



## **PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY AND THE MEANING OF PROFESSIONALISM TO ACADEMICS IN EX-3T AREA (CASE STUDY IN LANDAK REGENCY, INDONESIA)**

**Mingdry Hanafi Tjipto** 

Master of management, BINUS Business School, Universitas Bina Nusantara, Indonesia  
mingdry.tjipto@binus.ac.id

**Tatum Syarifah Adiningrum**

Master of management, BINUS Business School, Universitas Bina Nusantara, Indonesia

### **Abstract**

*This study is an exploratory study aims to explore the contribution of the micro, meso, and macro social structure towards the development of professional identity, to examine a meaning of professionalism to academics in ex-3T area, and to find the relation between professional identity and professionalism in managing higher education institution. This is qualitative research in order to explore the development professional identity and professionalism. After gathering data through in-depth interviews with 20 numbers of academics in an ex-3T area, it is then analysed using Miles and Huberman's (2014) thematic analysis to produce several categories and themes related to professional identity and professionalism of academics. Despite its limitations in access, economic growth, and facilities, academics in the ex-3T formed their own professional identity driven by their personal missions to increase the quality of human resources in this area. The personal mission becomes a process of internal disposition that is developed gradually could slowly be diminished because of the impact of meso and macro level that is principally an external influence. There are plenty of studies related to teachers in remote areas, or academics in a general sense. However, this study fills the gap of studies related to academics in higher education context in remote areas.*

*Keywords: Professional Identity, Professionalism, 3T-area, Remote area, Indonesia*



## INTRODUCTION

Republic of Indonesia is the largest archipelago nation in the world with five major islands and total number of 17,508 minor islands of which about 6000 are inhabited. This geographical reality gives an enormous challenge to the central government as well as local government to equally develop every area. Peraturan Presiden Indonesia (Indonesia Presidential Decree) number 63 in the year 2020 regarding the stipulation of underdeveloped areas in 2020-2024 states some criteria of area considered as 3T area (Terdepan-Frontier, Terluar-outermost and Tertinggal-Least developed area), which include, economic life; human resources in terms of participation in junior high school and senior high school; infrastructures; financial stability; accessibility; and characteristics of an area. It is widely known that even in the five major islands there are significant inequalities, let alone between the urban and remote areas of 3Ts.

Landak Regency was considered 3T in the period of 1999-2019. Located in Western Borneo, about 178 kilometers or around 4 hours from the capital, Pontianak, Landak Regency has (describe more about the economic, demography and education status of this area). As often happens in remote areas, the gross participation in higher education is low, while human quality is an important aspect to be discussed because presidential decree does not mention about the role and impact of higher education institution in its criteria to develop 3T area. Landak Regency has only one higher education institution which is STKIP Pamane Talino. This college of education is managed by a private foundation. On July 2022, the status of this college was elevated by the Ministry of Education into a University.

Table 1 shows the data of the academics in the area which gives a picture of the situation of the college.

Table. 1 Higher Education Profiles

<b>STKIP Pamane Talino, Landak</b>	
<b>Date of establishment</b>	January 10, 2013
<b>Total Number of Academics</b>	32
<b>Academic Ranks</b>	
Lecturer	17
Junior Lecturer ( <i>Asisten Ahli</i> )	14
Senior Lecturer ( <i>Lektor</i> )	1
<b>Academic Qualifications</b>	
Master's	31
Doctoral	1
<b>Number of Students</b>	751
<b>Ratio Teacher : Students</b>	1:23

Sources: [https://pddikti.kemdikbud.go.id/data\\_pt/Mzk5RUQxMDItRTk4NC00RUNCLUEXQTctNTgwNjZGMEQ2M0Uw](https://pddikti.kemdikbud.go.id/data_pt/Mzk5RUQxMDItRTk4NC00RUNCLUEXQTctNTgwNjZGMEQ2M0Uw) (*STKIP Pamane Talino*) (Retrieved on July 14, 2022)

This higher education institution is not enough to accommodate the young people who are supposed to pursue tertiary level of education which amounted to around 170,000 (Table 2) young people from *Landak* and the two other regencies around it – *Bengkayang and Melawi*.

