

# Who Are We as Teachers? A Sequential Study of Structuring Teacher Professional Identity among Malaysian Educators

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores and empirically validates the key dimensions shaping Teacher Professional Identity (TPI) among Malaysian teachers through a two-phase sequential, mixed-method design. In the first phase, thematic analysis of teacher narratives and reflective accounts identified six interrelated dimensions, namely (i) Personal and Emotional Commitment, (ii) Pedagogical Beliefs and Practices, (iii) Innovation and Technology Integration, (iv) Leadership and Professional Growth, (v) Social Responsibility and Community Engagement, and (vi) Student Empowerment and Impact. In the second phase, the Fuzzy Delphi Method (FDM) was employed with ten expert educators to verify the relevance and consensus of these dimensions. All six dimensions achieved strong expert agreement ( $d \leq 0.2$ ), with Pedagogical Beliefs and Practices, Personal and Emotional Commitment, and Student Empowerment and Impact emerging as the most central elements of Teacher Professional Identity. The results reveal that Malaysian teachers' professional identity is deeply anchored in pedagogical values, emotional engagement, and the transformative empowerment of learners. The validated Teacher Professional Identity framework provides a localized and empirically grounded model that integrates both cognitive-pedagogical and affective dimensions of teaching. The study contributes to the theoretical enrichment of teacher identity research and offers practical guidance for policy design, teacher professional development, and curriculum innovation aligned with Malaysia's educational goals.

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## 1. Introduction

Teacher Professional Identity (TPI) is increasingly recognized as critical in shaping various aspects of the teaching profession, including teacher effectiveness, resilience, instructional decisions, and commitment to the profession. Various studies have conceptualized TPI as a dynamic construct influenced by sociocultural, emotional, pedagogical,

and institutional factors (Richards, 2021). Recent literature emphasizes that TPI is not static; it evolves through experiences and interactions within educational contexts (Sani et al., 2022; Gracia et al., 2022). Notably, Kayi-Aydar and Green-Eneix's work illustrates how classroom practices can signify the intersection of personal and professional identities (Alnahdi & Alwadei, 2023), reinforcing the idea that identity and practice are mutually constitutive (Ohle-Peters et al., 2023; Cece et al., 2022).

In the Malaysian educational landscape, teachers contend with challenges stemming from centralized curriculum reforms, a diverse student body, digital transformation pressures, and shifting community expectations. The Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025 advocates for innovative and empowered teaching, yet the exploration of Teacher Professional Identity remains insufficiently defined and empirically studied within local contexts (Gracia et al., 2021). As Gracia et al. (2021) have noted, a widespread focus on TPI during the initial training periods of teachers signals its importance in educational effectiveness (Rachmajanti et al., 2021). Malaysian teachers, therefore, must navigate their professional identities amidst these complex dynamics, potentially leveraging pedagogical beliefs and strategies to foster their professional growth (Yan, 2024; Karaolis & Philippou, 2019).

Moreover, the interplay between teacher identity and professional development is underscored in the context of digital pedagogy. Past studies indicate that teachers' online teaching experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic influenced their perceptions of professional identity, showcasing a transformation prompted by contextual shifts in teaching environments (Gracia et al., 2022). The construction of TPI is also intrinsic to reflective practices and self-efficacy, which mediational models propose as contributing factors to meaningful identity transformation (Cece et al., 2022; Ulla et al., 2024). As teachers reflect on and adapt their practices, they reinforce their professional identities, eventually enhancing their effectiveness and resilience (Cece et al., 2022; Ulla et al., 2024). Thus, understanding the multifaceted nature of TPI in Malaysia necessitates a focus on both personal and contextual factors influencing teachers' self-perceptions and career trajectories. Emerging models that integrate emotional labor, leadership roles, and digital competence are essential to constructing TPI in current educational contexts. These elements serve as crucial touchpoints for teachers to reassess their professional roles and cultivate an identity that is responsive to contemporary educational demands (Solihatun et al., 2025). By engaging with these dimensions, Malaysian educators can better align their professional identities with the overarching goals of educational reform and innovation outlined in national policy frameworks.

Despite the international growth of scholarship on Teacher Professional Identity (TPI), there remains a conspicuous absence of context-specific, empirically structured frameworks that accurately reflect the unique realities and values of Malaysian educators. Central to this discussion is the need to deeply understand how emotional commitment, social responsibility, student empowerment, and the integration of digital pedagogy contribute to the evolving formation of teacher identities. Current literature often overlooks these dimensions, limiting the potential for effective professional development initiatives that resonate with Malaysian teachers. Therefore, this study aims to explore and validate the key dimensions that shape the professional identity of Malaysian teachers. Specifically, it seeks to: (i) identify core dimensions of Teacher Professional Identity relevant to the Malaysian educational context, and (ii) empirically structure these dimensions using the Fuzzy Delphi Method with expert consensus. This study used a two-phase sequential mixed-method design to explore and empirically structure the key dimensions of Teacher Professional Identity (TPI) among Malaysian educators.

