Cultivating Lecturer Professionalism in Islamic Higher Education: A Phenomenological Exploration of Disciplinary Alignment, Digital Adaptation, and Ethical Engagement

Muhammad Iqbal [1], Saiful Akhyar Lubis [2], Masganti Sitorus [3]

[1] Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Medan; muhammad.iqbal@iainlangsa.ac.id
[2] Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Medan; saifulakhyarlbs@uinsu.ac.id
[3] Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Medan; masganti@uinsu.ac.id

Abstract	Professionalism among Guidance and Counseling lecturers plays a vital role in improving the quality of higher education and fulfilling the Tri Dharma of Higher Education—teaching, research, and community service. While teacher professionalism has been widely discussed, limited attention has been given to its development within Islamic higher education, where academic competence is closely intertwined with moral and social values. This study examines the readiness and professional development strategies of Guidance and Counseling lecturers at Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Langsa in Aceh, Indonesia. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, the research explores lecturers' lived experiences in shaping professional identity and practice. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis involving ten purposively selected informants, including institutional leaders, lecturers, staff, and students. Data were analyzed through stages of collection, condensation, display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that lecturer professionalism is constructed through three interconnected dimensions: disciplinary alignment in teaching, adaptive integration of digital technology, and sustained engagement in research and community service grounded in counseling ethics. The study concludes that professionalism in Islamic higher education extends beyond technical competence to include ethical commitment and contextual responsiveness, highlighting the need for integrated institutional support for sustainable professional development.
Keywords	Counseling Education; Islamic Higher Education; Lecturer Professionalism

Corresponding Author
Muhammad Iqbal
Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Medan; muhammad.iqbal@iainlangsa.ac.id

1. INTRODUCTION

Lecturer professionalism is a central concept in the development of higher education quality, as it is directly associated with the quality of teaching, scholarly development, and the social contribution of universities (MacFarlane, 2001; Saefrudin & Jaelani, 2024). In the field of Guidance and Counseling, lecturer professionalism is not merely the mastery of academic competencies, but also the ability to construct a professional counselor identity grounded in ethical principles, humanistic values, and social responsibility (Arthur, 2009). Accordingly, the professionalism of Guidance and Counseling lecturers

encompasses integrating their roles as academic educators and counseling practitioners who provide personal, social, and moral development services to students and the wider community (Tangkere et al., 2018).

Within Islamic higher education institutions, lecturer professionalism in Guidance and Counseling has distinctive characteristics due to an educational environment that emphasizes the integration of Islamic values, academic knowledge, and social engagement (Kadarisman et al., 2024; Munir & Rojak, 2023). Guidance and Counseling lecturers in this context are not only responsible for fulfilling the Tri Dharma of Higher Education, teaching, research, and community service, but also for serving as agents of character development and mental well-being in accordance with Islamic ethical principles (Hawignyo et al., 2024; Rojak & Munir, 2023). Consequently, lecturer professionalism in Islamic higher education requires a balanced integration of pedagogical, professional, personal, and social competencies that are internalized in both academic practices and counseling services (Bahri et al., 2023).

Theoretically, this study is grounded in theories of lecturer professionalism and the concept of professional identity, which conceptualize professionalism as a dynamic construct shaped by experience, reflection, values, and institutional context (Kelchtermans, 2009; Tangkere et al., 2018b) Pereira & Felicetti, 2022). From the perspective of counseling education, professionalism is also understood through counselor competency frameworks that encompass disciplinary knowledge, practical skills, professional ethics, and socio-cultural sensitivity. These theoretical perspectives provide a relevant foundation for examining how Guidance and Counseling lecturers construct their professionalism within the context of Islamic higher education (Sahin, 2018; Warta et al., 2024).

In practice, Guidance and Counseling lecturers in Islamic higher education face complex challenges as they are required to perform dual roles as academic lecturers and professional counselors while simultaneously integrating teaching, research, community service, and public counseling services (Anwar et al., 2025; Wardoyo et al., 2020). These challenges are further intensified when lecturers are responsible for managing institutional counseling units that serve both students and the broader community. As a result, lecturer professionalism cannot be assessed solely on academic performance, but must also consider the quality and sustainability of social and counseling services provided (Ristianti et al., 2025).

