artificial Intelligence. The study addresses the following research questions, as followed (1) How do English teachers perceive the influence of Generative Artificial Intelligence on their professional identity? (2) How do English teachers negotiate and reconstruct their professional identity while integrating Generative Artificial Intelligence into English language teaching? And (3) What opportunities and challenges do English teachers encounter in maintaining their professional identity in the era of Generative Artificial Intelligence

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative narrative inquiry design to explore how English teachers construct, negotiate, and reconstruct their professional identity in the era of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) (Gubrium & Holstein, 2008). Narrative inquiry is particularly appropriate because professional identity is understood as a dynamic, evolving, and socially constructed phenomenon that develops through individuals' lived experiences, interactions, and reflections. Rather than seeking generalizable findings, narrative inquiry

aims to understand how individuals make meaning of significant events that shape their professional lives. Through teachers' personal narratives, this study captured the complexity of identity development as participants experienced the rapid integration of AI technologies into English language teaching.

The study was guided by a constructivist perspective, which assumes that reality is socially constructed through participants' experiences and interpretations. Therefore, teachers' narratives were considered valuable sources for understanding how they perceived the influence of Generative AI on their professional roles, beliefs, pedagogical practices, and future professional aspirations.

The participants consisted of ten English teachers employed in public and private senior high schools in East Java, Indonesia. A purposive sampling strategy was adopted because the study sought participants who possessed direct experience using Generative AI in English language teaching. To ensure rich and relevant narratives, participants were selected based on the following inclusion criteria, consist of currently teaching English at the senior high school level; having at least three years of teaching experience; actively using one or more Generative AI applications such as, ChatGPT, Gemini, Microsoft Copilot, Claude, or similar tools in instructional planning, teaching, assessment, or professional development; and willing to participate in an in-depth interview.

TABLE 1/Demographic Information of Participants

Participant	Gender	School Type	Teaching Experience	Educational Qualification	AI Tools Frequently Used
T1	Female	Public	5 years	Bachelor's	ChatGPT, Gemini
T2	Male	Private	8 years	Master's	ChatGPT
T3	Female	Public	10 years	Master's	ChatGPT, Copilot
T4	Male	Private	6 years	Bachelor's	ChatGPT
T5	Female	Public	12 years	Master's	ChatGPT, Gemini
T6	Female	Private	7 years	Bachelor's	ChatGPT
T7	Male	Public	15 years	Master's	ChatGPT, Copilot
T8	Female	Private	4 years	Bachelor's	ChatGPT, Gemini
T9	Male	Public	9 years	Master's	ChatGPT
T10	Female	Private	11 years	Master's	ChatGPT, Claude

Furthermore, selecting teachers from different school types and varying teaching experience allowed the study to obtain diverse perspectives regarding professional identity in AI-supported educational environments. Pseudonyms (T1–T10) were assigned to protect participants' anonymity.

Data were collected through semi-structured, enabling participants to describe their professional experiences while allowing flexibility for probing questions and follow-up discussions. Semi-structured interviews were considered appropriate because they provide opportunities to explore participants' perceptions, emotions, and identity negotiation processes in greater depth.

Each interview lasted approximately 45–70 minutes and was conducted either face-to-face or via online video conferencing, depending on participants' preferences and

availability. With participants' consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim to ensure data accuracy.

Prior to the interviews, participants received information regarding the research objectives, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw from the study at any stage. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection commenced.

TABLE 2 | Semi-Structured Interview Guideline

No.	Interview Question
1	Could you describe your experience using Generative AI in English language teaching?
2	In what ways has Generative AI influenced your role as an English teacher?
3	How has using Generative AI affected the way you perceive yourself as a professional English teacher?
4	What challenges have you encountered when integrating Generative AI into your teaching practices?
5	How do you balance AI assistance with your own pedagogical knowledge and professional judgment?
6	What opportunities has Generative AI provided for your professional growth and development?
7	How do your students influence the way you use AI in your classroom?
8	What ethical considerations do you take into account when using Generative AI?
9	How do you think the role of English teachers will change in the future because of Generative AI?
10	Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience as an English teacher in the era of Generative AI?

The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the six-phase framework proposed by Clarke & Braun (2006). This approach was selected because it enables researchers to identify recurring patterns while preserving participants' individual narratives.

The analysis involved six interconnected phases. First, all interview transcripts were read repeatedly to achieve familiarity with the data. Second, meaningful segments related to teachers' professional identity and AI experiences were assigned initial codes. Third, similar codes were grouped into broader candidate themes. Fourth, the themes were reviewed by comparing them with the original transcripts to ensure coherence and representativeness. Fifth, each theme was refined, clearly defined, and appropriately named according to its conceptual meaning. Finally, the themes were interpreted in relation to the research questions and existing literature concerning teacher professional identity and Generative AI in English language teaching.