Understanding TPI in Malaysia is pivotal for developing targeted professional development programs aimed at fostering emotionally resilient, innovative, and socially responsive educators. As established in various studies, TPI has significant implications not only on individual teacher effectiveness but also on broader educational policies that effectively nurture the identity of educators as a fundamental aspect of quality education (Gracia et al., 2022). Furthermore, incorporating aspects of social and emotional learning in education can positively influence teacher well-being and engagement, thereby enhancing professional identity (Mahoney et al., 2021; Shalev & Gidalevich, 2024). The integration of these components into Malaysian educational frameworks may also cultivate a culture of empowerment, aiding teachers in navigating their professional roles amidst constant change and complexity. A refined understanding of TPI that encompasses both global best practices and local educational realities is, therefore, essential (Gracia et al., 2022). This research ultimately aspires to contribute not only to scholarly literature but also

to the advancement of the teaching profession in Malaysia, ensuring that educational reforms are reflective of the diverse identities, challenges, and aspirations of educators.

## **2. Literature Review**

### ***2.1 Teacher Professional Identity***

Teacher Professional Identity (TPI) is widely conceptualized as a dynamic and evolving self-understanding that teachers construct through the interaction of personal beliefs, professional expectations, and sociocultural contexts. According to Beijaard et al. (2004), TPI encompasses the ways teachers interpret who they are in relation to their professional roles, shaped continuously by experience, reflection, and contextual demands. Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) further emphasize that TPI is not a fixed entity, but a fluid, multidimensional construct influenced by teachers' emotional lives, pedagogical orientations, and professional relationships. This perspective aligns with Richards (2021), who argues that teacher identity emerges through ongoing participation in teaching practices, institutional structures, and classroom interactions, making it inherently relational and situated. With that, these foundational studies highlight that TPI is simultaneously personal and professional, shaped by internal dispositions and external expectations, and continuously reconstructed across the span of teachers' careers. This conceptual grounding provides a framework for examining TPI within the Malaysian context, where teachers navigate complex reforms, cultural diversity, and shifting pedagogical demands.

Global interpretations of TPI often emphasize universal aspects of identity formation. However, contextual understandings are vital, especially in diverse educational settings such as Malaysia. Here, the complexities of TPI are further compounded by local cultural, societal, and institutional factors, often resulting in variations across different geographical and cultural contexts. Research has shown that contextual factors play a crucial role in how teachers construct their professional identities, which can vary significantly from global norms (Ohle-Peters et al., 2023; Cece et al., 2022). Despite the emphasis on the complexities of TPI, existing literature often lacks sources that are specific to the Malaysian context. This gap indicates a need for a more systematic investigation into the emotional, social, and pedagogical dimensions of TPI among Malaysian teachers. An in-depth exploration of how teachers navigate their identities in the face of local challenges is essential for the enhancement of teacher training and professional development. Consequently, initiatives aimed at improving professional identity must incorporate local values and experiences to be truly effective, especially in the Malaysian context. In summary, the exploration of Teacher Professional Identity presents critical implications for understanding educational practices and policies. The interplay between personal and professional identities, contextual interpretations, and the need for current empirical studies is fundamental in developing a comprehensive framework that reflects the complexities of teaching identities.

### ***2.2 Theoretical Foundations of Teacher Professional Identity***

The theoretical foundations of Teacher Professional Identity (TPI) are diverse and encompass various perspectives that reflect the dynamic nature of identity formation in education.

#### ***2.2.1 Sociocultural Theory***

Sociocultural theory posits that identity is socially constructed and relational, emphasizing the influence of cultural and social contexts on individual identity (Kayi-Aydar & Green-Eneix, 2019). Vygotsky's work on social interaction and the role of community in cognitive development underscores the idea that teachers' identities are shaped within social dynamics and interactions with peers and students (Richards, 2021). Sani et al. (2022) reinforce this notion by highlighting how teachers develop their professional identities through their relationships with colleagues, students, and the wider educational community.

### **2.2.2 Constructivist Theory**

Constructivist views argue that identity is shaped through experience, reflection, and interaction. According to this perspective, teachers construct their identities through their teaching experiences and reflective practices (Gracia et al., 2022). Research has shown that teachers who adopt constructivist approaches in their pedagogy tend to develop a deeper understanding of their professional roles and responsibilities. For example, Voss and Kunter (2019) found that the emotional experiences of beginning teachers significantly influenced their teaching beliefs and practices, indicating that personal experiences are critical in the formation of teacher identity.

### **2.2.3 Role Identity Theory**

Role identity theory articulates that teachers embody multiple roles, such as caregiver, leader, and facilitator, each contributing to their professional identity. This theory suggests that understanding the specific roles teachers play in their educational settings is vital for comprehending the multifaceted nature of TPI (Ohle-Peters et al., 2023). Hargreaves (2001) emphasizes the importance of role complexity in defining teachers' professional identities, arguing that these roles interact dynamically to shape how teachers perceive themselves.

### **2.2.4 Emotional Commitment Theories**

Emotional Labor Theory and Resilience Theory provide insights into the emotional commitments inherent in teaching. Emotional labor involves the regulation of emotions to fulfill the social expectations of one's role, which can significantly affect a teacher's resilience and overall job satisfaction (Gracia et al., 2021). Studies have indicated that teachers who manage their emotional labor effectively demonstrate lower levels of burnout and higher job performance, thus underscoring the relationship between emotional commitment and professional identity (Rachmajanti et al., 2021; Yan, 2024). Based on the theoretical foundations, TPI is simultaneously shaped by sociocultural contexts, individual experiences, and the emotional demands of teaching. Each theoretical perspective contributes a unique dimension to the understanding of how teachers construct and navigate their professional identities within complex educational landscapes, thus calling for an integrative approach to teacher professional development.