Previous studies on lecturer professionalism have predominantly focused on general pedagogical and professional competencies and their impact on teaching quality or student academic outcomes (Supriyanto et al., 2019; Arif & Cahyani, 2025; Anwar et al., 2025). Although the literature on educator professionalism is extensive, only a limited number of studies have specifically examined the professionalism of Guidance and Counseling lecturers in higher education, particularly within Islamic higher education institutions that require the integration of academic and socio-religious dimensions. Moreover, research linking lecturer professionalism to the practical implementation of the Tri Dharma of Higher Education and the management of public counseling services remains scarce.

Addressing this research gap, the present study offers a novel perspective by examining the professionalism of Guidance and Counseling lecturers as an integrated practice that combines academic and social dimensions within the context of Islamic higher education. The novelty of this study lies in its analysis of lecturer professionalism not merely as an individual competency, but as a professional construction manifested through teaching, research, community service, and the sustained, holistic management of institutional counseling services.

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the readiness and strategies of Guidance and Counseling lecturers at Institut Agama Islam Negeri Langsa in constructing professionalism through the integration of pedagogical, professional, personal, and social competencies in the implementation of the Tri Dharma of Higher Education and public counseling services. This study is expected to contribute theoretically to the development of the concept of lecturer professionalism in Islamic higher education

and practically to institutional policies on lecturer development and the strengthening of counseling services in Islamic higher education institutions.

2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design using a descriptive phenomenological approach (Husserl et al., 1984) to explore the lived experiences of Guidance and Counseling lecturers in developing and enacting their professionalism (Farid, 2018; Patria & Salamah, 2022). This type of phenomenology was selected to capture the essence of participants' conscious experiences and meanings as perceived from their own perspectives (Hamdani, 2024; Fu'ady, 2011). The phenomenological approach allows researchers to understand experiences from the lecturers' viewpoints, focusing not only on observable actions but also on reflections and lived experiences (Nasir et al., 2023). The primary aim of this study was to identify the readiness, strategies, and processes adopted by Guidance and Counseling lecturers to actualize their professional competencies across teaching, research, community service, and public counseling practices. This phenomenological approach enabled a holistic, in-depth understanding of how Guidance and Counseling lecturers construct and implement professionalism in real-world academic and counseling practices in Islamic higher education.

The research was conducted at Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Langsa, Aceh, Indonesia. The participants in this study were exclusively Guidance and Counseling lecturers, as they are directly involved in developing and implementing professional competencies in Islamic higher education. A total of 7 Guidance and Counseling lecturers were selected using purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (1) permanent lecturer status, (2) a minimum of three years of teaching experience, and (3) active involvement in at least two components of the Tri Dharma of Higher Education.

Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation, and document analysis. An interview guide was developed based on the research objectives and theoretical framework (Fadila et al., 2025; Ardiansyah et al., 2023). The interview questions explored themes of professional identity formation, disciplinary alignment, digital adaptation, ethical engagement, and challenges in integrating academic and social responsibilities (Subandi, 2011; Soegijono, 1993). All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim. Observations were conducted on- and off-campus to capture lecturers' professional activities in authentic academic and counseling contexts. Relevant documents, including institutional policies, activity reports, and counseling service records, were examined to support and contextualize the interview findings (Sulung & Muspawi, 2024; Arianto, 2024).

Data analysis followed phenomenological analysis procedures aligned with descriptive phenomenology. Edmund Husserl views phenomenology as an approach aimed at capturing the essence of experience through in-depth description of subjective consciousness (Syahrizal & Jailani, 2023). Descriptive phenomenology focuses on understanding phenomena as they are experienced in consciousness, emphasizing intentionality, lived experience, and the meaning structures of experience (Husserl et al., 1984). The analysis involved several stages: (1) identifying significant statements related to lecturers' experiences, (2) treating all statements with equal value, (3) clustering meanings into thematic units, (4) developing textural descriptions of what participants experienced, and (5) constructing structural descriptions of how these experiences occurred within institutional and socio-religious contexts. These steps led to the identification of the essence of lecturer professionalism as experienced by Guidance and Counseling lecturers.

To ensure data trustworthiness and validity, this study applied strategies of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was strengthened through data triangulation, prolonged engagement, and member checking. Transferability was addressed through

rich and detailed contextual descriptions, while dependability and confirmability were ensured through the maintenance of an audit trail and reflexive documentation. Data collection and analysis continued until data saturation was achieved, as indicated by recurring themes and the absence of new significant meanings.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings

The professionalism of Guidance and Counseling lecturers, like that of educators in other disciplines, requires deliberate and continuous preparation. This preparation is not intended solely for personal benefit, but also to ensure that its impact is felt more broadly within the institution where they serve (Nashrullah et al., 2025). At its core, readiness involves anticipating and organizing all necessary elements so that academic responsibilities can be carried out smoothly through independent, optimal effort. Such readiness serves as a foundation for shaping professionalism, providing evidence that Guidance and Counseling lecturers are capable of fulfilling their role as qualified human resources in higher education while also gaining social recognition beyond the academic community. For this reason, lecturers must view preparation as a strategic step to enhance the quality of their profession and, at the same time, contribute to the advancement of their institution, particularly the State Islamic Institute of Langsa (IAIN Langsa), Aceh, reciprocally.