To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, several strategies were implemented. Member checking was conducted by inviting participants to review interview summaries and verify the accuracy of interpretations. Peer debriefing was undertaken with two qualitative research experts to discuss coding consistency and thematic development. Additionally, an audit trail documenting coding decisions, theme revisions, and analytical reflections was maintained throughout the research process to improve transparency and dependability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Reconstructing Professional Identity through AI-Enhanced Pedagogy

The first theme illustrates how the emergence of Generative AI has reshaped English teachers' professional identity from being primarily transmitters of linguistic knowledge to becoming learning designers, facilitators, critical evaluators, and contextual pedagogical experts. Rather than perceiving AI as a threat to their professional role, participants described AI as a technological partner that transformed how they planned instruction, delivered lessons, and supported students' learning. This transformation reflects a shift in professional identity from content-centered teaching toward learner-centered pedagogy, where teachers' expertise is increasingly demonstrated through instructional decision-making, pedagogical adaptation, and ethical judgment rather than simply possessing subject knowledge.

Across interviews, participants consistently explained that AI significantly reduced the time required for routine instructional tasks such as preparing lesson plans, designing classroom activities, generating reading passages, producing grammar exercises, writing quizzes, and creating assessment rubrics. Several teachers admitted that these administrative responsibilities previously consumed a substantial portion of their preparation time. By utilizing AI as an initial drafting tool, they could allocate more time to monitoring students' progress, designing interactive classroom experiences, and reflecting on students' learning needs.

Nevertheless, participants strongly rejected the perception that AI could replace teachers. Instead, they emphasized that AI-generated materials frequently required substantial modification before being implemented in the classroom. Teachers explained that AI often produced examples that were linguistically accurate but culturally inappropriate, too difficult for students' proficiency levels, or inconsistent with the school's curriculum and educational values. Consequently, teachers considered professional judgment to be more important than ever because every AI-generated output needed to be critically evaluated, verified, simplified, and contextualized before classroom implementation.

As one participant explained:

> *"Before AI, I created everything from scratch. Now AI helps me prepare materials much faster, but I still decide what is suitable for my students. My role has become more about designing meaningful learning rather than simply delivering information."* (T3)

This statement demonstrates a significant reconstruction of professional identity. Rather than defining expertise through the production of instructional materials, the participant defined professionalism through the capacity to make informed pedagogical decisions. AI accelerated instructional preparation, but responsibility for curriculum alignment, student engagement, and learning quality remained entirely with the teacher.

Similarly, another participant highlighted that students' independent access to AI had changed classroom interactions.

> *"Students can ask ChatGPT for grammar explanations, but they still need me to explain why certain expressions are appropriate in different contexts."* (T8)

This quotation reflects an important distinction between information and pedagogy. While AI can provide grammatical rules and language explanations, participants argued that effective English teaching requires contextual interpretation, pragmatic competence, and communicative appropriateness—areas where teachers continue to play an indispensable role. Participants believed that their expertise increasingly lies in helping students understand when, where, and why language should be used rather than simply explaining grammatical forms.

Another participant described how AI had changed classroom dynamics:

> *"Now students sometimes come to class after asking AI first. Instead of giving them direct answers, I discuss whether the AI explanation is correct and how it can be improved."* (T5)

This finding indicates that classroom interaction has become more dialogic and inquiry-oriented. Teachers no longer function solely as providers of information but increasingly act as facilitators who encourage students to evaluate, compare, and refine AI-generated knowledge through discussion and critical thinking.

Several participants also emphasized that AI should function as an assistant rather than an autonomous instructional agent.

> *"AI gives many suggestions, but not all of them fit our curriculum or our students' background. Teachers still need to adjust every activity."* (T1)

Participants explained that adapting AI-generated content involved considering students' English proficiency, learning motivation, cultural background, institutional expectations, religious values, and classroom realities. These contextual factors could not be adequately understood by AI alone, reinforcing teachers' belief that pedagogical expertise remains uniquely human.

Moreover, participants described an increased sense of professional responsibility in evaluating the reliability and accuracy of AI-generated content. Many reported encountering factual inaccuracies, unnatural language use, fabricated references, or oversimplified explanations produced by AI. Consequently, teachers considered critical evaluation an essential component of contemporary teaching professionalism.

One participant commented:

> *"I never use AI answers directly. I always compare them with textbooks, trusted websites, and my own experience before giving them to students."* (T9)

Another participant similarly explained:

> *"Sometimes AI produces excellent materials, but sometimes it makes mistakes that students cannot recognize. That is why teachers must become quality controllers."* (T6)

These narratives demonstrate that participants perceived themselves as professional gatekeepers who ensure the quality, credibility, and educational appropriateness of AI-assisted learning resources. Rather than diminishing teachers' authority, AI has expanded their professional responsibility by requiring higher levels of digital literacy, information evaluation, and pedagogical reasoning.

Participants also noted that the integration of AI encouraged greater reflection on their own teaching practices. Instead of focusing primarily on content delivery, they increasingly considered how classroom activities could promote collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking. AI allowed routine instructional tasks to become more efficient, enabling teachers to devote greater attention to meaningful student interaction and individualized learning support.

Collectively, these findings suggest that teachers' professional identity is being reconstructed rather than replaced in the era of Generative AI. Participants consistently viewed AI as a cognitive support tool that enhances instructional efficiency but cannot substitute for the complex pedagogical expertise required in English language teaching. Their narratives indicate that contemporary English teacher professionalism is increasingly characterized by four interconnected identities: (1) learning designer, who strategically develops meaningful learning experiences using AI-assisted resources; (2) learning facilitator, who guides students' independent engagement with AI-supported learning; (3) critical evaluator, who verifies and improves AI-generated content before classroom use; and (4) contextual pedagogical expert, who adapts instructional decisions to learners' linguistic proficiency, cultural backgrounds, institutional values, and educational objectives.

