



Reconceptualizing Professionalism In Vocational High School Graduates: A Multi-Stakeholder Perspective From Education and Industry

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Abstract: This study aims to reconceptualize professionalism among vocational high school graduates through a multi-stakeholder perspective involving vocational education institutions, higher education, and industry. The study addresses the persistent gap between graduate competencies and labor market demands, particularly in non-cognitive and identity-related aspects of professionalism. A qualitative conceptual approach was employed using an integrative literature review grounded in the framework of Personal Professional Theories (PPT), which views professionalism as a dynamic and context-dependent construct shaped by individual experience and reflection. The findings indicate that professionalism in vocational education cannot be adequately understood as a set of standardized competencies. Instead, it is a multidimensional construct consisting of three integrated dimensions: Universal, Exploration, and Investigation (UNI). The Universal dimension represents foundational competencies and professional values, the Exploration dimension emphasizes experiential and contextual learning processes, and the Investigation dimension focuses on reflective identity formation and personal professional development. Based on these findings, this study proposes a One-to-One Professionalism Development Framework that integrates personalized mentoring with structured learning experiences. The framework highlights the importance of continuous guidance, reflection, and individual development pathways in fostering professional identity and employability. This study contributes theoretically by shifting the understanding of professionalism from a competency-based model to a personalized and identity-based construct. Practically, it offers a conceptual foundation for developing adaptive and learner-centered vocational education models that align more closely with the evolving demands of the labor market. The proposed framework provides a basis for future empirical research and innovation in vocational education systems

Keywords: Professionalism, Vocational Education, Employability, PPT, One-To-One Model

Introduction

Vocational education plays a strategic role in preparing skilled human resources aligned with labor market demands. In the Indonesian context, vocational education is designed to prepare students for specific occupations and facilitate direct entry into the workforce ([Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 20 Tahun 2003](#)). However, empirical evidence shows that vocational high school graduates still experience relatively

high unemployment rates compared to other education levels, indicating a persistent mismatch between graduate competencies and labor market requirements. Traditional vocational education systems have largely prioritized technical competencies (hard skills), while non-cognitive competencies such as work attitude, adaptability, communication skills, and professional identity remain insufficiently developed ([Abdullah et al., 2022](#)). This imbalance contributes to weak workforce integration and lowers graduate employability.

Recent studies indicate a shift toward more integrated vocational education models that combine technical skills, employability skills, and identity development. Billett (2021) emphasizes that vocational learning should be grounded in authentic workplace experiences to strengthen occupational capability. Jackson (2021) further highlights the importance of work-integrated learning in improving employability outcomes. In addition, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development ([OECD, 2023](#)) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO, 2023](#)) advocate for vocational education systems that integrate cognitive, non-cognitive, and adaptive competencies to respond to rapidly changing labor market demands.

The concept of professionalism in vocational education has also evolved beyond technical mastery. Personal Professional Theory explains professionalism as a dynamic and individualized construct shaped through experience, reflection, and contextual interaction ([Schaap et al., 2009](#); [Huijts et al., 2011](#); [Bogaart et al., 2018](#)). Studies further show that professional identity development significantly influences long-term career adaptability ([Halliwell, 2013](#); [Altan & Altintas, 2017](#)). However, existing studies still tend to conceptualize professionalism as a generalized outcome rather than a personalized developmental process. Most vocational education models also remain focused on standardized competency frameworks and have not fully addressed the individualized formation of professional identity. This limitation highlights the need for a more integrated and context-sensitive approach to professionalism development in vocational education. Therefore, this study proposes to reconceptualize professionalism by integrating Personal Professional Theory with a multi-stakeholder perspective.

Despite these developments, a clear research gap remains. First, most existing studies have examined digital literacy and metacognitive skills in general educational settings, without specifically analyzing their interaction in vocational or accounting education contexts. Second, vocational students as a key group in school-to-work transition studies remain underrepresented, limiting the contextual validity of previous findings. Third, prior research has largely relied on isolated variable testing without integrating industry demands and workplace competency expectations, which reduces explanatory strength and practical relevance. Fourth, existing studies have not clearly explained how digital literacy and metacognitive awareness jointly contribute to both academic achievement and work readiness in a single integrated model. These limitations indicate that previous approaches are fragmented and insufficient to capture the complexity of vocational education outcomes.

Consistently, data from Statistics Indonesia ([Badan Pusat Statistik, 2025](#)), the Ministry of Manpower (Kementerian Ketenagakerjaan Republik Indonesia, 2025), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development ([OECD, 2023](#)), and the United

Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO, 2023](#)) indicate that Indonesia's main labor market challenge lies in the quality of human resources rather than the quantity of available jobs. This reinforces the urgency of research focusing on strengthening digital literacy and metacognitive skills as key determinants of work readiness and academic achievement among vocational students.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach using a conceptual analysis combined with a literature-based review to explore and redefine professionalism in vocational education. The qualitative approach is selected because the concept of professionalism is inherently complex, multidimensional, and context-dependent, requiring in-depth interpretation rather than statistical generalization. The study is grounded in the framework of Personal Professional Theories (PPT), which conceptualizes professionalism as a dynamic construct shaped through individual experiences, reflective processes, and interactions within educational and professional environments ([Schaap et al., 2009](#); [Huijts et al., 2011](#)).