The effort to build professionalism among Guidance and Counseling lecturers at the State Islamic Institute of Langsa (IAIN Langsa), Aceh, is closely tied to the implementation of the Tri Dharma of Higher Education. The Tri Dharma is regarded as a fundamental pillar that sustains the academic life of lecturers, serving both as a guiding principle and as a responsibility inherent to their role (Sugiarti, 2022). Through the integrated execution of education, research, and community service, lecturers not only fulfill their academic obligations but also simultaneously cultivate their professional readiness. In this way, the Tri Dharma functions as an integrative framework that connects academic duties with the formation of professional identity.
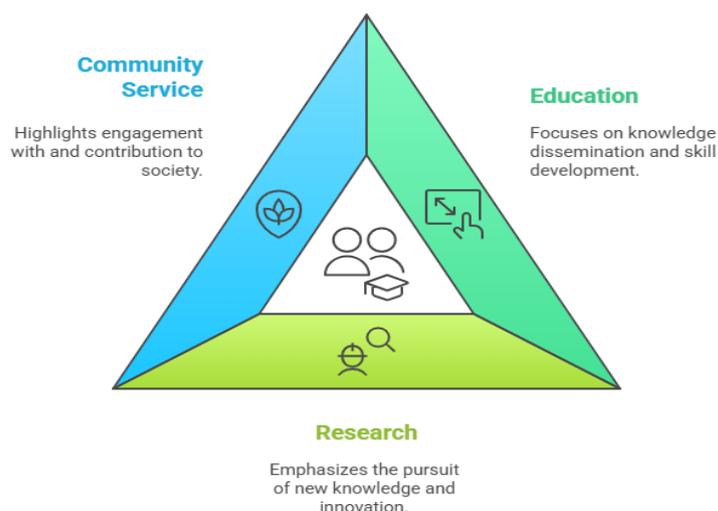

Figure 1. Tri Dharma of Higher Education

The Educational Domain

The educational domain emerged as a core lived experience through which Guidance and Counseling lecturers understand and enact their professionalism. Rather than being perceived merely

as a set of technical obligations, teaching was experienced as a continuous process of self-preparation, reflection, and ethical responsibility toward students and the academic community. Across interviews, lecturers described instructional professionalism as an ongoing effort to align personal competence with academic standards while remaining responsive to students' intellectual and emotional needs (M. Marimbun, personal communication, 2024; W. Chalidaziah, personal communication, 2024; N. Nengsih, personal communication, 2024; R. A. Pohan, personal communication, 2024).

Lecturers' experience in the educational domain is closely linked to their awareness of academic regulations and their internal commitment to professional growth. This awareness was not articulated as external compliance, but as an internalized sense of responsibility that guided their instructional decisions. One lecturer described professional readiness as beginning with a deep understanding of academic rules and a continuous effort to develop oneself through studying theories of guidance and counseling, psychology, and related disciplines, as well as evaluating course designs regularly (M. Marimbun, personal communication, 2024). Participation in seminars, training programs, and collegial discussions was experienced as a reflective space for reassessing pedagogical roles and addressing instructional challenges.

Professional teaching competence was also experienced as a dynamic and evolving practice. Lecturers emphasized that maintaining instructional quality requires continuous adaptation, including revising learning tools, developing course modules, and mentoring students beyond formal classroom settings. One participant highlighted that regular evaluation of learning instruments and active engagement in professional development activities helped sustain pedagogical relevance and effectiveness (W. Chalidaziah, personal communication, 2024). Collegial collaboration and feedback were experienced as essential in negotiating instructional challenges and reinforcing professional identity.

Another lecturer described professionalism in teaching as inseparable from a commitment to lifelong learning and self-reflection. Strengthening teaching competence through targeted training, improving classroom management, mastering updated instructional materials, and remaining attentive to students' social and emotional conditions were experienced as integral to being a professional academic (N. Nengsih, personal communication, 2024). Mutual feedback among colleagues was perceived as a meaningful process for enhancing instructional awareness and quality.