## **2.3 Dimensions of TPI in Global Literature**

The dimensions of Teacher Professional Identity (TPI) as outlined in global literature provide a multi-faceted understanding of how teachers construct and express their professional identities. These dimensions encompass various aspects that are critical to enhancing teacher effectiveness and well-being.

### **2.3.1 Pedagogical Dimension**

This dimension focuses on teachers' beliefs, practices, and teaching styles, which are central to their TPI. Kayi-Aydar and Green-Eneix (2019) assert that beliefs about teaching practices significantly influence how educators approach instruction and interact with students. Teachers who adopt reflective practices are more likely to evolve their pedagogical styles and develop a robust professional identity that aligns with their educational philosophies (Richards, 2021; Sani et al., 2022). Gracia et al. (2022) further highlight that these introspective practices are fundamental for teachers to negotiate their identities within their pedagogical engagements.

### **2.3.2 Professional Learning and Leadership**

The role of growth, recognition, and mentorship is vital in shaping TPI. Teachers' professional identities are often enhanced through leadership opportunities and collaborative learning environments that foster professional development (Alnahdi & Alwadei, 2023). Ohle-Peters et al. (2023) emphasize the significance of mentor support, which not only strengthens TPI but also cultivates a collaborative culture essential for continuous professional growth. These opportunities enable teachers to feel validated and connected within their professional communities.

### **2.3.3 Technological Integration**

The integration of digital competences and innovation is increasingly acknowledged as a key aspect of TPI in the 21st century (Cece et al., 2022; Gracia et al., 2021). With the rise of educational technology, teachers are expected to be proficient in various digital tools that aid in enhancing their teaching practices and engaging students effectively. Studies have shown that educators who embrace technology in their teaching not only improve their instructional delivery but also redefine their professional identities in the context of modern education (Rachmajanti et al., 2021; Yan, 2024).

### **2.3.4 Affective Dimension**

The emotional connection teachers have with their work, along with their passion and overall well-being, is critical to TPI. Karaolis and Philippou (2019) note that positive emotional engagement enhances teachers' resilience, while negative emotional experiences can detract from their professional identity. This dimension recognizes the importance of emotional labor and its implications for teachers' commitment and effectiveness in the classroom (Ulla et al., 2024). Emotional health is intricately linked to how teachers perceive themselves and their role in education, which, in turn, can influence student outcomes as well (Solihatun et al., 2025; Namaziandost et al., 2024).

### **2.3.5 Community and Ethical Engagement**

Community involvement, social justice, and ethical engagement are crucial dimensions of TPI. Teaching is not only about imparting knowledge but also involves cultivating values of equity and social responsibility. Educators who actively engage with their communities and advocate for social justice typically have a strong professional identity that aligns with their moral and ethical beliefs (Zulkifli et al., 2022; Gengatharan et al., 2023). These teachers are often viewed as mentors and leaders within their communities, where they can leverage their professional identities to create a positive impact.

In summary, the dimensions of TPI encompass pedagogical beliefs, professional growth, technological integration, emotional connections, and ethical engagement. Research indicates that a well-rounded understanding of these dimensions equips educators with the tools they need to foster meaningful teaching practices that resonate with their identities and engage their students effectively. This comprehensive view of TPI is crucial for the ongoing improvement and sustainability of teaching as a profession.

## **2.4 Past Studies**

Research exploring Teacher Professional Identity (TPI) in Southeast Asia, particularly Malaysia, reveals that cultural and systemic factors, such as centralized education, ethnic diversity, and an exam-oriented culture, significantly shape teacher identities. Yang and Janaka (2024) found that teachers often navigate complex identities influenced by these systemic pressures, where the centralized education system and diverse ethnic backgrounds create challenges in identity formation. Similarly, Othman and Aljuhaish (2021) highlight that identity formation is a complex and highly contextual process. The participants in their study construct their identities by engaging in their teaching environment, sharing practices with their peers, engaging in student-parent relationships, and participating in professional development.

Teachers in Malaysia face a myriad of challenges related to national curriculum reforms and digital transformation, alongside evolving expectations from parents and communities. Chang et al. (2020) and Sani et al. (2022) emphasize that these pressures compel educators to adapt continuously, often resulting in increased stress and a struggle to maintain a coherent professional identity. Digital transformation initiatives, aimed at integrating technology into the classroom, further complicate this landscape as teachers strive to adapt their practices to align with 21st-century learning demands (Gracia et al., 2022).

Moreover, there exists a significant gap in empirical frameworks that fully address the emotional, technological, and community engagement aspects of Malaysian teacher identity. The Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013) articulates

the necessity for a teacher workforce that is technologically savvy and emotionally resilient (Alnahdi & Alwadei, 2023). However, studies have shown that frameworks examining these dimensions are limited (Ohle-Peters et al., 2023). Cece et al. (2022) indicate that educational policies often overlook emotional resilience and community engagement in teacher identity discussions, particularly in contexts like Malaysia. The literature on TPI in Malaysia is marked by gaps, particularly the lack of holistic, context-specific frameworks that cater specifically to Malaysian educators.

Current studies often underrepresent critical dimensions of identity such as emotional resilience, social responsibility, and student empowerment (Gracia et al., 2021). This oversight limits the potential for reforms that can support teachers in navigating their professional landscapes effectively. In line with that, Yan (2024) suggests that without systematic methodologies to refine these identity dimensions, the resulting frameworks may fail to resonate with the unique challenges that Malaysian teachers face. In summary, past studies consistently affirm that Teacher Professional Identity (TPI) is a multi-dimensional and dynamic construct, essential for understanding educators' roles in contemporary classrooms. Therefore, a localized, empirically validated model of TPI is critical for guiding teacher development policies and practices in Malaysia, as it addresses specific cultural and contextual nuances that influence teacher identity formation (Abendaño, 2024; Lee & Ip, 2021).