Previous studies have employed various methodological approaches to understand the development of professionalism in vocational education. For instance, Schaap et al. (2009) utilized qualitative interviews to explore how students construct their personal professional theories, focusing on the internal and reflective dimensions of professional knowledge. Huijts et al. (2011) applied concept mapping techniques to analyze the structure and complexity of professional knowledge, providing insights into how learners organize and relate professional concepts. Meanwhile, Bogaart et al. (2018) adopted a longitudinal qualitative approach incorporating reflective assignments and observations to examine the development of personal professional theories over time. These approaches collectively highlight that professionalism is not only a measurable outcome but also a dynamic and evolving construct shaped through learning experiences and reflection.

Building on these methodological insights, this study does not aim to replicate empirical data collection methods, but rather to integrate and synthesize existing theoretical and empirical findings into a comprehensive conceptual framework. The data used in this study are derived from a wide range of relevant scholarly sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, international policy reports, and empirical studies related to vocational education, employability, and professional competence. Key references include studies on vocational professionalism and identity development ([Bogaart et al., 2018](#); [Halliwell, 2013](#); [Altan & Altintas, 2017](#)), as well as policy-oriented frameworks from international organizations such as OECD (2023), which emphasize the importance of integrating technical and non-cognitive competencies in vocational education systems. In addition, national-level studies related to the quality of vocational graduates and labor market alignment are incorporated to provide contextual relevance ([Khurniawan et al., 2020](#)).

Data collection was conducted through a systematic document analysis process, involving identification, selection, and review of literature based on relevance, credibility, and contribution to the research topic. The selection process prioritizes recent publications

to capture current developments in vocational education and labor market dynamics. Each selected source was carefully examined to extract key concepts, theoretical perspectives, and empirical findings related to professionalism and vocational competencies.

The analysis of the data was carried out using thematic analysis, which allows for the identification and synthesis of recurring patterns across different sources. The process begins with the extraction of key concepts related to professionalism, followed by grouping these concepts into thematic categories. These categories are then analyzed across multiple stakeholder perspectives, including vocational education institutions, higher education, and industry (DUDIKA), to identify similarities, differences, and areas of convergence. The final stage involves conceptual interpretation, where the findings are synthesized into a coherent framework that reflects the multidimensional nature of professionalism.

To enhance the credibility and robustness of the analysis, triangulation was applied by comparing findings across various types of sources and perspectives. This approach ensures that the resulting conceptual framework is not based on a single viewpoint but reflects a comprehensive understanding of professionalism in vocational education. The analysis focuses on identifying core dimensions of professionalism, particularly technical competence, non-cognitive attributes, adaptability, and reflective professional identity, as well as examining how these dimensions interact within different educational and workplace contexts.

Through this methodological approach, the study aims to produce a theoretically grounded and practically relevant conceptualization of professionalism, which serves as the basis for proposing a personalized One-to-One professionalism development framework in vocational education.

Result and Discussion

Multi-Stakeholder Perspectives on Professionalism

The findings indicate that professionalism among vocational education graduates cannot be understood as a single, uniform construct. Instead, it is shaped by multiple stakeholder perspectives, each with distinct orientations and expectations. From the perspective of Vocational High Schools (SMK), professionalism is generally associated with the mastery of technical competencies, discipline, and adherence to work procedures. This approach aligns with competency-based education paradigms that emphasize minimum standards of job-related skills. However, this perspective tends to be normative and does not fully capture the personal and contextual dimensions of professionalism.

In contrast, vocational higher education institutions view professionalism as a more complex capability, encompassing critical thinking, independent learning, and reflective capacity. Within this perspective, professionalism is not merely considered an outcome of learning, but rather a continuous developmental process that contributes to the formation of an individual's professional identity. Meanwhile, industry and the world of work (DUDIKA) place greater emphasis on non-cognitive aspects as key indicators of professionalism. Work attitude, communication skills, adaptability, and teamwork are considered critical factors in recruitment and job performance ([Khurniawan et al., 2020](#)).

These findings suggest that the gap between vocational education and industry is largely attributed to the insufficient development of non-cognitive competencies.

Dimensions of Professionalism Based on the UNI Framework

Based on the synthesis of the analysis and the theoretical foundation of Personal Professional Theories (PPT), this study conceptualizes professionalism among vocational education graduates into three main dimensions integrated within the Universal, Exploration, and Investigation (UNI) framework.