These findings illustrate that professional identity in the age of AI is becoming less associated with knowledge possession and more closely connected with pedagogical expertise, critical digital literacy, ethical decision-making, and contextual instructional judgment. Rather than weakening the teacher's role, Generative AI appears to have reinforced the importance of uniquely human professional competencies that cannot be replicated by artificial intelligence.

TABLE 3 | Findings for Theme 1

Subtheme	Description	Representative Evidence	Participants
Teacher as learning designer	Teachers use AI to generate initial instructional resources while redesigning materials to suit curriculum objectives, students' proficiency, and classroom needs.	"AI helps me prepare materials much faster, but I still decide what is suitable for my students." (T3)	T1, T3, T5, T7, T10
Teacher as learning facilitator	Students increasingly access AI independently, while teachers guide discussion, reflection, and deeper understanding rather than simply providing information.	"Students can ask ChatGPT first, then we discuss whether the explanation is appropriate." (T5)	T2, T4, T6, T8
Teacher as critical evaluator	Teachers critically examine AI-generated content for accuracy, linguistic appropriateness, reliability, and educational quality before classroom implementation.	"I never use AI answers directly. I always verify them first." (T9)	All participants
Teacher as contextual pedagogical expert	Teachers adapt AI outputs to local curriculum, students' characteristics, institutional culture, and religious or ethical values.	"Not every AI suggestion fits our students or school context." (T1)	T1, T3, T5, T8, T9
Teacher as reflective professional	AI encourages teachers to reconsider instructional goals, prioritize meaningful learning, and strengthen higher-order thinking rather than information transmission.	"Now I spend more time thinking about learning activities than preparing worksheets." (T7)	T2, T5, T7, T10
Teacher as ethical decision-maker	Teachers recognize responsibility for ensuring responsible AI	"Students need to understand that AI is	T2, T4, T6, T9, T10

use, preventing overreliance, and maintaining academic integrity in learning.	a tool, not the final answer." (T4)

Based on the findings which demonstrate that English teachers are reconstructing their professional identity in response to the increasing integration of Generative AI into classroom practice. Rather than perceiving themselves as the primary source of linguistic knowledge, participants increasingly positioned themselves as learning designers, facilitators, critical evaluators, and contextual pedagogical experts. This shift reflects a transition from teacher-centered knowledge transmission toward learner-centered pedagogy, where professional expertise is defined by the ability to design meaningful learning experiences, scaffold students' learning, and make informed instructional decisions. McNaughton and Billot (2016) support the view that professional identity is dynamic and continuously reconstructed through teachers' interactions with changing educational contexts and technological innovations. As AI increasingly performs routine instructional tasks, teachers' value lies less in delivering information and more in exercising pedagogical judgment to ensure that learning remains meaningful, contextualized, and responsive to students' needs (George, 2023).

The findings are consistent with recent scholarship arguing that Generative AI does not diminish teachers' professional roles but instead transforms the nature of teacher expertise. Rather than replacing teachers, AI automates repetitive activities such as lesson planning, material generation, and assessment preparation, enabling teachers to devote greater attention to higher-order pedagogical responsibilities, including facilitating critical thinking, fostering communication, and supporting personalized learning. This finding aligns with studies suggesting that teachers' professional identity in AI-enhanced education increasingly depends on uniquely human competencies, including contextual decision-making, ethical reasoning, creativity, and interpersonal relationships, which remain beyond the capabilities of AI (George, 2023; Tang, 2024). Participants' emphasis on verifying, adapting, and contextualizing AI-generated materials further highlights that technological efficiency alone cannot ensure effective instruction. Instead, teachers continue to function as professional gatekeepers who evaluate the accuracy, appropriateness, and educational value of AI outputs before integrating them into classroom practice.

Furthermore, the findings reinforce sociocultural perspectives of teacher professional identity, which conceptualize identity as socially constructed, continuously negotiated, and shaped by interactions between teachers, technologies, institutional expectations, and classroom realities. Participants demonstrated that integrating AI required not only developing digital competence but also reinterpreting what it means to be an effective English teacher in contemporary education. Their narratives suggest that professional identity is increasingly characterized by adaptive expertise—the capacity to combine technological innovation with pedagogical knowledge and contextual understanding.

Consequently, AI should not be viewed as replacing the professional role of teachers but as reshaping the competencies that define teacher professionalism (Tang, 2024). The ability to critically integrate AI while maintaining pedagogical autonomy, cultural sensitivity, and meaningful teacher–student interaction emerges as a defining characteristic of English teachers' professional identity in AI-enhanced educational environments.

Negotiating Professional Agency in Human–AI Collaboration

The second theme reveals that English teachers continuously negotiated their professional agency as Generative AI became embedded in their instructional practices. Rather than passively accepting technological change, participants actively redefined their professional roles by balancing the affordances of AI with their pedagogical expertise, ethical responsibilities, and educational values. Their narratives demonstrate that professional agency was not diminished by AI; instead, it evolved through ongoing decision-making about when, how, and to what extent AI should be incorporated into teaching and learning.