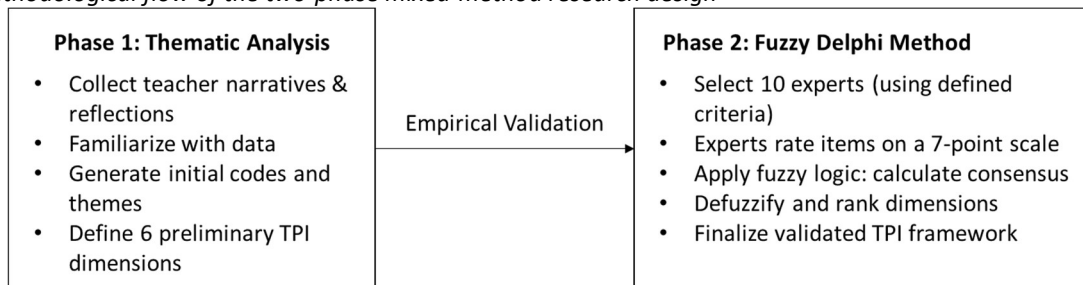
### 3. Method

#### 3.1 Research Design

This study employed a two-phase sequential mixed-method approach, integrating qualitative thematic analysis with the Fuzzy Delphi Method (FDM) to identify and validate the core dimensions of Teacher Professional Identity (TPI) (see Figure 1). In Phase 1, teacher narratives, reflection sheets, and professional forum transcripts were analyzed inductively using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis. This phase generated an initial set of dimensions grounded in real teaching contexts. In Phase 2, these dimensions were evaluated by a panel of ten educational experts using the Fuzzy Delphi Method, which enabled structured consensus-building and quantitative ranking of the identified dimensions. Table 1 shows the sequential research design of this study

**Figure 1**

*The methodological flow of the two-phase mixed-method research design*



**Table 1***The sequential research design of this study*

Phase	Method	Participants	Instruments	Data Analysis Procedure	Justification
Phase 1	Thematic Analysis	Malaysian teachers participating in professional forums, poster sessions, and reflection activities	Teacher narratives, reflection sheets, and forum transcripts	Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis: familiarization, coding, theme development, and review	To inductively capture grounded insights and rich contextual experiences from teachers, allowing authentic emergence of teacher professional identity's dimensions grounded in real Malaysian classroom and community realities. The qualitative phase builds conceptual depth.
Phase 2	Fuzzy Delphi Method (FDM)	10 education experts purposively selected for their qualifications and national-level experience	Structured expert evaluation questionnaire derived from Phase 1 findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fuzzy logic applied to expert ratings (7-point linguistic scale)</li> <li>Threshold value (<math>d \leq 0.2</math>) used to determine consensus</li> <li>Defuzzification for ranking dimensions</li> </ul>	FDM was selected to refine and validate the framework by quantifying expert consensus and minimizing subjectivity. FDM enables precise, data-driven decision-making in complex, value-laden constructs, such as teacher professional identity.

To enhance methodological robustness, the study employed a systematic triangulation strategy that integrated qualitative insights, theoretical grounding, and expert validation. First, teacher narratives, reflection sheets, and forum transcripts were analyzed through Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis, beginning with deep familiarisation, inductive coding, and iterative theme development. Themes were reviewed, refined, and consolidated to ensure internal coherence and conceptual clarity, with particular attention given to maintaining fidelity to teachers' lived experiences. These emergent dimensions were further supported by alignment with established literature on Teacher Professional Identity, strengthening their theoretical validity. To minimize subjective bias and reinforce analytic credibility, the qualitative results underwent a second layer of triangulation through the Fuzzy Delphi Method. Ten recognized educational experts independently evaluated the emergent dimensions using fuzzy linguistic scales, enabling structured consensus building and empirical verification. This multi-step analytic process, which started from inductive coding, literature triangulation, and expert consensus, ensured that the TPI framework was both contextually grounded and methodologically rigorous.

### 3.2 Research Participants

The participants in this study comprised two distinct groups. In the qualitative phase, teacher narratives and reflective accounts were collected from Malaysian educators who participated in professional development forums and sharing sessions focusing on teacher professional identity. These participants represented a range of teaching backgrounds, including primary, secondary, and teacher education institutions. For the FDM validation phase, ten experts were purposively selected based on their expertise, experience, and contributions to national education initiatives. This group included senior teachers, school leaders, curriculum specialists, and teacher educators, each with at least ten years of experience and a strong record of contribution to teacher training, educational policy, or school improvement initiatives. Ten experts were selected to ensure an optimal balance between content validity and efficient consensus processing in the FDM. Previous studies indicate that 10–15 experts are sufficient for reliable FDM outcomes in education-related constructs, especially when participants are carefully selected. Table 2 shows the expert demographic information and its selection criteria.