Furthermore, lecturers experienced teaching professionalism as closely linked to personal readiness, encompassing emotional, spiritual, and physical dimensions. One lecturer emphasized that effective teaching begins with thorough preparation of instructional materials and personal readiness before entering the classroom. Expanding instructional resources through digital platforms, such as educational videos and online academic materials, was experienced as supporting clearer and more engaging learning processes (R. A. Pohan, personal communication, 2024).

Overall, the essence of professionalism in the educational domain was experienced by lecturers as a holistic readiness, characterized by reflective pedagogical competence, internalized regulatory awareness, continuous learning, and ethical commitment to students. These lived experiences were sustained through ongoing academic dialogue conducted via formal and informal channels, enabling lecturers to continuously interpret, evaluate, and reconstruct their professionalism within the context of Islamic higher education.
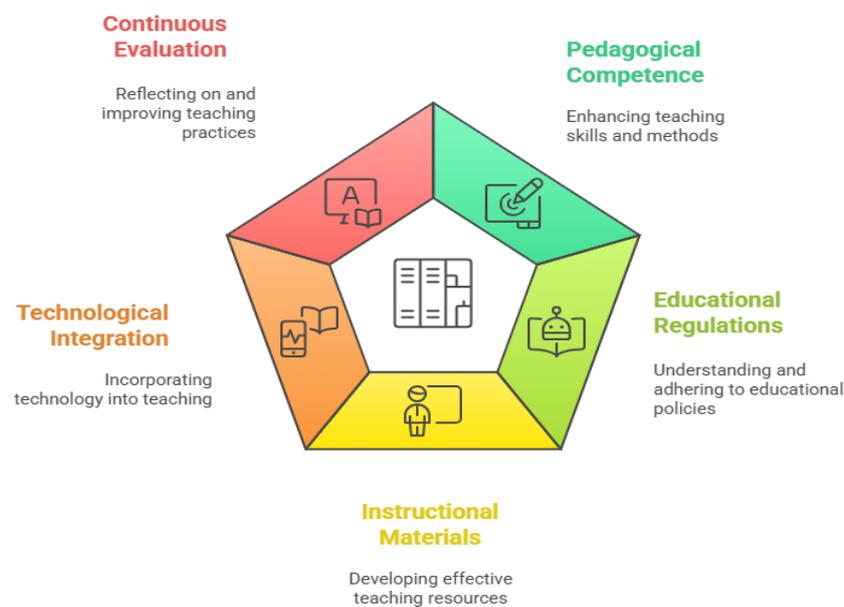
Figure 2. Lectures' Readiness Framework

Taken together, these findings indicate that the lecturers' preparation in education and teaching has been implemented effectively, in accordance with their respective strategies and professional orientations. The various forms of preparedness identified in this study highlight the importance of establishing a structured, sustainable framework that serves as a collective guideline for improving educational quality within the Guidance and Counseling program.

Figure 2 illustrates five interconnected dimensions that shape lecturers' preparedness for teaching: continuous evaluation, pedagogical competence, educational regulations, instructional materials, and technological integration. Rather than functioning as isolated competencies, these components collectively depict an ongoing process of professional transformation and identity development within higher education contexts.

Continuous evaluation serves as the primary catalyst for critical reflection, a key element in Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory (Paprock, 1992). As lecturers routinely examine the effectiveness of their instructional approaches and student responses, they engage in reflective practices that prompt them to reconsider long-held assumptions about teaching and learning. This reflective engagement encourages shifts in pedagogical perspectives and fosters more adaptive decision-making in complex classroom environments.

Enhancing pedagogical competence emerges as a natural consequence of this reflective process (Liakopoulou, 2011). By adopting more participatory and responsive instructional strategies, lecturers not only incorporate new teaching methods but also reconstruct their understanding of the educator's role. This reconstruction reflects a deeper transformation in meaning-making structures, demonstrating how shifts in perspective unfold through both cognitive and practical changes in teaching practice (Paprock, 1992).

Understanding educational regulations provides an essential normative foundation for lecturers' professional behavior. As institutional policies and academic standards become internalized, they form part of the structural basis of lecturers' professional self-concept. From the standpoint of Professional Identity Formation Theory (Flum & Kaplan, 2012)Adherence to educational regulations strengthens a coherent professional identity, guiding lecturers' decision-making while ensuring alignment with institutional expectations.