Table. 2. Population

<b>Number of young people in the area (proper age go to college in the year 2021)</b>			
Age	Landak Regency (2021)	Bengkayang Regency (2021)	Melawi Regency (2021)
15-19	36,238	25,558	20,451
20-24	37,953	26,314	20,707

Source: <https://kalbar.bps.go.id/indicator/12/131/1/penduduk-kab-landak-menurut-kel-umur-dan-jenis-kelamin.html>

Although the government has provided several programs to improve the quality of education in 3T area but it is still questionable whether they are successful and effective to improve the quality of education in 3T areas. And more importantly, whether the programs are supposed to be a continuous program. 3T areas offer challenges, difficulties and generally considered as having bleak future that does not attract young people to come to teach or to sustain those who are willing to come to stay longer.

### **Academics' Role in Remote Areas**

Dudung, et al. (2018) points out that there are some problems with education setting in 3T areas, namely academic shortage, unqualified academics, poorly distribution of academics, lack of academic's competencies, shallow commitment of academics, unenthusiastic academics and unsuited academics with the subject being taught. Table 1 gives a snapshot of the quality of the academics in STKIP Pamane Talino, with majority are Master graduates and having low academic ranking.

Academics are the fundamental element of education. Academics should be competent, committed and professional. Academics is not just a title but it is a profession that carries responsibility. It also gives a strong sense of identity and authority to a person who is fully dedicated to the development of knowledge and learning (Ching, 2021). Ageiz et al. (2021) makes a distinction between professionalism and professional identity. They suggest that professionalism deals with responsible performance and doing things with conformity to rules and policy. Meanwhile, they suggest that professional identity is closely related to values, beliefs, and internalization of profession characters.

Along with professional identity which is embedded in individual values and beliefs, Lunenberg, et.al., (2014) suggests the steps to attain academics' professionalism, using teacher education program as the context. The first step to attain professionalism as a teacher of teachers is to develop personal or internal qualities. They should develop internally the attitude of openness to innovations, updating and upgrading willingness, greater collaboration, and generosity to share. The second is development of skill or competence of teaching by always updating or upgrading their competence by acquiring new skills, developing classroom management, and innovating in teaching method. The last step is self-reflective process. The academics should be open to criticism and evaluation by others. After that, the academics should do much self-process or self-reflective to see how they work so that they can improve their performance in the future.

Forming identity is closely related to the profession's context, which include the micro, meso and macro environment of the profession. Turner (2010) gave a detailed description of micro, meso and macro social theory. Micro level deals with an encounter among persons whether face-to-face or virtual to have meaningful and enriching interaction in social life. This encounter carries the personal level of an individual such as emotions, values, roles, status or culture. The meso level of society provides an encounter of people in a group. This group is ordered into corporate units which are defined by division of labor to achieve goals and categoric units which are defined by distinct categories such as age, gender, family background, religious affiliation, and financial aspect. And the highest level of society which is macro level happens when the dynamics of encounter in the meso level are very large. These huge changes can greatly influence the society in terms of population, production, distribution, or regulation. The macro level of society mostly deals in the institutional domain such as economy, kinship, religion, polity, law, medicine, sport, or education. Thus, Turner (2010) gave a theoretical structure on Micro, Meso, and macro approach to better understanding professional identity and professionalism in higher education.

### **Professional Identity Formation of Academics**

Johnson (2008) says that the micro level focuses of the human activity, decision and dynamics of interpersonal relationship in a family or small group of people. The micro level is mostly characterized with direct encounters between persons. It mostly characterized with direct encounters between persons and stresses on the individual freedom to choose and make decision for one's wellbeing. Dopfer, et.al., (2004) suggest that micro level deals with adoption, learning and competition, and maintenance. In this case, the individual is trying adopt changes

as one interacts, so it has positive or negative effect on individual as one learns new skills, new understanding, new approaches and new abilities.