**Table 2**  
*Expert demographic information and selection criteria*

Expert ID	Institution Type	Position / Role	Experience (Years)	Expertise Area
E1	Public University	Senior Lecturer in Teacher Education	18	Teacher Training, Curriculum Design
E2	Private University	Associate Professor in Educational Policy	15	Educational Leadership, Policy Analysis
E3	Public University	School Improvement Officer (MOE)	20	Professional Development, Evaluation
E4	Private University	Master Trainer, National Teacher Academy	14	Curriculum Innovation, Instructional Design
E5	Public University	Principal, High-Performing School	23	School Leadership, Policy Implementation
E6	Public University	Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Education	12	Teacher Identity, Reflective Practice
E7	Private University	National Award-Winning Teacher	17	Pedagogy, Student Engagement
E8	Public University	Curriculum Development Panel (KPM)	21	Curriculum Frameworks, Educational Standards
E9	Public University	Educational Consultant & Former Dean	25	Teacher Education, Policy Strategy
E10	Private University	Education Technology Specialist	11	Digital Pedagogy, Blended Learning

### **3.3 Materials**

The materials used in this study consisted of two key instruments. For the first phase, teacher narratives, workshop transcripts, and reflection sheets served as qualitative data sources. These materials were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach to thematic analysis, which involved familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, identification of themes, reviewing, defining, and naming themes. This process yielded the dimensions of Teacher Professional Identity that formed the foundation for the second phase. In the FDM phase, a structured expert evaluation questionnaire was developed. The questionnaire presented the six dimensions and their corresponding sub-dimensions, and experts rated each item using a seven-point linguistic scale ranging from "Not Important" to "Very Important" through a structured Excel form. The responses were converted into triangular fuzzy numbers to quantify expert judgments and manage uncertainty in subjective evaluations.

### **3.4 Research Procedure**

This study was carried out in two sequential phases. In Phase 1, teacher narratives, reflection sheets, and transcripts from professional forums were collected and subjected to thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach. The data were first familiarized and coded inductively, after which initial themes were generated, reviewed, and refined to ensure conceptual clarity and alignment with teachers' lived experiences. This qualitative phase yielded an empirically grounded set of dimensions describing how Malaysian teachers construct their professional identities. In Phase 2, these dimensions were subsequently validated using the Fuzzy Delphi Method (FDM). A panel of ten educational experts independently evaluated each dimension using a seven-point linguistic scale. Their ratings were converted into triangular fuzzy numbers to account for uncertainty and variation in expert judgement. Threshold values ( $d \leq 0.2$ ) were then calculated to determine the level of consensus, and all items meeting this criterion were retained. Finally, a defuzzification process was conducted to compute the average fuzzy

scores ( $A_{max}$ ), allowing the dimensions to be prioritized and ranked according to their perceived importance in shaping Teacher Professional Identity.

### **3.5 Ethical Considerations**

This study was conducted in full adherence to established ethical standards for educational research, with approval obtained from the institutional research ethics committee before data collection. All participating teachers and expert panel members were provided with a clear explanation of the study's objectives, procedures, and their rights as participants, including the right to withdraw without penalty. Informed consent was obtained in writing, and confidentiality was safeguarded by anonymizing all teacher narratives, reflective statements, and expert evaluations throughout the analysis and reporting processes. The qualitative data originated from pre-existing teacher narratives, reflection sheets, and forum transcripts that were voluntarily contributed during professional development sessions. All data were stored securely and used exclusively for academic purposes, ensuring compliance with principles of privacy, respect for autonomy, and responsible data management. This rigorous ethical approach ensures that participants' voices are represented with integrity while maintaining the highest standards of research accountability.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1 Phase 1: Thematic Analysis of Teacher Narratives**

The qualitative data gathered from teacher narratives, reflective statements, and forum discussions were analyzed using thematic analysis. The process resulted in the identification of six dominant themes representing the core dimensions of Teacher Professional Identity (TPI) in the Malaysian context. Table 3 shows the emergent dimensions of Teacher Professional Identity based on teacher narratives. These six dimensions were then operationalized into 18 sub-dimensional items and used as the basis for Phase 2 expert evaluation. To enhance the analytic depth and interpretive rigour of the thematic findings, representative anonymized excerpts from teacher narratives were incorporated into the results. The inclusion of these excerpts serves a dual purpose: first, it provides empirical grounding by demonstrating how the identified themes emerge directly from teachers' lived experiences; and second, it strengthens the credibility and transparency of the analytic process by allowing readers to trace the connection between raw data and thematic interpretation. As recommended in qualitative research standards, anchoring themes in verbatim evidence enhances dependability and confirmability, ensuring that the analysis remains closely aligned with participants' voices rather than researcher assumptions. These excerpts were carefully selected to reflect the diversity of emotional, pedagogical, and professional contexts represented in the dataset while maintaining anonymity and ethical integrity. By embedding these narrative fragments within the thematic explanations, the revised section offers a more compelling and authentic portrayal of how Malaysian teachers construct their professional identities, thus reinforcing both the interpretive validity and contextual resonance of the emergent dimensions.

The first dimension, Personal and Emotional Commitment, refers to a teacher's sustained emotional engagement and personal dedication to the profession. This includes the ability to form meaningful emotional connections with students, demonstrate resilience in the face of challenges, and view teaching as a vehicle for personal growth. The second dimension, Pedagogical Beliefs and Practices, encompasses the teacher's commitment to student-centered learning approaches, the use of differentiated instruction to meet diverse needs, and the adoption of creative pedagogical strategies that make learning meaningful. The third dimension, Innovation and Technology Integration, reflects the ability to leverage digital tools, gamified strategies, and multimedia content creation to enhance classroom engagement and 21st-century learning outcomes. The fourth dimension, Leadership and Professional Growth, captures teachers' roles as mentors, curriculum contributors, and continuous learners who lead educational initiatives within and beyond their institutions. The fifth dimension, Social Responsibility and Community Engagement, involves the teacher's sense of duty toward promoting educational equity, collaborating with local communities and NGOs, and engaging in volunteerism to uplift underserved groups. Finally, the sixth dimension, Student Empowerment and Impact, highlights teachers' commitment to nurturing student confidence, enabling student voice, and guiding learners through real-world, transformative learning experiences.