The development of instructional materials further reinforces this identity-building process. Engaging in the continuous design, revision, and contextualization of learning resources requires both subject-matter expertise and pedagogical sensitivity. Through this work, lecturers position themselves as active designers of learning experiences, translating disciplinary knowledge into forms that are accessible and meaningful for students. Technological integration represents yet another domain through which professional transformation becomes visible. The incorporation of digital tools not only expands opportunities for interaction and accessibility but also reshapes lecturers' perceptions of their role in the learning process. As they adapt to evolving technological demands, lecturers negotiate new competencies that reinforce an identity aligned with contemporary academic challenges.

Together, the dimensions presented in Figure 2 demonstrate that lecturer readiness extends far beyond technical proficiency. It reflects a dynamic and continuous process of reflection, adaptation, and identity construction. Through transformative learning experiences and the ongoing consolidation of professional identity, lecturers develop a form of readiness that is both intellectually grounded and contextually responsive, ultimately strengthening the quality of teaching and learning in higher education.

The Research Domain

The research domain was experienced by Guidance and Counseling lecturers as a fundamental expression of their academic responsibility and professional identity, rather than merely an administrative requirement. Research was understood as a meaningful avenue for advancing counseling knowledge and responding to societal needs through scientific inquiry. Although lecturers demonstrated diverse strategies in preparing for research, their experiences revealed a shared sense of obligation to strengthen their research competence as part of their professionalism continuously.

Lecturers experienced research readiness as beginning with sustained engagement with scientific literature and methodological understanding. One lecturer described research preparation as a continuous process of reading books and journal articles on guidance and counseling and research methods, complemented by participation in research training, seminars, and workshops. These activities were experienced as essential spaces for learning and self-evaluation, particularly when preparing research proposals for institutional funding schemes (B. Basri, personal communication, 2023). Rather than viewing these activities as routine tasks, the lecturer experienced them as opportunities to deepen understanding of the research process and to improve the quality of scholarly work.

Another lecturer emphasized that research professionalism was experienced through a strong awareness of formal research regulations and ethical guidelines. Reading scientific articles and understanding official research policies were perceived as foundational practices that ensured methodological rigor and accountability. Involving students in research activities and engaging in academic discussions with colleagues within and outside the institution were experienced as meaningful collaborative processes that enriched perspectives and reduced obstacles during research implementation (M. Marimbun, personal communication, 2024).

For some lecturers, research readiness was experienced primarily through scientific literacy as a daily academic habit. One participant described reading a wide range of published articles and utilizing digital platforms such as Google Scholar and other online academic sources as essential practices for expanding methodological insight and identifying relevant research topics (R. A. Pohan, personal communication, 2024). Participation in seminars and workshops was found to reinforce practical understanding and help translate abstract ideas into feasible research designs.

Another lecturer experienced research professionalism as a flexible yet consistent process of academic engagement. Regular involvement in seminars and workshops, conducting small-scale studies, writing scientific articles each semester, and reading national and international publications

were perceived as interconnected practices that sustained research competence over time. Collegial discussions were experienced as reflective spaces for testing ideas and refining academic arguments, rather than as formally structured obligations (M. Siregar, personal communication, 2023).

Overall, the essence of research readiness among Guidance and Counseling lecturers was experienced as a continuous, self-directed academic journey, characterized by sustained engagement with scientific literature, awareness of research regulations, use of digital academic resources, collaborative dialogue, and ongoing scholarly writing. These experiences unfolded according to individual rhythms and strategies, yet collectively reflected a shared commitment to strengthening research professionalism within the study program.

Data derived from interviews, institutional documents, academic webpages, publication records, and faculty planning materials further illuminated how research readiness was enacted in everyday academic practice. The findings suggest that while research professionalism has been actively exercised, there remains a need to orient these diverse experiences toward a more systematic and sustainable institutional framework, enabling research readiness to function as a shared guideline for enhancing the quality and impact of research within the Guidance and Counseling Study Program.

The Community Service

Within the final pillar of the Tri Dharma of Higher Education, namely community service, Guidance and Counseling lecturers experienced their professionalism as extending beyond institutional boundaries into direct engagement with societal realities. Community service was not merely an additional academic obligation but a moral and professional calling to apply counseling knowledge to real social and psychological needs. Lecturers described this domain as a space where academic expertise, ethical responsibility, and social sensitivity intersect.