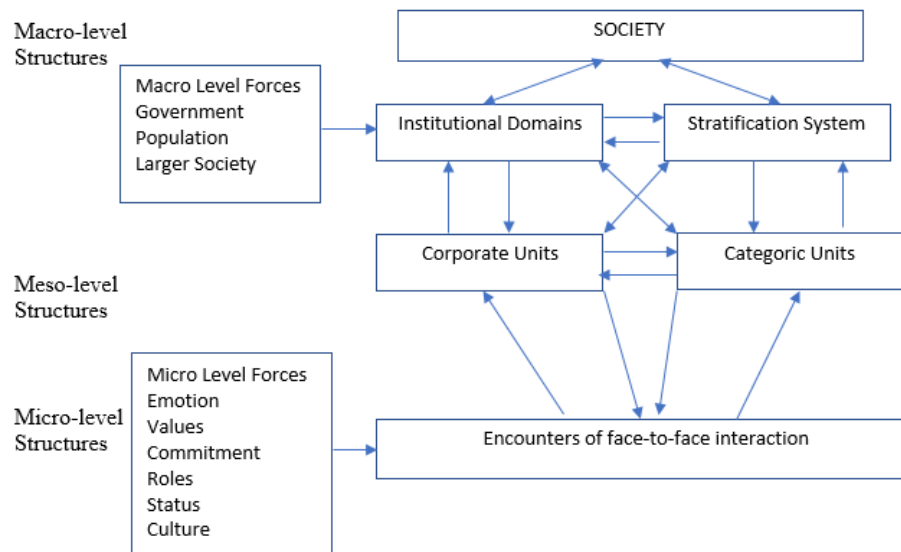


Figure. 1 Turner's micro, meso, macro social scheme (2010)

Van Wijk, et.al., (2019) describes meso cycle as the personal involvement in the bigger environment which is the organization or institution. It is a place to interact and intermingle with others so that one can grow and expand their perspectives. Dopfer, et.al., (2004) suggest that meso level deals with origination, adoption and retention. Gathering of individual who have shared interest are able to originate new capabilities, opportunities and eventually to engage in new interaction. With adopting new things, every individual should make an effort to do retention these new things and to practice them in the daily performance so that they could be institutional culture.

Van Wijk, et.al., (2019) sees macro level as the biggest environment that helps the individual and institution to apply the micro and meso understanding towards fuller social engagement. It makes an institution to interact with other institutions, so the government can make policy wherein multiple institutions are collaborating or confronting each other that might affect society at large. Johnson, (2008) describes the macro level as social structure in the large scale. This means that there are rules and policy to put things in orderly manner. This social structure has a great task to develop social system to manage the formal organizations or communities at meso level and also to organize an individual level at micro level.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This research is exploratory research in the only higher education institution in ex-3T area of Landak Regency which is STKIP Pamane Talino. The researcher applied qualitative method research in order to explore the development professional identity and professionalism of the academics. This research used in-depth interview as data collecting method. The researcher made 20 interviews consist of 5 top administrators and 15 academic lecturers to make data credibility and added observation to make data triangulation. The theory of Miles and Huberman (2014) was applied to produce several categories and themes from respondent's interview. The researcher presented thematic analysis of the interview of the development of Professional identity, Professional academics and its relationship with the management of Higher Institution. And finally, the researcher made the conclusion and some recommendations.

Table 3. Interviews

<b>STKIP PAMANE TALINO in LANDAK REGENCY</b>		
Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3
Ex-Chairman of the College	Head of English Education Department	9 Regular academics
Vice Chairman of Academic Affair	Secretary of English Education Department	
Vice Chairman of Students Affair	Head of Mathematical Education Department	
Vice Chairman of Financial Affair	Secretary of Mathematical Education Department	
Vice Chairman of Research and Development Affair	Head of Physical Education Department	
	Secretary of Physical Education Department	

In-depth interviews occurred about 60–90 minutes to individual academics. The interviews conducted to gather data about academic's background, beliefs and understanding of "academic professional identity" and "academic professionalism" which served in ex-3T areas. The interviews focused on to data condensation deals with selection, concentration, simplification, abstraction, and transformation of the data. It was consisted of writing summaries, coding, developing themes, generating categories, and writing analytic memos that made the data stronger.

The Triangulation scheme of researcher's observation and theory was used to validate the obtained data from interviews. The researcher used the abductive method to draw the output from the interviews to make the thematic map (Muktaf, Z.M., 2016). Miles and Huberman (2014) suggested several steps to arrive at the thematic analysis which was first cycle coding,

then second cycle or pattern codes and the process of deriving towards general themes through jottings and analytic memoing.

