Understanding business professional identity formation in higher education: A qualitative perspective

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ABSTRACT

There has been limited recognition of the factors contributing to professional identity formation (PIF) in business higher education. This study addresses this gap by examining PIF among alumni from Assumption University of Thailand. The university emphasizes three core identity pillars: *English proficiency*, *ethics*, and *entrepreneurial spirit*, collectively referred to as the 3Es. The main objectives investigate how PIF is conveyed from alumni to individuals within their close circles, including family members and supervisors. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, capturing a multi-perspective view of identity development from alumni, including their family members and supervisors. This research reveals that professional identity is shaped not only through academic learning but also through interactions with family and organizational stakeholders. Communication competence, moral reasoning, discipline and leadership skills emerge as central to identity consolidation. Furthermore, the study highlights the influence of cultural norms, educational strategies, and work environments on graduates' identity evolution. This research contributes to the theoretical understanding of PIF by emphasizing its multidimensional nature in business-oriented higher education. It also offers practical implications for universities seeking to foster holistic professional development, including curriculum development and co-curricular activities.

Contribution/Originality: This study provides new insights into professional identity formation in business education within a non-Western higher education context. Its multi-perspective qualitative approach adds value by revealing how identity is shaped and transferred across personal and professional environments.

1. INTRODUCTION

Professional identity formation (PIF) is a strong basis for professional and personal growth. PIF refers to the process through which individuals internalize and perform the values, norms and skills needed in their respective professional domains (Sommerlad, 2007). PIF has become vital for higher education in today's interconnected global economy, particularly in programs that prepare students for graduate-level leadership in dynamic, multicultural settings like business (Tomlinson & Jackson, 2021). This is particularly important for Thailand, a country whose economy and culture are changing quickly. A labor force with the key components of PIF (e.g., role modeling (Koh, Koh, Renganathan, & Krishna, 2023), its social and relational nature (Goldie, 2012), university courses (Matthews, Bialocerkowski, & Molineux, 2019) and experience-based education (Janke et al., 2021)) is crucial in meeting the

demands and potential posed by globalization. Real-world skills encompass ethical decision-making, entrepreneurship, and global communication. However, the COVID-19 pandemic challenged conventional pedagogical approaches, highlighting the need to rethink and innovate ways of developing professional identity in hybrid learning contexts as well as virtual learning spaces (Findyartini et al., 2022; Sternszus et al., 2020).

The PIF process is not merely limited to the acquisition of technical skills but also transcends into values, organizational expectations and social forces (Bebeau & Monson, 2011). This process can be open to change or impacted by institutions of learning through the addition of ethical accountability, entrepreneurial skills, and global awareness in their curricula (Noble et al., 2014). These factors can be most notably prominent in Thai learning, where cultural values are more collectivist and interdependent with a big emphasis placed upon hierarchical structures of relationship which can strongly dictate professional identity formation and expression (Salsarola, 2023).

In contrast to the increasing interest in PIF in higher education, few studies have examined the development of PIF in non-Western contexts, like Thailand. Moreover, the interaction between institutional values, family influence, and workplace mentorship has received little attention, especially in business-oriented educational curricula.

In Thailand, private universities play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between local cultural values and global professional standards. This research refers to Assumption University of Thailand – the first private, catholic, and research-based higher education institution to emerge since 1969 which has institutionalized its unique identity framework known as the 3Es: *English proficiency*, *ethics*, and *entrepreneurial spirit*. These are the three fundamental pillars of a mission that aims to produce internationally competent, ethically sound, and entrepreneurial graduates in pursuit of their professional goals. However, how far alumni internalize such values and apply them in their professional and personal lives remains an open question, considering the unique cultural and organizational contexts in which they operate.

Extensive research into PIF in the fields of medicine, pharmacy, law, nursing, and education has contributed to identity formation largely within the frameworks of constructive-developmental theory (Kegan, 1982) and social identity theory (Hogg, 2016). Organizational identity theory further explains that people align their self-concept with the values of organizations as a function of institutional culture in the formation of professional identities (Cian & Cervai, 2014). Yet, most research is based on quantitative methodologies that allow little elaboration of the nuanced interpersonal and contextual dimensions involved in identity development.