**Table 3***Emergent TPI dimensions from thematic analysis*

<b>Emergent Dimension</b>	<b>Subdimensions Identified</b>
Personal and Emotional Commitment	Emotional connection, resilience, and personal growth
Pedagogical Beliefs and Practices	Student-centered learning, differentiated instruction, creative pedagogy
Innovation and Technology Integration	Digital tools, gamification, and content creation
Leadership and Professional Growth	Mentorship, recognition, and curriculum contribution
Social Responsibility and Community Engagement	Equity, outreach, volunteerism
Student Empowerment and Impact	Confidence-building, student voice, real-world learning

**4.2 Phase 2: Fuzzy Delphi Method (FDM) Results**

Following the qualitative identification of these dimensions in Phase 1, a total of 18 sub-dimensional items were developed and presented to the expert panel for evaluation. Each item was rated on a 7-point linguistic scale and processed using fuzzy logic to account for subjective judgments. Overall, the FDM results confirmed consensus on all 18 items, with threshold values ( $d$ ) ranging between 0.00 and 0.18, well below the cut-off value of 0.2. This indicated strong agreement among experts regarding the relevance of each item to TPI. The defuzzification process ( $A_{max}$ ) further allowed for ranking the dimensions based on perceived importance. Among the six dimensions, the highest  $A_{max}$  scores were recorded for items under Pedagogical Beliefs and Practices, Personal and Emotional Commitment, and Student Empowerment and Impact, suggesting that these elements are particularly central to Malaysian teachers' professional identity development.

**Table 4***Findings of expert consensus on emergent dimensions of teacher professional identity*

<b>Item</b>	<b>Triangular Fuzzy Numbers</b>		<b>Defuzzification Process</b>				<b>Expert Consensus Status</b>	<b>Ranking</b>
	<b>Threshold Value, <math>d</math> (&gt;0.2)</b>	<b>Average of % Consensus (&gt; 75%)</b>	<b>m1</b>	<b>m2</b>	<b>m3</b>	<b>Fuzzy Score (A) (&gt; 0.5)</b>		
1	0.155	80%	0.620	0.800	0.940	0.787	Accept	6
2	0.106	100%	0.640	0.840	0.970	0.817	Accept	5
3	0.094	90%	0.760	0.920	0.990	0.890	Accept	3
4	0.101	90%	0.780	0.930	0.990	0.900	Accept	2
5	0.115	90%	0.660	0.850	0.970	0.827	Accept	4
6	0.076	100%	0.800	0.950	1.000	0.917	Accept	1

*\*Note. Item 6 = Pedagogical Belief and Practices; Item 4 = Personal and Emotional Commitment; Item 3 = Student Empowerment and Impact*

Based on Table 4, the Fuzzy Delphi Method (FDM) analysis revealed strong expert consensus on the proposed dimensions of Teacher Professional Identity (TPI) based on six representative items. All items achieved a threshold value ( $d$ ) below 0.2, indicating sufficient agreement among the panel of ten experts. The average percentage of consensus exceeded 75% for all items, with three items reaching 90% consensus and two items achieving a full 100% agreement. Notably, Item 6, which represents Pedagogical Belief and Practices, recorded the highest defuzzified score ( $A_{max} = 0.917$ ), ranking it as the most crucial dimension in shaping TPI. This was followed closely by Item 4 (Personal and Emotional Commitment,  $A_{max} = 0.900$ ) and Item 3 (Student Empowerment and Impact,  $A_{max} = 0.890$ ), which were also among the top three in terms of expert-rated importance. Other dimensions, including Leadership and Professional Growth (Item 5,  $A_{max} = 0.827$ ), Innovation and Technology Integration (Item 2,  $A_{max} = 0.817$ ), and

Social Responsibility and Community Engagement (Item 1,  $A_{max} = 0.787$ ), also demonstrated high levels of acceptance, with all  $A_{max}$  values exceeding the 0.5 acceptance threshold. The consistent acceptance across all six dimensions confirms the robustness of the proposed framework. These results empirically validate the contextual relevance of each TPI domain, with particular emphasis on pedagogical excellence, emotional resilience, and student impact as central pillars of Malaysian teachers' professional identity.

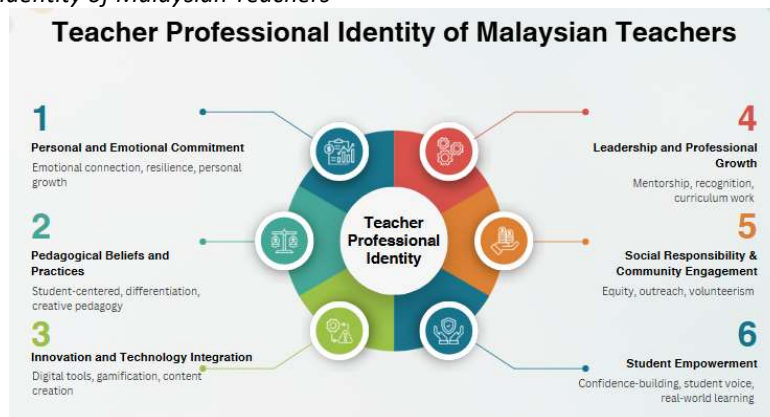
## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 Interpretations of Results