## FINDINGS

This section presented the findings and the discussions to answer the research inquiries in this study. The purpose of the interview questions was to explore the professional identity and professionalism of academics in ex-3T area, and to interpret the extent to which they are related to the higher education institution management or business in the scope of the study. The findings are summarized in the thematic map below:

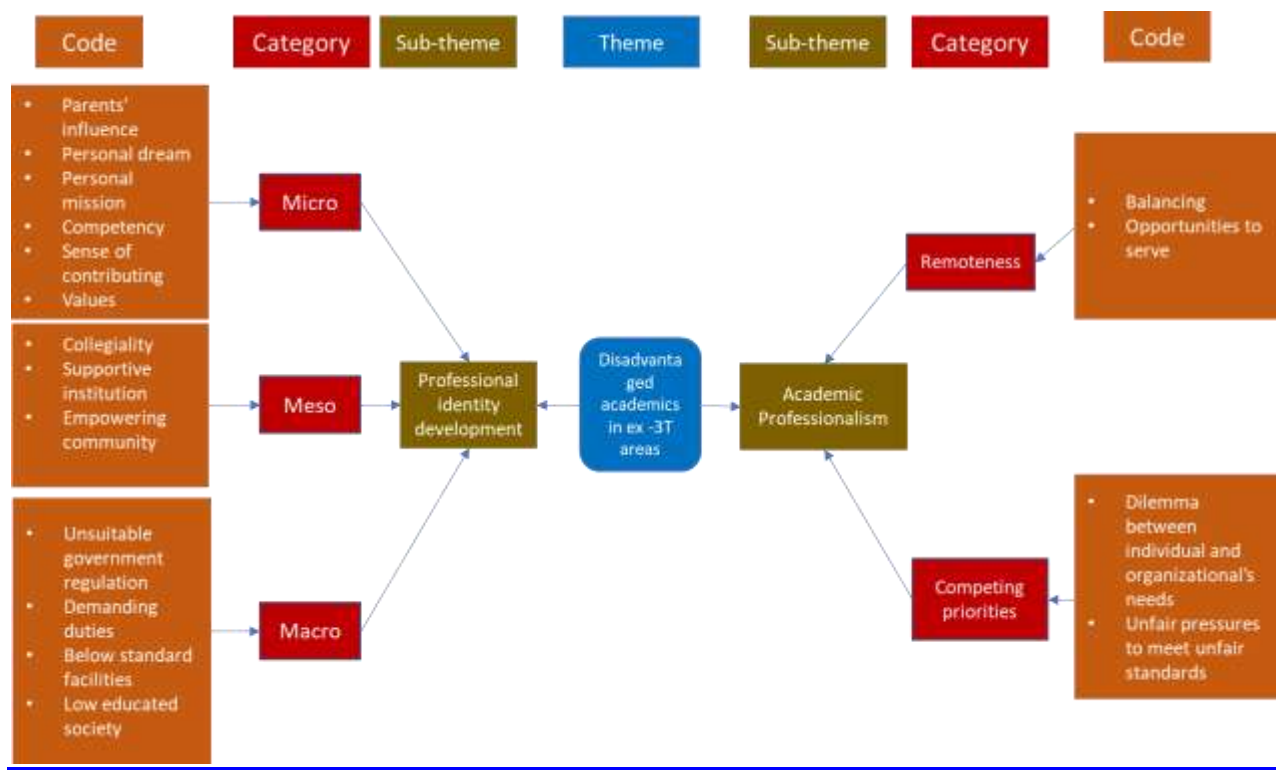


Figure 2. Thematic Map

The theme constructed was “disadvantaged academics in ex-3T areas”, as we found that the bigger structure of the profession, the meso and macro structure, put the individuals into a disadvantaged position in both their professional identity development and opportunities to channel and mold their professionalism. For each sub-theme, professional identity development and professionalism, there are three categories which have several codes. Each sub-theme and the related categories and codes are explained separately

## Academic Identity Development

The first level in the social structure that influence the academic identity development is the micro level, which refers to the individual level. In the micro level, there are several codes that are important: personal mission and parents' influence. The majority agreed that their presence is primarily because of they have personal mission in life. Some of the words they use are "serving the region", "wanting to dedicated myself" and "being a development agent". As further elaborated by a respondent, being an academic is seen as "a medium to develop remote areas". The personal mission bring motivation, strength, and also a sense of resilience, as expressed by Tri, "instead of choosing to give up to the situation, I thought it would be better if I could fix this chaotic situation." Many of the respondent also found a more specific mission, such as focusing on human resource development in remote areas (Tri), sports (Ja) and giving back to the community after studying overseas (Aj). This personal mission may explain their *raison d'être* to come and to stay in a remote area.