Lecturers experienced readiness for community service through sustained interaction with diverse social institutions and community groups. One lecturer described his engagement with governmental bodies, non-governmental organizations, and educational institutions as meaningful opportunities to translate counseling knowledge into practical interventions. Serving as a speaker in seminars and workshops was an effective way to address contemporary issues in guidance and counseling. At the same time, collaborating with students in community service programs enabled shared learning and social responsibility (N. Nengsih, personal communication, 2024). Managing counseling services for the wider public was experienced as an extension of academic commitment beyond the classroom (M. Sembiring, personal communication, 2024).

Another lecturer experienced community service readiness as closely tied to attentiveness toward evolving societal needs. Participation in community counseling programs, professional associations, and educational forums was perceived as a means of remaining socially responsive and professionally relevant. Being invited to address psychological and social issues affecting students, teachers, and the broader community was experienced as recognition of professional credibility. Despite encountering challenges, these were interpreted as manageable learning experiences rather than barriers to engagement (M. Marimbun, personal communication, 2024).

For other lecturers, community service was experienced as inseparable from teaching and research responsibilities. Participation in community engagement programs organized by the Guidance and Counseling Study Program, often involving students, was described as a reflective space to apply counseling theories in real-life contexts. Through these activities, lecturers sought to understand community concerns and provide counseling-based solutions while simultaneously deepening their comprehension of Islamic values and social dynamics. Engagement in initiatives promoting religious moderation and dialogue on emerging social issues further shaped their understanding of professional responsibility within Islamic higher education (M. Siregar, personal communication, 2023).

Another lecturer experienced community service preparedness as closely aligned with semester-

based teaching and research demands. Providing educational and counseling materials to diverse community groups, including school counselors, students, and the general public, was perceived as a way to maintain relevance between academic content and social realities. Although limitations in institutional funding were acknowledged, these constraints did not diminish the lecturer's commitment to sustained community engagement (W. Chalidaziah, personal communication, 2024).

The essence of community service readiness emerged as a relational and adaptive experience, characterized by building communication networks with schools, governmental agencies, and local communities; offering counseling services; facilitating seminars and discussions; and responding sensitively to social and psychological issues. These experiences were supported by academic dialogue, use of digital resources, and reflective engagement with colleagues, rather than being driven solely by formal program requirements (B. Basri, personal communication, 2023).

At a broader level, lecturers experienced the cultivation of professional competence as an ongoing integration of community service with academic development. Participation in scientific forums, training programs, and professional associations was experienced as essential for self-evaluation and identity formation as educators. Reviewing curriculum relevance and continuously engaging with scholarly literature enabled lecturers to align community engagement with disciplinary developments in Guidance and Counseling.

Lecturers also experienced professional growth as closely connected to career development and public recognition. Maintaining functional academic positions required balancing teaching, research, and community service, often within limited institutional resources. Nevertheless, these constraints were experienced as challenges that demanded adaptability rather than reasons for disengagement (R. A. Pohan, personal communication, 2024). Some lecturers further emphasized the importance of personal conduct and professional demeanor in shaping public trust, interpreting social phenomena in context, and offering counseling-based solutions that could be integrated into classroom learning.

Taken together, the lived experiences of Guidance and Counseling lecturers reveal that community service is experienced as a core dimension of professional identity, integrating academic competence, ethical commitment, and social engagement. While individual approaches to community service vary, these diverse experiences point to the need for a shared, sustainable framework that harmonizes professional development efforts, ensuring coherence, continuity, and collective impact within Islamic higher education.

Discussions

Professionalism in higher education encompasses not only mastery of a discipline but also the development of ethical standards, academic competencies, and a sense of social responsibility. For lecturers in Guidance and Counseling within Islamic higher education, professionalism is lived through continuous engagement in teaching, research, and community service, which together shape their academic and moral identity. Examining how these lecturers experience and interpret their professional roles provides insight into the ways professionalism is internalized, negotiated, and continuously refined within a socio-religious academic context.

Viewed through the lens of Professional Identity Formation Theory, the findings reveal that lecturer professionalism is not a static attribute, but an evolving process shaped by repeated experiences, reflection, and social interaction (Nixon, 1996; Beijaard et al., 2004. The phenomenological data indicate that lecturers construct their professional identity through intentional engagement with scholarly practices, institutional expectations, and community involvement. These experiences function as meaningful encounters through which lecturers come to understand who they are as academics, counselors, and members of an Islamic educational community.