This study aimed to explore and empirically structure the key dimensions shaping Teacher Professional Identity (TPI) within the Malaysian context. Thematic analysis of teacher narratives revealed six core dimensions: (i) Personal and Emotional Commitment, (ii) Pedagogical Beliefs and Practices, (iii) Innovation and Technology Integration, (iv) Leadership and Professional Growth, (v) Social Responsibility and Community Engagement, and (vi) Student Empowerment and Impact. These dimensions reflect the holistic nature of professional identity as perceived by Malaysian teachers, encompassing not only instructional competence but also emotional resilience, technological fluency, and social responsibility (see Figure 2). Subsequent validation through the Fuzzy Delphi Method (FDM) confirmed expert consensus on all six dimensions that were identified in Phase 1. Particularly, dimensions such as Pedagogical Beliefs and Practices and Student Empowerment received the highest fuzzy scores, emphasizing that identity construction is deeply rooted in how teachers engage with learners and shape transformative classroom experiences. The high consensus levels and strong defuzzified scores ( $A_{max} > 0.80$ ) indicate a high degree of alignment between lived experiences of the teachers and expert understanding of professional identity in the Malaysian education system.

**Figure 2**

*Teacher Professional Identity of Malaysian Teachers*



The coherence between the empirical findings and theoretical framing is reinforced by examining how the highest-ranking dimensions from the Fuzzy Delphi Method align with both the qualitative narratives and established scholarship on teacher identity. The prominence of Pedagogical Beliefs and Practices, Personal and Emotional Commitment, and Student Empowerment and Impact in the FDM analysis reflects the centrality of these elements in teachers' lived experiences as expressed through their narratives and reflective accounts. Teachers consistently described their identity construction as rooted in relational engagement, classroom decision-making, and the emotional labour intrinsic to teaching, where closely parallel the foundational views of Beijgaard et al. (2004), Beauchamp and Thomas (2009), and Richards (2021), who argue that identity is formed through the interplay of personal meaning, pedagogical action, and contextual negotiation. By connecting these experiential accounts with the validated prioritization of dimensions, the findings show that the teachers construct their professional identities through a dynamic integration of instructional values, emotional investment, and student-centered commitments. This alignment between emergent themes, expert consensus, and theoretical expectations strengthens the

interpretive validity of the study and underscores that the TPI framework derived here is not only empirically grounded but also conceptually robust and contextually meaningful.

The findings of this study align with prior international scholarship that defines Teacher Professional Identity (TPI) as a multifaceted, evolving construct, as articulated by Beijaard et al. (2004) and Beauchamp and Thomas (2009). However, this study extends the discourse by localizing the framework to Malaysian realities. While past studies have emphasized pedagogical beliefs and professional development (Flores & Day, 2006; Sachs, 2001), this study highlights previously underrepresented dimensions, such as Emotional Commitment and Student Empowerment, which have traditionally been marginalized in policy-driven identity models. Pedagogical beliefs serve as the core of a teacher's professional identity because they directly shape instructional strategies, classroom interactions, and beliefs about student learning (Sani et al., 2022) in the Malaysian context, where curricular reforms demand more active, differentiated, and student-centered approaches (MOE, 2013). Teachers' identity is strongly tied to how they internalize and implement such pedagogical innovations. The high centrality of this dimension affirms that Malaysian teachers see effective pedagogy not merely as a skill but as a defining feature of who they are as professionals. This aligns with the findings of Alnahdi and Alwadei (2023), who argue that teachers significantly shape their students' identities through reflective pedagogical practices that affirm student participation and agency.

Equally significant is Personal and Emotional Commitment, which highlights the affective and humanistic dimension of teacher identity. The incorporation of emotional commitment and student empowerment dimensions aligns with findings indicating that emotional factors play a crucial role in teacher engagement and leadership (Li et al., 2022; Mooman & Sadruddin, 2023). As highlighted by Mooman and Sadruddin (2023), a teaching identity rooted in learner-centered practices fosters more effective interaction with students and enhances overall educational outcomes. Drawing from Emotional Labor Theory and Resilience Theory, this dimension reflects how teachers emotionally invest in their students, endure systemic pressures, and derive meaning from relational work. In collectivist societies like Malaysia, where education is deeply intertwined with moral and emotional duty, teachers' sense of identity often centers around values like care, dedication, and perseverance (Gracia et al., 2021; Rachmajanti et al., 2021). This underscores the assertion by Yan (2024) that teaching is fundamentally a relational practice, emphasizing the importance of emotional connections in professional identity formation.

The prominence of Student Empowerment and Impact as a central dimension adds a transformative layer to the understanding of teacher identity. In contrast to traditional models that emphasize teacher-directed instruction, this dimension highlights how teachers define themselves by their ability to foster student agency, voice, and real-world readiness. This resonates with Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and the growth mindset literature (Dweck, 2006), which emphasize autonomy-supportive environments and transformative outcomes as hallmarks of effective education. In Malaysia's shift toward 21st-century skills and holistic education, empowering students is not only a pedagogical goal but a moral imperative. As such, teachers increasingly see themselves not merely as content deliverers, but as enablers of change, facilitators of confidence, and nurturers of student identity, thereby reflecting on and reinforcing their professional identity. This notion aligns with Solihatun et al. (2025), who note that teachers' roles in creating empowering classroom environments are critical for fostering positive student outcomes.