Many of the respondents are also inspired by their parents who were teachers. Therefore, the way they interact and conduct their duties have similarities with how teachers conduct their profession. For example, a respondent said that he likes being an academic because "my big family are mostly teachers" (Kun) and that "I am used to seeing my parents teach and interact with students" (Mnk). The internalisation of the teaching profession may contribute to how they see academic profession as a teaching profession, according to the reference given by their teacher parents. The combination of the remoteness of the area, their sense of duty and personal mission, and the strong reference towards teaching profession, they realise that they need to be a good teacher for the special group of students who have to study in the middle of limitation. For example, Sel refers to "In 3T area, we must be more detailed in explaining the material so that students can understand what is being taught". In a similar spirit, Kun refers to the impact of limitations in the areas: "Academics must think about what methods and lecture materials can be followed by all students with limited facilities and infrastructure". The academic identity is also influenced by factors in the meso level, the peers, department, and organisation. It was found that collegiality plays an important role in the development of academic identity, especially how senior academics nurture or model the profession to the younger ones. Strong and positive collegiality means a lot to the academics: "I begin to trust other academics in order to learn from them and develop my skill" (In). At times when positive collegiality does not take place, the aura of suspicion hinder teamwork and is destructive to the dynamics of teamwork as explained by No: "Some academics don't support each other, finding the fault of others, even want to destroy others [reputation]".



In addition to the peer's collegiality, the role of the organisation is also crucial in the academic identity development. The institution is seen as strengthening the academic identity by giving fair treatment, support, and facilities for the academics to play their role. In this study, the academics have ambivalent attitudes towards the institution: it is considered as supportive in terms of fair treatment in work-relation such as performance evaluation, and that they feel that they are needed and contribute to the institution. The way the institution engaged with the community development program is also contributing to positive academic identity. Nonetheless, some voice of disappointment are raised in terms of the level of support in research or in attaining national qualifications. This might refer to the access to resources available to the institution located in remote area, in which internal business processes and behaviour such as performance review, leadership style, and communication channels can be internally managed. However, once it is related to funding and resources related to research and processes to the government, the institution has to depend on extra resources that might be hard to secure.

In the macro level, the regulations around higher education and academic professions are considered unfair. The requirement of faculty workload, accreditation, and lecturers' career are seen as unfair toward remote areas such as ex-3T. For example, before pandemic, explanations about new regulations will be conducted onsite in South Kalimantan or in Jakarta, which is costly for small and remote institutions. Many of the regulations are not friendly for rural areas with the limitations such as "the government should also consider the burden of Tri Dharma given with the limited number of academics in a 3T regional institution" (Tri), and "I don't have time to improve my academic quality (tri dharma), with a dense academic and structural workload, it's almost difficult for me to fulfil the demand" (Kun). The national government made the standard for all regions that most of the time difficult to be followed by the academics in remote area, such as number of research and number of community service in order to increase educational position ranking; number of academics that are permanent residence; number of ratio between academics and the students, as Aj said that, "administratively burdensome, because physically and psychologically we are not yet in that standard, but because of the variable of the capital city, the government has standardized us with those in Java (urban area)." Remote area is struggling with the quantity of human resources who are willing to serve for a long period of time. Therefore, consistently being asked to achieve a standard beyond their capability brought negative effect to their academic identity. On top of the regulations, the respondents also brought up the lack of infrastructure in their area, including internet access and source of knowledge like library. This further brought lack of confidence to the academics in the ex-3T area.

## Academic Professionalism

Professionalism refers to the conduct, behaviour, and attitudes of individuals in a profession which include things like competence, ethical behaviour, and commitment to the profession and its values. It acts as a social contract between a profession and the society (Adler & Liyanarachchi, 2016). Every profession has its own professional conduct, let it be lawyer, accountant, engineers, including academics. “Professionalism was usually interpreted as an occupational or normative values, as something worth preserving and promoting in work and by and for workers” (Evetts, 2011, p. 7). This study explores whether there another meaning of professionalism for academics residing in rural areas.