First, the Universal dimension represents the foundational layer of professionalism that is general and cross-contextual. This dimension includes an understanding of work values, professional ethics, and basic competencies required across various fields of expertise. Universal is not limited to the mastery of technical knowledge but also reflects an individual's ability to construct a systematic and integrated professional mindset. From the perspective of PPT, this dimension is associated with the overall complexity of an individual's professional understanding ([Schaap et al., 2009](#)). Second, the Exploration dimension describes the development of professionalism through concrete and contextual learning experiences. This dimension emphasizes active engagement in work-based practices, exploration of learning experiences, and interaction with professional environments. Through this process, individuals not only understand concepts at a theoretical level but also internalize real-world experiences as part of their professional knowledge construction. The Exploration dimension is related to the richness and concreteness of professional knowledge gained through experience ([Huijts et al., 2011](#)). Third, the Investigation dimension represents the advanced stage of professionalism development, focusing on the formation of an individual's professional identity. At this stage, individuals engage in deep reflection on their learning and work experiences, while developing more specific and personalized understanding aligned with their field of expertise and personal potential. Investigation goes beyond competence acquisition, encompassing the individual's ability to interpret and integrate their profession as part of their identity. This dimension reflects the level of vocational specificity and depth of professional knowledge ([Bogaart et al., 2018](#)).

These three dimensions are not linear but interact dynamically and develop continuously. The Universal dimension provides the conceptual foundation, Exploration enriches contextual experience, and Investigation deepens professional identity formation. Therefore, the UNI framework illustrates that professionalism is a dynamic, personal, and context-dependent developmental process. This approach offers a fundamental distinction from previous models that tend to conceptualize professionalism as a set of generic competencies. Within the UNI framework, professionalism is understood as the integration of knowledge, experience, and reflection that shapes an individual's unique professional identity.

Proposed One-to-One Professionalism Development Framework

Based on the results of the analysis and conceptual synthesis, this study proposes a professionalism development framework referred to as the One-to-One Professionalism Development Framework, as illustrated in Figure 1.



Figure 1. One-to-One Professionalism Development Framework

As shown in Figure 1, the framework consists of three main layers: Universal, Exploration, and Investigation. The Universal layer represents foundational competencies and work values as the basis of professionalism. At this stage, learners develop an initial understanding of professional standards and basic skills required in the workplace. The Exploration layer emphasizes experiential and context-based learning, such as industry internships, problem-based projects, and work-based learning activities. This stage enables learners to develop a more concrete and contextual understanding of their chosen profession. Meanwhile, the Investigation layer focuses on the development of professional identity through self-reflection, exploration of personal potential, and alignment between individual interests, talents, and professional demands. This stage represents a deeper level of professional development that distinguishes this model from conventional approaches.

These three layers are interconnected through a continuous one-to-one mentoring mechanism. This personalized guidance facilitates deeper reflection, individualized feedback, and adaptive professional development, allowing learners to construct their professionalism in a more meaningful and context-sensitive manner.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that professionalism in vocational education needs to be reconceptualized from a competency-based approach toward an identity-based perspective.

This extends previous studies that have predominantly positioned professionalism as an outcome of technical skill acquisition alone. By employing the Personal Professional Theories (PPT) framework, this study confirms that professionalism is a personal construct

that develops through the interaction of experience, reflection, and social context (Schaap et al., 2009). This is consistent with the findings of Huijts et al. (2011) and Bogaart et al. (2018), which emphasize that the development of professionalism is dynamic and non-linear.

The findings of this study are consistent with recent developments in vocational education that emphasize the integration of competence, experience, and identity. Billett (2021) argues that vocational learning should be grounded in authentic practice to develop occupational competence, while Jackson (2021) highlights the role of experiential learning in enhancing employability. Similarly, Rausch (2024) emphasizes that professional competence involves not only technical skills but also cognitive and reflective dimensions. However, unlike these models, the present study introduces a personalized approach through one-to-one mentoring, which enables the integration of individual potential and professional identity development.

The proposed One-to-One model offers a novel contribution by integrating both technical and non-cognitive competencies into a personalized and reflective learning process. In contrast to previous models that tend to adopt a mass and standardized approach, this framework enables individuals to develop professionalism based on their unique characteristics and personal potential.

Furthermore, the model bridges the gap between education and the world of work by conceptualizing professionalism as a continuous developmental process that extends beyond skill acquisition toward the formation of professional identity. Therefore, this study extends existing vocational education models by bridging competency-based training with identity-based professional development through a personalized and continuous mentoring approach.

Conclusion

These findings have important implications for vocational education theory and practice. They confirm that professionalism should no longer be understood only as the accumulation of technical competencies, but as an identity-based construct that develops through experience, reflection, and social interaction within authentic learning environments. This shift requires vocational institutions to redesign learning systems that move beyond competency checklists toward developmental processes that integrate cognitive, experiential, and reflective dimensions. The findings also align with Billett (2021), Jackson (2021), and Rausch (2024), who emphasize the importance of workplace-based learning and reflective practice in shaping professional competence. In practice, this means vocational schools need stronger collaboration with industry to provide meaningful work-integrated learning, structured mentoring systems, and continuous reflection activities that support identity formation. Future research should test the UNI framework and the One-to-One Professionalism Development model across different vocational fields and cultural contexts to examine its generalizability and effectiveness. In addition, longitudinal studies are needed to track how professionalism develops over time from initial competence to professional identity formation, while experimental designs can be used to measure the

impact of personalized mentoring on employability outcomes and student readiness for work.

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