Participants consistently described AI as a powerful instructional resource that could improve efficiency and provide immediate access to information. However, they simultaneously emphasized that effective teaching requires professional judgment that extends beyond the capabilities of AI. Teachers viewed themselves as the individuals responsible for deciding whether AI-generated content was pedagogically appropriate, ethically acceptable, and beneficial for students' long-term learning. Consequently, agency was exercised not through controlling all classroom knowledge but through making informed instructional decisions regarding the integration of AI.

Introduction of these strategies within a sequencing of the curriculum demonstrates an alignment of the approach to the end purpose of creating an environment conducive to integrated development. Upon employing an active involvement approach that also takes an adaptive perspective to teaching, teachers address students' unique needs while, at the same time, developing a sense of both involvement and deeper language learning. Specifically, this dynamic approach, not only enhances linguistic competence, but also equips the students with the necessary tools to manage challenging communicative situations that extend to their general academic and personal growth.

Moreover, The combination of media and IT has transformed everyday teaching. In teaching and learning environments, the introduction of digital resources, such as educational video, interactive educational tools and technologies, online community of practice, augments either the educational process or the learning process by supporting, a deeper, more active, engagement. Adopting the same approach, it is possible to answer those calls in the case of scarce resources and at the same time ensuring an adequate pedagogical quality. The technologies presently available permit the development of a great variety of lessons catering to the needs of the students, which contribute to the establishment of a dynamic and accessible type of educational environment. Moreover, technology-based resources offer perspectives of knowledge on a planetary scale and reciprocal relations, thus driving the development of skills in thinking critically and solving problems. With regards to its constraints on clinicians to maximize their own benefit at the potential expense of student academic achievement, this model demonstrates a classic effect seen by members of the professions ensuring that the concerns for student academic learning and success are circumvented for greater student learning and success.

Thus, the comprehensive approach to assessment is well-articulated by ET4, who state:

> *"In addition to the fact that the standardized measuring rubric, including the components of project, presentation, and essay is sufficient to develop a more integrated, considered (imbedded) representation of student achievement…" (ET4)*

However, the fundamental premise of ET2 is the plausibility of multimodal assessment tools "*not tests, but also tasks-based and presentation-based tests*." Integrative, for instance, it is also possible to achieve a more detailed and comprehensive view of the abilities of a learner across different domains. Even though this approach is more than just the practice of traditional testing, it can be used not only to deal with different learning styles, but also for example to foster, critical thinking, creativity or communicative skills.

Overall assessment/evaluation is in line with contemporary pedagogic strategies that encourage student development, while also acknowledging, that not only is academic excellence important, but also that student learning is transferable to benefit the individual and the greater good of society. In addition, it allows the teachers to more accurately identify prevailing strengths and weaknesses and it is used to plan focused interventions and implement a customized learning infrastructure. This view, as an integrative framework, highlights the importance of balanced and representative evaluation to ensure educational achievement that is meaningful, subjective and authentic.

Then, English is not only a communication tool, but also a tool to popularize Islamic doctrine all over the world. It is observed that ET2 expresses this as,

> *"English is not a language but. That it is a medium through which the*

> *world may have contact with the ends of Islam, etc. two purposes of English teaching at the Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) are described." (ET2)*

A recurring concern across interviews was students' increasing tendency to rely on AI-generated responses without critically examining their validity. Participants observed that many students regarded AI outputs as inherently correct because of the confidence and fluency with which the technology generated responses. Teachers worried that this pattern could weaken students' analytical abilities, reduce intellectual curiosity, and encourage surface-level learning if AI were used merely as an answer-generating tool.

As one participant explained:

> *"AI gives quick answers, but students often accept everything without questioning it. My responsibility is teaching them how to think critically, not only how to obtain answers."* (T5)

This quotation illustrates a significant shift in teachers' professional agency. Rather than positioning themselves as providers of correct answers, participants increasingly perceived their role as cultivating students' critical literacy and evaluative thinking. They believed that AI should become an object of inquiry rather than an unquestioned authority, requiring students to analyze, verify, compare, and justify AI-generated information before accepting it.

Several participants explained that classroom discussions had become increasingly centered on evaluating AI responses rather than simply completing learning tasks. Instead of discouraging students from using AI, teachers deliberately designed learning activities that required students to identify inaccuracies, compare multiple sources, and explain why certain AI responses were appropriate or problematic. These instructional practices demonstrate that teachers actively shaped how AI influenced learning rather than allowing technology to dictate classroom interactions.

Participants also described negotiating changes in traditional teacher authority. Historically, teachers were often viewed as the primary source of academic knowledge. However, the widespread accessibility of AI meant that students could obtain explanations, examples, and translations before entering the classroom. Rather than perceiving this development as a threat, participants viewed it as an opportunity to redefine professional authority around expertise in reasoning, interpretation, and contextual judgment.