Based on the findings, seven key elements have been identified as essential efforts in the development of professional identity among Guidance and Counseling lecturers, as illustrated in the
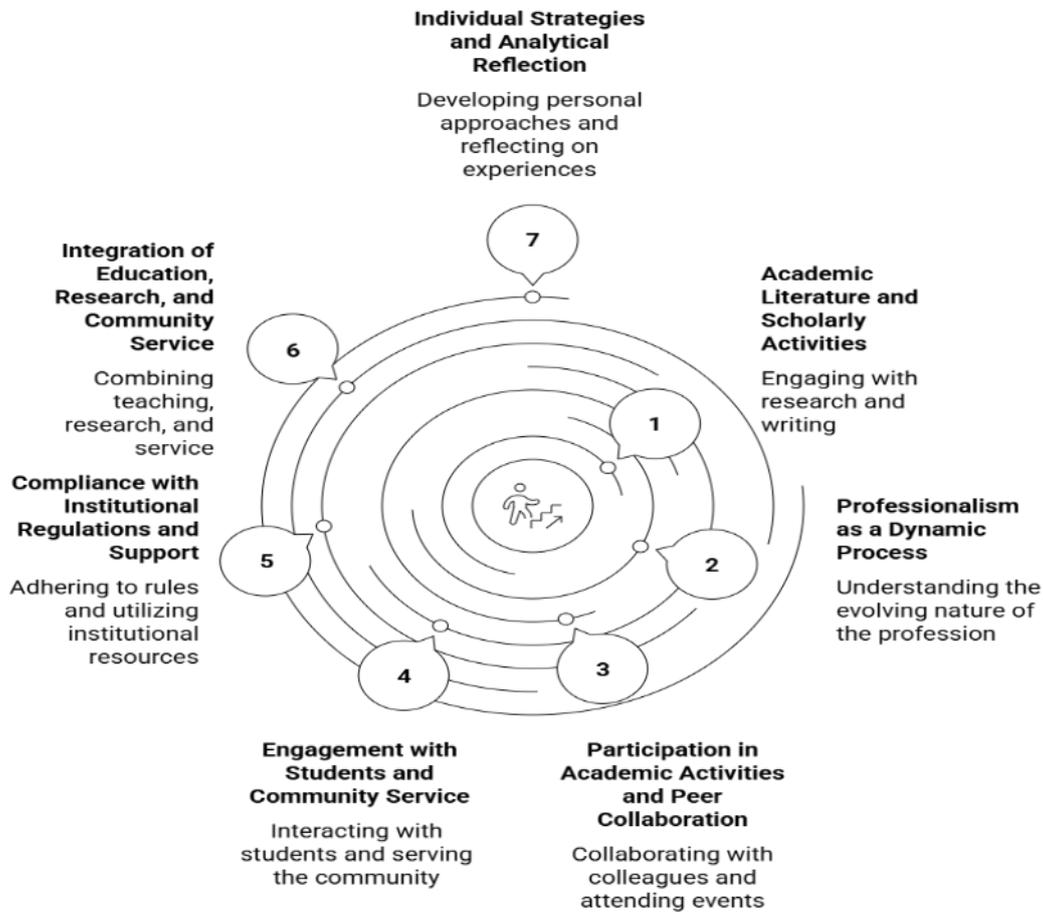
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Figure 3. Elements of Professional Identity Formation among Guidance and Counseling Lecturers

A central theme emerging from participants' lived experiences is sustained engagement with academic literature. Lecturers consistently described reading books, journal articles, and methodological references not merely as a requirement for research productivity, but as an experience of intellectual immersion that deepens their understanding of the discipline. From a phenomenological perspective, this engagement represents a form of intentional consciousness, where reading becomes a meaningful act through which lecturers internalize disciplinary values and scholarly norms. Within Professional Identity Formation Theory, such practices serve as a cognitive foundation that anchors identity development in disciplinary legitimacy and academic rigor (Beijaard et al., 2004; Trede et al., 2012).

Participation in seminars, workshops, and academic training further illustrates how professional identity is shaped through socialization within communities of practice. These activities were experienced by lecturers as spaces of encounter, where they observed professional norms, exchanged ideas, and reflected on their own academic positioning. Consistent with phenomenological insights, identity formation here unfolds not as isolated self-development, but as a relational process mediated through interaction with peers, mentors, and institutional cultures (Trede et al., 2012).

Peer dialogue and collaboration emerged as another significant experiential structure. Lecturers described collegial discussions as moments of validation, negotiation, and reinterpretation of professional roles. Phenomenologically, these interactions constitute intersubjective experiences through which meaning is co-constructed. Professional identity, therefore, is not only personally felt but socially affirmed, reinforcing the idea that professionalism is shaped through reciprocal recognition

within academic networks.