Most of these studies have been designed and conceptualized within a Western framework and do not take into consideration the specific cultural and institutional factors that influence PIF in Asian contexts (Deng et al., 2018; Hayashi, Son, Nanishi, & Eto, 2020). For example, the Thai culture of familial bonds and respect for authority introduces different dynamics in identity formation. There are few studies exploring how such cultural norms interface with institutional arrangements, like the 3Es in determining PIF. Furthermore, the accelerated digital change catalyzed by the pandemic has further made these dynamics more complex, changing pre-existing patterns of mentorship, teamwork, and professional interaction (Sun, Li, Lee, & Tao, 2023).

Therefore, this research attempts to fill these gaps by ascertaining how graduates of the first international university internalize and practice the 3Es within the workplace. The study examines the dynamic tension between organizational forces, cultural norms, and institutional values in influencing PIF by integrating data from immediate managers and family members. Thus, this study adopts a qualitative methodology allowing for an in-depth examination of participants lived experiences and the social, cultural, and organizational contexts that shape their professional identity. The research questions are as follows:

1. How do alumni perceive and apply the values of *English proficiency*, *ethics*, and *entrepreneurial spirit* in their professional and personal lives?
2. What roles do family members and immediate supervisors play in influencing PIF?

3. How can universities adapt their educational strategies to enhance PIF?

This research contributes to the broader discourse on professional education by emphasizing the importance of integrating institutional identity frameworks into curricula and co-curricular activities. It provides practical recommendations for enhancing PIF in non-Western and post-pandemic contexts, addressing challenges posed by digitalization and global interconnectedness. Furthermore, the study responds to the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, offering insights into fostering PIF in hybrid and digital learning environments. This study captures the multidimensional nature of PIF, extending existing theories to include cultural and contextual nuances by incorporating perspectives from alumni, family members, and supervisors.

The manuscript is structured into eight sections. Following this introduction, section 2 presents a review of the literature, examining theoretical perspectives, empirical findings, and gaps related to professional identity formation. Section 3 outlines the research methodology. Section 4 reports the results and provides a detailed discussion of the findings. Section 5 discusses theoretical contributions. Section 6 recommends practical actions. Section 7 concludes the study by summarizing key contributions. Finally, section 8 addresses the limitations of the study and offers directions for future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Professional Identity Formation

Professional identity formation (PIF) consists of the ways in which individuals come to develop an occupational self-concept that is nurtured throughout the course of their education, training, and practical experience (Kalet et al., 2017). PIF is a lifelong social, cultural, and institutional process that influences members through the continuous internalization of those values, norms, and behaviors expected by a profession (Mount, Kahlke, Melton, & Varpio, 2022). While PIF has been extensively researched in disciplines such as medicine, law, and engineering, relatively few studies have focused on business education despite the growing importance of leadership, ethical decision-making and global competency in the business world (Reissner & Armitage-Chan, 2024).

Different scholars have studied PIF under various frameworks that explain how an individual constructs, refines, and then enacts his or her professional identity. The foundation theories generally fall under constructive-developmental theory as proposed by Kegan (1982) which describes how individuals develop a sense of professional identity through an ever-changing process involving reflection, adjustment, and learning experiences. Hence, business education can apply this framework whereby students evolve into autonomous professionals who can establish their value, formed either through higher education or field experiences.

Another important perspective is social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 2003) which describes professional identity formation through group membership and social relations. A person develops a sense of affiliation with their profession, inspired by colleagues, superiors, and organizational culture. This also aligns with the findings that business students develop their identities through interactions with faculty members, peers, and professional associates, reinforcing shared perceptions of professional self (Ryan et al., 2023).