One participant reflected:

> *"Sometimes students know new AI tools before I do. Instead of feeling threatened, I learn together with them."* (T2)

This narrative illustrates a collaborative conception of professional agency. Participants acknowledged that technological innovation evolves rapidly and that students are often early adopters of emerging digital tools. Instead of attempting to maintain authority through technological superiority, teachers demonstrated professional confidence by embracing continuous learning and positioning themselves as co-learners within the educational process.

Another participant similarly noted:

> *"I don't need to know every AI application before my students. What matters is that I can help them decide whether the information is reliable and useful."* (T8)

These accounts suggest that participants no longer associated professional authority with possessing the most up-to-date technological knowledge. Instead, authority increasingly derived from pedagogical wisdom, critical evaluation, and the capacity to guide students in making informed decisions about digital information. In this sense, professional agency became relational and adaptive rather than hierarchical.

Ethical responsibility emerged as another central dimension of teachers' professional agency. Participants consistently argued that the rapid adoption of AI had introduced new ethical challenges, including plagiarism, academic dishonesty, excessive dependence on AI, inaccurate information, and reduced opportunities for independent thinking. Consequently, they perceived ethical guidance as an essential component of contemporary English language teaching.

One participant emphasized:

> *"Professionalism today means teaching students when AI should and should not be used."* (T7)

Similarly, another participant stated:

> *"If students use AI only to finish assignments, they are not really learning. They need to understand that AI is a learning partner, not a shortcut."* (T4)

These narratives indicate that teachers extended their professional agency beyond instructional decision-making to include fostering students' ethical awareness and digital responsibility. Participants believed that responsible AI integration required explicit classroom discussions about transparency, authorship, intellectual honesty, verification of information, and appropriate reliance on technological assistance.

Several teachers also highlighted the importance of modelling responsible AI use through their own professional practice. Rather than prohibiting AI, they demonstrated how teachers themselves critically interrogated AI-generated materials, revised inaccurate outputs, and acknowledged both the strengths and limitations of the technology. Participants believed that modelling reflective AI use encouraged students to develop similar habits of critical evaluation.

Another significant finding concerns teachers' perceptions of human–AI collaboration. Participants consistently rejected narratives suggesting that AI would replace teachers. Instead, they framed AI as a cognitive assistant capable of supporting routine instructional tasks while leaving pedagogical, interpersonal, and ethical responsibilities firmly within the domain of human educators.

As one participant explained:

> *"AI can organize information, but it cannot understand students' emotions, motivation, or classroom dynamics. Those decisions still belong to teachers."* (T9)

Another participant added:

> *"Technology helps me become more efficient, but the relationship between teacher and students cannot be replaced."* (T6)

These quotations demonstrate that participants regarded empathy, emotional support, classroom management, and relationship-building as uniquely human dimensions of teaching that AI cannot replicate. Accordingly, professional agency remained rooted in teachers' capacity to respond flexibly to the complex social and emotional realities of classroom life.

Participants further explained that AI had encouraged greater professional reflection regarding their own learning. Many admitted that they regularly explored new AI platforms, attended professional development workshops, exchanged ideas with colleagues, and learned from students who introduced unfamiliar technologies. Continuous learning was therefore viewed not as a sign of professional inadequacy but as evidence of professional growth.

One participant described this process:

> *"Every semester there are new AI tools. If I stop learning, I cannot guide my students effectively. Learning together has become part of my professionalism."* (T10)

This narrative illustrates that professional agency is increasingly characterized by adaptability and lifelong learning. Teachers no longer considered professional competence to be a fixed body of knowledge but an evolving capacity to respond effectively to continuous technological innovation.

TABLE 4 | Findings for Theme 2

Subtheme	Description	Representative Evidence	Participants
Maintaining pedagogical authority	Teachers redefine authority by guiding students to critically evaluate, interpret, and question AI-generated information rather than simply providing answers.	"My responsibility is teaching them how to think critically, not only how to obtain answers." (T5)	T2, T5, T7, T9
Ethical responsibility	Teachers explicitly teach responsible AI use, academic integrity, transparency, and appropriate dependence on AI in learning.	"Professionalism today means teaching students when AI should and should not be used." (T7)	T1, T4, T6, T7, T10
Human–AI collaboration	AI is positioned as an instructional assistant that supports efficiency while teachers retain responsibility for pedagogical, ethical, and contextual decisions.	"Technology helps me become more efficient, but the relationship between teacher and students cannot be replaced." (T6)	All participants
Shared learning and adaptive professionalism	Teachers acknowledge that students may discover new AI tools first and embrace reciprocal learning as part of ongoing professional development.	"Instead of feeling threatened, I learn together with them." (T2)	T2, T6, T8, T10
Promoting students' critical AI literacy	Teachers design learning activities that require students to verify AI outputs, compare multiple sources, and justify their conclusions.	"Students should evaluate AI answers instead of accepting them immediately." (T5)	T3, T5, T8, T9
Lifelong professional learning	Teachers continuously update their AI literacy through experimentation, peer collaboration, training, and reflective practice to remain pedagogically relevant.	"Learning together has become part of my professionalism." (T10)	T1, T2, T6, T10

Collectively, these findings suggest that teachers negotiated professional agency through four interconnected processes: maintaining pedagogical authority by fostering critical thinking rather than transmitting information; exercising ethical responsibility through responsible AI education; engaging in collaborative human–AI partnerships that preserved human judgment; and embracing continuous professional learning alongside students. Rather than reducing teachers' professional autonomy, AI appeared to expand the complexity of their

decision-making by requiring them to balance technological opportunities with pedagogical values, ethical principles, and students' holistic development.