Several lecturers also described involving students in research and community service activities. This experience reflects a more advanced stage of professional identity formation, where lecturers move beyond self-oriented competence development toward mentoring and leadership roles. In phenomenological terms, this shift represents a transformation in how lecturers perceive themselves—not merely as knowledge consumers, but as knowledge producers and ethical role models (Barbarà-i-Molinero et al., 2017).

Autonomous scholarly practices, such as conducting independent studies and writing academic articles each semester, further demonstrate a high level of professional agency. These experiences indicate that research activities are not merely institutional obligations, but have been internalized as expressions of selfhood. Professional Identity Formation Theory characterizes such agency as a key marker of advanced identity development, where individuals act proactively to maintain alignment between behavior and internalized professional values (Fitzpatrick & Queenan, 2020).

Equally important is lecturers' engagement with institutional regulations and research policies. Rather than perceiving these frameworks as external constraints, participants experienced them as guiding structures that help align personal academic aspirations with institutional legitimacy (Rohman et al., 2023). This phenomenological insight highlights the dynamic negotiation between individual meaning-making and organizational expectations, reinforcing a coherent sense of professional self within the academic system.

Community service experiences add a further layer to the formation of professional identity. Lecturers described community engagement as meaningful encounters where disciplinary knowledge, ethical responsibility, and Islamic values converge. From a phenomenological standpoint, these activities expand the lecturers' lifeworld (lebenswelt) by situating academic work within broader societal realities. Professional Identity Formation Theory acknowledges that identity deepens when professional practice is connected to social contribution and public good (Tomlinson & Jackson, 2021).

Across these lived experiences, research readiness and community service engagement are revealed not as separate competencies, but as interconnected dimensions of a single, evolving professional identity. Cognitive, behavioral, and relational processes converge to shape how lecturers understand and enact professionalism in their daily academic lives. Institutional support—through access to resources, academic networks, and structured programs—further mediates this process. However, the findings suggest that a more integrated and sustainable system could enhance identity development more consistently.

Taken together, this study offers a distinctive contribution by reframing lecturer professionalism as a lived phenomenon rather than a set of measurable competencies. Unlike prior studies that conceptualize professionalism primarily in terms of performance indicators or compliance with institutional standards, this phenomenological analysis reveals professionalism as an experience of consciousness, shaped by reflection, relational engagement, and value-laden practice. In the context of Islamic higher education, professionalism is lived at the intersection of academic rigor, ethical commitment, and socio-religious responsibility.

The effective implementation of the Tri Dharma of Higher Education stems not only from adherence to structural requirements but also from the profound internalization of professional values within lecturers' lived experiences. This perspective deepens existing theories of professional identity by emphasizing the spiritual and ethical dimensions intrinsic to Islamic higher education. These dimensions are often underrepresented in mainstream literature on academic professionalism. Lecturer development programs can achieve greater impact when they move beyond purely technical training to include reflective and dialogical spaces, enabling educators to engage in meaning-making and actively cultivate their professional identities.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that lecturer professionalism in Guidance and Counseling at Islamic higher education institutions is a multidimensional construct shaped by academic engagement, digital adaptation, and ethical participation. Empirical findings indicate that lecturers actively prepare for teaching by developing pedagogical competence, aligning instructional materials with disciplinary standards, and integrating digital tools into learning processes. In research, they engage with scholarly literature, conduct small-scale studies, collaborate with colleagues, and participate in seminars to enhance methodological and disciplinary knowledge. In community service, lecturers contribute through counseling programs, collaboration with schools and government agencies, and socially responsive initiatives that reflect Islamic ethical values. These practices collectively illustrate how lecturers internalize and enact professional competencies across the Tri Dharma of Higher Education.

The study contributes to theory by confirming and extending Professional Identity Formation Theory, demonstrating that lecturers' professional identities are constructed through lived experiences of reflection, social interaction, and contextual engagement. It highlights that identity formation in Islamic higher education uniquely integrates academic, ethical, and socio-religious dimensions, thus expanding the theory beyond general higher education contexts. The study acknowledges limitations, including its focus on a single institution and a relatively small number of participants, which may affect generalizability. Practically, the findings suggest the need for structured institutional support, tailored professional development programs, and formal guidelines to coordinate teaching, research, and community service, enabling lecturers to cultivate a coherent and sustainable professional identity.

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