Additionally, the proposed framework addresses gaps in how contextual factors, such as centralized educational policies and cultural diversity, shape teacher identity in Malaysia. This study supports the necessity for context-specific models, providing a pathway for future investigations into Teacher Professional Identity that reflect local conditions while contributing to the broader international discourse on teacher identity development. Few prior studies have employed systematic consensus-building methods like the Fuzzy Delphi Method (FDM) in structuring TPI frameworks. For example, Wong and Liu (2022) emphasize the importance of empirical validation methods in understanding teachers' professional identities, noting that such approaches lend quantitative support to qualitative findings. By incorporating FDM, the current study moves beyond narrative conceptualization and provides a robust, data-driven basis for a localized, empirically grounded identity model. This approach offers a significant contribution to TPI research in Southeast Asia, where validated frameworks remain limited.

## **5.2 Study Implications**

From a theoretical standpoint, this study contributes to a validated model of Teacher Professional Identity (TPI) that situates emotional engagement, community outreach, and student empowerment alongside traditional pedagogical dimensions. It reconceptualizes identity not just as a cognitive or professional stance, but as a relational, emotionally invested, and socially embedded process (Saddington & Bacasmot, 2024). The integration of these dimensions aligns with findings that highlight the multifaceted nature of teacher identity, which cannot be fully understood without considering emotional and social dimensions (En, 2023). Practically, the results offer a valuable reference for teacher professional development programs in Malaysia. Training modules can now be aligned with specific TPI dimensions, including the implementation of emotional regulation strategies, digital innovation, and community-based teaching practices. This is particularly important as studies indicate that emotional and psychological empowerment significantly enhances both teachers' job satisfaction and student engagement. For example, Prasetyowati et al. (2023) underscore that when teachers feel more empowered and engaged, this positively impacts their teaching quality and student academic performance.

For educational leaders and policymakers, the framework developed in this study can guide the design of performance evaluation tools, teacher induction models, and reflective practices embedded in national teacher standards. By grounding these structures in teacher-validated identity components, they become more responsive, contextualized, and impactful (Choy et al., 2019). The association between effective leadership and teacher empowerment aligns with findings from En (2023), which emphasize that transformational leadership fosters teachers' psychological empowerment by actively involving them in school governance, thereby contributing to their sense of professionalism.

## **5.3 Limitations and Future Directions**

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the qualitative data were derived from a limited number of narratives within selected professional development settings, which may not capture the full diversity of teacher experiences across Malaysia. Second, while the FDM panel was composed of highly qualified experts, the relatively small sample size (n=10) may constrain the generalizability of the validation results. Additionally, the FDM process, though robust for consensus building, does not account for causal relationships between identity dimensions or their impact on student outcomes. Addressing the limitations, future research should consider expanding the data pool to include a broader range of school contexts (urban, rural, vernacular, religious) to increase representativeness. A quantitative survey based on the validated TPI dimensions can be developed and administered at scale to empirically examine how these identity dimensions correlate with teacher effectiveness, retention, and well-being. Longitudinal studies may also uncover how Teacher Professional Identity and its dimensions evolve, especially in response to national reforms, digitalization, and socio-political shifts in education. Lastly, incorporating student perspectives could provide a multi-stakeholder view of teacher identity and its real-world impact.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study explored and empirically structured the key dimensions of Teacher Professional Identity (TPI) among Malaysian teachers through a two-phase sequential research design involving thematic analysis and the Fuzzy Delphi Method (FDM). The results revealed six interrelated dimensions, which are (i) Personal and Emotional Commitment, (ii) Pedagogical Beliefs and Practices, (iii) Innovation and Technology Integration, (iv) Leadership and Professional Development, (v) Social Responsibility and Community Engagement, and (vi) Student Empowerment and Impact. Among these, three dimensions, which are Pedagogical Beliefs and Practices, Personal and Emotional Commitment, and Student Empowerment and Impact, emerged as the most central, highlighting the dynamic relationship between teachers' instructional values, emotional resilience, and their transformative influence on learners. This study highlights that Malaysian teachers define their professional identity not merely through technical competence but through meaningful pedagogical engagement, emotional dedication, and student-centered transformation. By integrating qualitative insights with expert consensus, the study provides a validated and context-sensitive Teacher Professional Identity framework that can inform and guide future teacher training, leadership development, and

policy formulation. In conclusion, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of what it means to be a teacher in Malaysia's evolving educational landscape. The validated framework affirms that a strong professional identity is foundational to teacher effectiveness, innovation, and social impact, making it a cornerstone for advancing both teacher professionalism and educational excellence.

## **Declarations**

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### **Competing Interests**

None.

### **Ethical Statement**

This research was conducted in accordance with established ethical standards for educational research. Ethical clearance was obtained from the institutional research ethics committee before data collection. All participants were informed of the purpose and procedures of the study and provided written informed consent before participating. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. For the Fuzzy Delphi Method (FDM) phase, expert identities were anonymized during data processing to maintain objectivity. No personally identifiable information has been reported in the study, and all data has been securely stored and used solely for academic purposes.

### **Author's Contribution**

**Author<sup>1</sup>:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft

**Author<sup>2</sup>:** Supervision, Investigation

### **Data availability**

The data was collected and analysed based on qualitative methods through structured interview questions and sharing session content. The collection and analysis processes were detailed in the method section of this study.

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