Based on the Theme 2, it is demonstrate that English teachers actively negotiated their professional agency rather than surrendering it to Generative AI. Participants viewed AI as a valuable pedagogical resource while emphasizing that instructional decisions, ethical considerations, and classroom interactions remained fundamentally human responsibilities. This finding aligns with the concept of teacher agency, which emphasizes teachers' capacity to make intentional pedagogical decisions in response to changing educational contexts rather than merely implementing technological innovations. As students increasingly accessed AI-generated information independently, participants redefined their professional authority from being the primary source of knowledge to becoming facilitators of critical inquiry, reflective thinking, and informed decision-making (Ma et al., 2025). This transformation suggests that professional agency is reconstructed through adaptive pedagogical practices, where teachers maintain control over learning by determining how AI should be integrated to support meaningful educational outcomes.

Another important finding concerns teachers' growing emphasis on ethical leadership and critical AI literacy. Participants consistently expressed concerns about students' tendency to accept AI-generated responses uncritically, highlighting the risk of overdependence, misinformation, and reduced independent thinking. Consequently, they perceived one of their central professional responsibilities as teaching students how to evaluate, verify, and appropriately use AI-generated content rather than simply encouraging technological adoption. This finding supports recent literature arguing that the integration of Generative AI requires teachers to develop not only digital competence but also ethical and pedagogical competence to cultivate responsible AI use among learners. The results further indicate that teacher professionalism in AI-enhanced classrooms extends beyond technological proficiency to include fostering critical digital literacy, academic integrity, and responsible decision-making, thereby positioning teachers as ethical guides in increasingly AI-mediated learning environments (Koukaras et al., 2026; Yan et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the findings reveal that teachers strengthened their professional agency by embracing collaborative learning with students instead of viewing technological change as a threat to their authority. Participants acknowledged that students sometimes became familiar with new AI applications before teachers themselves; however, rather than resisting this shift, teachers adopted a co-learning orientation characterized by openness, adaptability, and lifelong professional learning. This finding resonates with sociocultural perspectives of teacher professionalism, which conceptualize professional identity and agency as dynamic constructs continuously negotiated through interactions with evolving educational, technological, and social contexts. Accordingly, Ghamrawi et al. (2024) stated that AI did not diminish teachers' professional status but instead expanded the scope of their agency by requiring them to exercise greater pedagogical judgment, ethical leadership, and adaptive expertise. These findings suggest that human–AI collaboration is most effective when teachers retain authority over pedagogical decisions while positioning AI as a complementary tool that enhances, rather than replaces, the uniquely human dimensions of teaching.

Embracing Lifelong Professional Learning amid AI Transformation

The third theme demonstrates that participants regarded lifelong professional learning as an essential foundation for sustaining their professional identity in the era of Generative AI. Rather than perceiving AI as a disruptive force that threatened their profession, teachers framed technological change as an ongoing catalyst for professional growth. Across the interviews, participants consistently emphasized that remaining professionally relevant required continuous learning, experimentation, and adaptation. Consequently, professional identity was no longer viewed as a fixed characteristic developed through pre-service education but as an evolving process shaped by continuous engagement with emerging technologies, pedagogical innovations, and collaborative learning experiences.

Participants acknowledged that the rapid evolution of AI technologies has fundamentally altered the nature of teacher professionalism. Unlike previous educational technologies, Generative AI develops at a pace that requires teachers to regularly update both their

technical knowledge and pedagogical strategies. Several participants explained that AI applications, prompting techniques, and educational features change so frequently that relying solely on knowledge acquired during formal teacher education is no longer sufficient. Instead, professional competence increasingly depends on teachers' willingness to become self-directed and lifelong learners.

One participant explained:

> *"Learning AI has become part of my professional responsibility. If I stop learning, I will not be able to support my students effectively."* (T1)

This quotation illustrates that professional learning was not perceived as an optional activity but as an ethical responsibility. Participants believed that students deserved guidance from teachers who continuously developed their competencies to meet changing educational demands. Consequently, learning new AI technologies became closely associated with maintaining professional credibility and instructional effectiveness.

Similarly, another participant reflected:

> *"Every month there is a new AI tool. I realize that being an English teacher now means becoming a lifelong learner."* (T10)

This narrative reflects participants' recognition that professional identity has become increasingly dynamic. Rather than mastering a stable set of teaching skills, teachers viewed professionalism as the capacity to continuously adapt to technological innovation while preserving sound pedagogical principles. Lifelong learning therefore became a defining characteristic of contemporary English language teaching.

Participants described numerous self-directed learning strategies that enabled them to expand their AI competence. These included attending webinars, enrolling in online courses, watching tutorial videos, reading professional blogs, participating in online communities, experimenting with different AI platforms, and engaging in reflective classroom practice. Many participants explained that trial-and-error experimentation played a particularly important role because formal guidance on educational AI remained limited.