Professionalism sets a standard of behaviour, attitudes, and values (Evetts, 2008; Sullivan, 2005). In this study, we found that behaviour, attitudes and values meant significantly for the academics in ex-3T area, categorised as “internal qualities”. Attitudes are considered as core attribute of an academic because they will be a role model to the students and hold a high prestige in the society. Specifically in rural areas, the academics found that they need to respect local wisdom, which might not be known widely. Academics in remote area should mingle well with local culture or local tradition so that they can offer development, as mentioned by Mnk, “many people are honest, maintaining cultural heritage and live side by side with nature which is a big capital in sustainable development.” Being a wise person to balance modern science and the local wisdom is valued, as expressed by Tri: “Being wise is much better than being right.”. Teaching in remote areas is unique, and academics need to teach differently, adjusting the material and the delivery suitable to the limited facilities (Kun), continuously motivate the students who might not see the relevance of higher education (AI), and be “innovative to go around regulation so that quality can improve from time to time” (Tri).

The remoteness of the ex-3T area in itself shaped the conduct of professionalism for the academics. As a part of continuous learning, working in remote area provides opportunities for “learn many times more than my friends in urban areas. In the 3T area, my heart and mind are touched and formed for the development of this are.” (Tri). Self-learning and reflections are part of their process in professionalism, driven by the limitations of facilities and the closeness with society. The word “serving” is repeatedly used to describe their involvement in the ex-3T areas, which motivating them to be reflective of their purpose and the needs to involve with the bigger part of the society outside the academic institution. As expressed by Kun, difficulties posed by the limitation in the remote areas brought “strengthening motivation and awareness to continue serving even in challenging situations.” They do it through: “Self-development and self-evaluation that need to be improved to improve my performance and professionalism.” (EI) and also by looking for alternatives that can compensate complicated technology (Kun). Professional

development is also made easier if there is a good atmosphere of collegiality, in which people support each other to find new research topic or share best practice in teaching.

There are hindering factors to professionalism, which revolves around the competing priorities. Firstly, the academics felt that there is a dilemma between individuals and organisations' priority. For example, as the numbers of academics are limited, the priority of the institution is on teaching, while to pursue academic career they have to balance with research output as emphasised by Kun: "the proportion for teaching still dominates when compared to research and community service." There is also an indication that institution does not prioritise professional development because there is no sufficient funding allocated to the purpose as expressed by Dip: "Until now, it has not been felt that there are certain programs for career development," The pull-push between priorities are disheartening, as expressed succinctly by Wa: "permission was not given, [attending seminars outside are prohibited even cut the academic's leave of absences rights] but assistance in the form of fees was also not available".

Secondly, academics felt unfair pressure to fulfill the standard of performance they thought is determined based on the situation in urban area, set by the government. Remote area might not care much on quality management system. But institution did attend the quality control to meet the national and even international standard. And this made a tension between institution and the academics where they felt that it gave much pressures on them without taking care much on human aspect need, such as, Tri said that "Foundations and institutions still consumed a lot of my time and energy at the level of institutional reform." Moreover, Aj explicitly said that there is a lot of burden physically and psychologically when the institution put a great pressure to the academics in remote area to meet the requirements of urban area. Institution indeed needs to focus on its quality but it should not sacrifice the human person because human being is the main capital.

## DISCUSSIONS

In the scope of this case study, professional identity and professionalism are vital aspects in higher education institution in ex-3T area being studied. The micro level that deals with the internal aspect of academics reveals that the academics develop their professional identity first and foremost because they want to become an academic. The micro level contributes to the development of professional identity mostly by way of doing personal mission. The personal mission becomes a process of internal disposition that is nurtured from youth and developed gradually could slowly be diminished because of the impact of meso and macro level that is principally an external influence.

Meso level that focuses on the institutional or organizational component can enhance or minimize the initial identity that is constructed in the micro level. Meso level contributes to the development of professional identity mostly by way of belonging to or creating an empowering community. This community orientation makes people felt needed and are able to fulfil their personal mission that is nurtured in the micro level.

Macro level that is fully an external force contributes to the development of professional identity mostly in the undesirable way which is the hindrance of government regulation. National government regulation is hardly achieved by the academics in ex-3T area of the case study and this gives a negative impact to the development of professional identity of an academic.

Micro level has a principal influence to development of professional identity compared to meso and macro level. The management is looking for human resources that are committed, passionate, responsible, capable and professional despite any challenges. Macro level always influences the micro level and eventually the development of academic professional identity. The meso level of higher education that dwells much on the community can contribute to the academics in terms of collaboration, group support and common effort. Every academic can fully develop their professional academic identity within a community. And this is the responsibility of an institution to form, to sustain and to develop an empowering community wherein every academic can fully develop one's professional identity. The macro level of higher education that dwells much on the government regulation can contribute to the academics in terms financial support, considerable policy, and control system.