Meanwhile, the provisional selves theory developed by Ibarra (1999) states that individuals experiment with some professional selves while others reach a more settled state of self. During their university tenure, they engage in business education internships and take on leadership roles in various class projects that help define their strengths in light of well-formulated aspirations. This makes business education reflect research suggesting that business graduates are required to consider and navigate different occupational roles before becoming complete and adequate professionals (Thomas, 2024).

While professions such as physicians and lawyers have somewhat clearly defined identities, business graduates have more fluid and dynamic career paths, which require continuous refinement and adaptation of identity (Soemantri et al., 2023). The present study contributes to the literature on non-Western perspectives of PIF, specifically in Thailand's business education system. Past research on PIF has been largely Western-centric,

focusing on individualistic identity formation (Holden, Buck, Clark, Szauter, & Trumble, 2012). However, professional identity has roots that extend much deeper into the fields of family expectations, hierarchy, and values borrowed from society within a collectivist society like Thailand (Hofstede, 2011). These findings denote that family, mentors in the workplace, and university culture together mold the professional identities of students. Hence, culturally sensitive frameworks must be incorporated into business education so that such identifications may occur effectively.

2.2. Higher Education's Role in Professional Identity Formation

Higher education has become a critical platform for professional identity formation (PIF), shaping the values, competencies, and career aspirations of students. Universities function as socializing agents by exposing students to institutional cultures, ethical frameworks, and leadership experiences that contribute to their evolving professional identities (Kararmaz, 2024). It is not simply a matter of transitioning technical knowledge but also involves the internalization of norms, ethics, and the expectations of one's chosen profession (Brito, 2020). This section examines curriculum design, experiential learning opportunities, and mentoring programs in higher education, focusing on how they influence PIF to ultimately produce competent and work-ready professionals.

Universities consequently play an informative role in the formation and development of students' professional identities through reflective learning and self-construction (Kararmaz, 2024). According to the theory of self-construction, such aspects of development emerge when students build a working identity by integrating academically attained knowledge with their personal and professional experiences. A structured environment, such as that afforded by higher education promotes student development through activities such as practical problem-solving, teamwork and critical thinking (Sugimura et al., 2015). Such experiences help students understand the complexities of professional identity and foster a sense of belonging in their future workplaces.

Organizational identity theory supports the institutional culture's role in identity formation (Weerts, Freed, & Morphew, 2013). Students are socialized into absorbing the values, principles, or norms of their respective university, ultimately impacting their professional behaviors. From a business studies point of view universities that emphasize a strong value base in the domains of ethics, leadership, and creativity are likely to produce graduates who are enterprising as well as ethical in their business practices. Consequently, the institutional climate or ethos in a university plays a substantial role in the professional values and conduct of students.

Moreover, the efficient way of influencing professional identity is through experiential learning (Gough, Miranda, Hemm, Norman, & Jara, 2025). Students who are placed in internships, project-based exercises, or simulations are shown to be more professionally self-aware when compared with students who undergo classroom-based instruction (Janse van Rensburg & Goede, 2020). Experiential learning bridges the divide between theory and practice by giving students a forum in which they can test and hone their professional identity in a safe academic environment.

In 1999, Ibarra's provisional selves theory describes how a professional identity develops when one attempts many roles, experiments with them, and then rejects them before a firm self-concept is established (Ibarra, 1999). University studies support this process by introducing individuals to numerous dimensions of professional becoming, whereby one can experiment, change, and reform in real time, adapting according to real-life conditions, interdisciplinary learning, mentorship, and leadership. Similarly, business studies with incorporated leadership training, case studies, and professional mentorship also produce confident graduates capable of taking charge within the professional environment.

2.3. Contextual Influences on Professional Identity Formation in Business Education

PIF in business school is not consistently realized but rather realized within systematic and social contexts, which differ cross-culturally between institutions as well as across environments. Institutions of business education

should take these cultural subtleties into consideration while crafting curricula intended to promote ethical leadership, effective communication, and entrepreneurial skills appropriate in given professional contexts.