One participant commented:

> *"I usually test AI first before introducing it to my students. Through experimentation I learn what works and what should be avoided."* (T5)

This statement demonstrates that participants developed professional competence through reflective practice rather than passive consumption of information. Teachers viewed experimentation as an important mechanism for understanding both the pedagogical possibilities and the limitations of AI, enabling them to make more informed instructional decisions.

Another participant described how digital literacy had become inseparable from teacher professionalism:

> *"Now I don't only learn English teaching methods. I also learn prompting, evaluating AI responses, and choosing the right AI tools for different learning activities."* (T3)

This quotation indicates that participants perceived professional knowledge as expanding beyond traditional pedagogical and linguistic expertise. Contemporary English teachers increasingly considered AI literacy, prompt engineering, digital evaluation skills, and information verification as integral components of their professional competence.

A particularly significant finding concerns the collaborative nature of teachers' professional learning. Participants consistently emphasized that adapting to AI was not an individual process but one strengthened through collaboration with colleagues. Informal discussions, professional learning communities, social media groups, and peer sharing emerged as valuable sources of practical knowledge regarding AI implementation in English classrooms.

One participant explained:

> *"Whenever one teacher discovers a useful AI application, we usually share it with other teachers so everyone can learn together."* (T8)

Similarly, another participant noted:

> *"Our discussions are no longer only about lesson plans. We also exchange prompts, compare AI tools, and discuss which ones are most useful for our students."* (T4)

These narratives suggest that professional identity is increasingly constructed through collective learning. Rather than competing with one another, participants described professional collaboration as an essential strategy for responding to continuous technological change. The emergence of AI therefore appears to strengthen collegial learning networks that facilitate the sharing of knowledge, experiences, and innovative instructional practices.

Despite demonstrating strong motivation to develop professionally, participants consistently acknowledged that institutional support remained insufficient. Several teachers explained that schools had not yet established systematic professional development programs focusing on educational AI. Consequently, responsibility for developing AI competence largely rested with individual teachers.

As one participant observed:

> *"Most of what I know about AI comes from YouTube, webinars, and discussions with colleagues rather than formal school training."* (T6)

Another participant similarly explained:

> *"Schools expect teachers to use technology, but many of us learn independently because structured AI training is still limited."* (T9)

These findings reveal that teachers exercised considerable professional agency by independently seeking learning opportunities beyond their formal institutional environments. Rather than waiting for official training, participants proactively invested time and effort in developing the competencies they believed were necessary for effective teaching in AI-enhanced classrooms.

Participants also emphasized that continuous professional learning extended beyond acquiring technical AI skills. Many explained that learning involved critically reflecting on how AI influences pedagogy, assessment, classroom interaction, academic integrity, and students' learning habits. In this sense, professional development became both technological and pedagogical, requiring teachers to integrate digital competence with sound educational judgment. One participant reflected:

> *"Learning AI is not only about mastering technology. It is about understanding how technology can improve learning without reducing students' independent thinking."* (T7)

This quotation highlights participants' holistic understanding of professional growth. Teachers recognized that meaningful AI integration requires balancing technological innovation with educational values, critical thinking, learner autonomy, and ethical responsibility.

Collectively, these findings suggest that lifelong professional learning has become a central dimension of English teachers' professional identity in AI-enhanced educational environments. Participants consistently portrayed themselves as adaptive professionals who actively seek new knowledge, experiment with emerging technologies, collaborate with colleagues, and critically reflect on evolving pedagogical practices. Professional identity is therefore increasingly characterized by learning agility, digital competence, collaborative inquiry, and reflective practice rather than by static expertise alone.

TABLE 5 | Findings for Theme 3

Subtheme	Description	Representative Evidence	Participants
Continuous professional learning	Teachers proactively engage in webinars, online courses, workshops, and self-directed learning to enhance AI-related pedagogical competence.	"Learning AI has become part of my professional responsibility." (T1)	T1, T5, T10
Digital competence development	Teachers independently explore AI platforms, prompting strategies, and digital tools to improve classroom instruction and instructional efficiency.	"I also learn prompting and evaluating AI responses." (T3)	All participants
Collaborative professional learning	Teachers exchange AI experiences, teaching strategies, prompts, and digital resources through peer discussions and professional communities.	"We usually share useful AI applications with each other." (T8)	T3, T4, T8, T9
Adaptive professional identity	Teachers perceive continuous adaptation to emerging technologies as an essential characteristic of contemporary teacher professionalism.	"Being an English teacher now means becoming a lifelong learner." (T10)	All participants
Self-directed professional agency	In the absence of sufficient institutional support, teachers independently seek learning opportunities through webinars, online videos, experimentation, and professional networks.	"Most of what I know about AI comes from YouTube, webinars, and colleagues." (T6)	T1, T2, T5, T6, T9
Reflective technology integration	Teachers critically reflect on how AI should be integrated to improve learning while preserving pedagogy, ethics, and students' independent thinking.	"Learning AI is about improving learning, not replacing thinking." (T7)	T4, T7, T8, T10

Then findings of Theme 3 demonstrate that lifelong professional learning has become a defining characteristic of English teachers' professional identity in the era of Generative AI. Participants viewed continuous learning not merely as a means of acquiring technological skills but as an essential professional responsibility that enables them to remain pedagogically relevant in rapidly changing educational environments. This finding supports the concept of teacher professional identity as a dynamic and evolving construct rather than a fixed set of competencies. As AI technologies continue to develop, teachers increasingly reconstruct their professional identity through ongoing learning, experimentation, and reflection.