Professionalism in ex-3T area of the case study can mean forming a deep internal quality by way of focusing to the attitudinal aspect of an academic, performing best practices in higher education which reflective practice and being aware of the external factor which dilemma between individual's and organization's needs that can jeopardize the whole process. Development of the academics' professional identity and academics professionalism become the essential elements of the development and management of higher education institution. The leaders of higher education institution always look for the human resources that have full-grasped of their identity which led them to think clearly, to decide decisively and to act determinedly.

The attitude of academics is significant to the development of professionalism in HEIs. However, this personal attitude should follow the standard of professionalism made by the government and the institution. Every academic can claim that they already perform professionally but the leaders can perceive differently which means there should be tool to evaluate the professionalism of academics such as key performance index and quartal evaluation. Institution can promote professionalism in the level of attitudinal and performance

through psychological profiling, human resources development trainings and seminars, and giving reward to have accomplishments.

These processes of self-reflective also help the academics to develop attitude appropriate to professional academics. Reflective practice is usually done by the academics. But the institution can provide tool as part of the evaluation to all academics in order to give appropriate evaluation. The leaders can ask the academics to submit regularly the reflective practice as provided by the HRD department so that the evaluation can be objective based on the evaluation made by the co-academics and the students.

Reflective practice is a best practice tool to know how effective or efficient the academics in performing three dharma of HEIs. This can show as well the professionalism of the academics in doing self-assessment as part of the development. And the institution can provide trainings so that the academics can honestly do it well for self-realization in order to perform well in the institution.

Every academic has personal needs or personal dreams or personal idealism to be fulfilled in their life, but the organization also has needs that should be fulfilled by the academics. These personal needs and organizational needs when are not properly communicated can cause conflict in the institution. In reality, conflict is inevitably occurred in every institution, but it should not diminish commitment and competence in the side of the academics and the recognition and justice in the side of institution. The dilemma is always happening in a working environment. It is the duty of the institution through HRM to maintain positive and conducive employee relations such as relations among academics or relation between academics and staffs. Institution should find way to maintain positive relations with employees like asking help from religious leaders, government leaders or even from professionals. Preparing and producing these regular communications become regular task for the human resource department in order to diminish the dilemma between the individual and institution's needs.

Higher education institution management is looking for academics that can perform professionally in any circumstances, especially in the challenging area of ex-3T. Professional identity and professionalism are not instantaneous but it took times to develop it into something valuable and marketable. Professional and fully developed identity academics are precious asset to the institution because they are people who manage, organize, control, evaluate and develop the institution.

Academic professional identity development and academic professionalism are the heart of human resource development which highly affects the management of higher education institution. The quality management of higher education institution depends so much on the

quality of the academics who have fully grounded identity and continuous effort to professional development.

## CONCLUSIONS

Professional identity and professionalism are vital aspects in higher education institution in ex-3T area being studied. Social theory of micro, meso and macro helps this case study figuring out some elements that influence the construction of academic professional identity. The micro level contributes to the development of professional identity mostly by way of doing personal mission. While, meso level contributes to the development of professional identity mostly by way of belonging to or creating an empowering community. Finally in the highest level, macro level that is fully an external force contributes to the development of professional identity mostly in the undesirable way which is the hindrance of government regulation.

This case study might help the institution to accommodate academics that have a strong personal mission and have a deep commitment to the development of a community. The institution itself should be a place where the academics can give oneself totally to help the other communities to grow, promote an environment, and the institution is responsible to create a working culture that promotes collaboration rather than competition. This case study might also give an input to the central government to consider the context of the academics in ex-3T area when making policies. However, the institution should be able to provide a necessary support for the development of the career the academics. Moreover, the institution can create an income generating businesses to support the needs of the academics. And the institution also should actively find valuable partners to support the academics to achieve success.

On the way forward, there is still quite a lot of research space in this field to make it more in-depth and comprehensive, especially when talking about the context of Landak Regency (Indonesia). Future studies could focus on the role of local communities in developing academic professional identity. As a campus that is in the midst of indigenous (local) communities, research on the role of this community is certainly interesting and important. In addition, as a religious country, it is certainly interesting to see the role of religion in determining the professional identity of academics.

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