This aligns with the perspective that professional identity is continuously shaped by teachers' interactions with new educational contexts, technologies, and professional experiences rather than being established solely through pre-service teacher education (Huang & Wang, 2024; Tran & Dee, 2023). In this study, participants demonstrated that adapting to AI represents an extension of their professional commitment to providing meaningful and effective English language instruction.

Another important finding concerns the emergence of self-directed and collaborative professional learning as primary strategies for adapting to AI-enhanced education. Participants reported learning through webinars, online communities, experimentation, YouTube tutorials, and professional discussions with colleagues, largely because formal institutional training on AI remained limited. These findings resonate with research suggesting that teachers' digital competence is increasingly developed through informal professional learning networks and collaborative knowledge sharing rather than exclusively through structured professional development programs (Fernández-Batanero et al., 2022; Reisoğlu, 2022). Furthermore, the findings support recent studies on AI in education, which argue that successful AI integration depends not only on teachers' technological knowledge but also on their willingness to engage in continuous professional learning, reflective practice, and collaborative inquiry (Holmes et al., 2023; Ikrawansyah & Romadhon, 2024; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). The participants' narratives indicate that professional learning communities have become valuable spaces where teachers collectively interpret emerging technologies and exchange practical strategies for integrating AI into English language teaching.

Finally, the findings suggest that lifelong professional learning extends beyond developing technical AI literacy to strengthening teachers' pedagogical judgment, ethical awareness, and adaptive expertise. Participants consistently emphasized that learning about AI involved understanding its educational implications, critically evaluating its outputs, and ensuring that technology enhances rather than replaces meaningful learning. This reflects the growing expectation that contemporary teachers possess not only digital competence but also the ability to make informed pedagogical and ethical decisions regarding technology use. Such findings are consistent with the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework, which emphasizes that effective technology integration requires the intersection of technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge rather than technological proficiency alone (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). Moreover, the participants' experiences reinforce recent arguments that Generative AI is reshaping teacher professionalism by positioning teachers as lifelong learners who continuously adapt to technological innovation while preserving the uniquely human dimensions of education, including critical thinking, ethical leadership, contextual decision-making, and meaningful relationships with students. These findings indicate that lifelong professional learning has become a central mechanism through which English teachers sustain and reconstruct their professional identity in AI-enhanced educational contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study explored how English teachers construct and negotiate their professional identity in the era of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) through a narrative inquiry approach. The findings demonstrate that the emergence of GenAI has transformed, rather than diminished, teachers' professional identity. Instead of functioning primarily as knowledge transmitters, English teachers increasingly perceive themselves as learning

designers, facilitators, mentors, and critical evaluators who integrate AI into pedagogical practice while maintaining human-centered instruction. This shift reflects the dynamic nature of professional identity, which evolves in response to technological innovation, educational reform, and changing classroom expectations.

The study identified three interconnected themes that characterize English teachers' professional identity in AI-enhanced educational contexts. First, teachers reconstructed their professional identity by redefining their instructional roles and emphasizing pedagogical expertise, contextual decision-making, and meaningful human interaction beyond AI-generated content. Second, teachers continuously negotiated their professional agency by balancing the benefits of AI with ethical responsibility, critical thinking, and professional judgment. Rather than viewing AI as a substitute for teachers, participants positioned it as a complementary tool that supports teaching while preserving the irreplaceable value of human expertise. Third, teachers embraced lifelong professional learning as an essential component of their identity, recognizing that continuous development of AI literacy and digital pedagogical competence is necessary to remain effective in rapidly evolving educational environments.

These findings contribute to the growing body of literature on teacher professional identity by demonstrating that AI integration is not solely a technological issue but also an identity-related process involving teachers' beliefs, values, agency, and professional self-concept. The study extends existing research by highlighting how English teachers actively negotiate the relationship between technological innovation and professional responsibility within the context of language education. It suggests that successful AI integration depends not only on teachers' technical competence but also on their capacity to critically evaluate AI-generated content, uphold ethical teaching practices, and maintain meaningful teacher–student relationships.

From a practical perspective, the findings imply that teacher education institutions, schools, and policymakers should move beyond training teachers merely to operate AI technologies. Professional development programs should also support identity development by strengthening teachers' pedagogical agency, ethical decision-making, critical AI literacy, and reflective practice. Such initiatives can help English teachers confidently integrate Generative AI while preserving the human dimensions of language teaching that remain central to effective learning.

Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. It involved a relatively small number of participants from senior high schools in one Indonesian province, which may limit the transferability of the findings to other educational contexts. Additionally, the study focused exclusively on teachers' perspectives without incorporating students' or school leaders' experiences. Future research could employ longitudinal or comparative designs to examine how professional identity evolves over time across different educational levels, regions, or countries. Further studies may also investigate the relationship between teachers' AI literacy, professional identity, instructional practices, and student learning outcomes to provide a more comprehensive understanding of professional identity in the age of artificial intelligence.

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