2.3.1. Communication and Language

Language skills and effective communications are central in developing professional identity mainly from a global standpoint which introduces business professionals to cross-cultural practices. Communicating concepts, use of persuasive rhetoric, and adaptability in cross-cultural working environments are crucial factors in professional success (Fitzsimmons, 2013).

Business students build their professional identity through experiential learning exercises involving presentations, negotiations, and writing exercises (Gendron, Myers, Pelco, & Welleford, 2013). Findings show that the higher the language proficiency, the higher the professional confidence, resulting in higher career adaptability and leadership potential (Ren, Islam, & Chadee, 2023). Besides, translanguaging or the strategic use of more than one language in professional environments has been proven to contribute positively towards cross-cultural skills as well as identity formation in international business (Almashour, 2024).

2.3.2. Ethics and Leadership

Ethics and leadership are foundational pillars of professional identity, particularly in business education where future leaders are expected to navigate ethical dilemmas and make responsible decisions. Ethical leadership is closely linked to organizational culture as it influences workplace values, employee behavior, and decision-making processes (Romani & Szkudlarek, 2014). Universities play a crucial role in embedding ethical reasoning, social responsibility, and leadership development into their curricula ensuring that students internalize ethical standards before entering professional environments (Crigger & Godfrey, 2014).

2.3.3. Entrepreneurial Identity

Entrepreneurial identity refers to how individuals see themselves as entrepreneurs, shaping their values, behaviors, and decision-making processes (Yamani, 2025). Entrepreneurial identity is not limited to those who start businesses but also applies to corporate entrepreneurs, innovators and strategic leaders who introduce creative solutions within organizations. The development of entrepreneurial identity in business education involves risk-taking, adaptability, and problem-solving competencies, all of which are highly relevant for professional development (Balaraman, Leedberg, Celik, & Dewalt, 2024). Correspondingly, research shows that students participating in entrepreneurial education, innovation-based courses and incubators develop an enhanced professional identity through experiences gained in business settings (Ngoasong, Kourti, Kainyu, & Kirop, 2025). Business graduates with more clearly defined entrepreneurial identities are, in fact, more enterprising and better able to identify new opportunities to create value for their respective industries over the long term (Donnellon, Ollila, & Middleton, 2014).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Method

Qualitative research methodology was adopted for this in-depth interview-based investigation into the dynamics that govern professional identity formation during higher education and the transition into the professional world. In-depth interviews are particularly effective for capturing rich and detailed narratives, allowing researchers to delve into the subjective experiences of participants and the social contexts in which professional identities are developed (Seidman, 2006).

Semi-structured in-depth interviews are an appropriate method for exploring the complex and sensitive issue of professional identity formation. This approach allows interviewees to express their experiences in their voices while

also providing the researchers with the flexibility to probe areas of interest and follow emergent themes (Vaivio, 2012). This method is useful for explaining how professional identities are shaped through educational experiences, interactions with family members, and workplace dynamics.

3.2. Sampling Design

The study sample consists of students undergoing professional identity development in the process of their transition from higher to professional life. They are graduates within the last 1.5 to 5 years from Assumption University of Thailand with emphasis placed upon four business fields: management, international business management, accounting, and marketing. The four departments were selected due to their prominence in the university's curriculum as well as being most applicable in professional identity formation. The sample also included immediate family members, such as parents or guardians since they had a significant influence on the alumni's early values and behaviours. Furthermore, direct workplace managers of the alumni were also interviewed in this study to gain a third-party viewpoint of how alumni implement and enact their professional identity in the workplace.

Each case consisted of three stakeholders (e.g., the alumnus, a close family member, and the supervisor from the immediate workplace of the alumnus). Alumni names for in-depth interviews were drawn from the alumni database of the Martin de Tours School of Management and Economics (MSME) at Assumption University of Thailand. The selected participants were experienced in their jobs as entrepreneurs and employees in international organizations in Thailand with internships for a minimum of 1.5 years.

The study employed a purposive sampling strategy with the purpose of yielding in-depth and rich descriptions of professional identity formation. Purposive sampling enables the selection of individuals whose cases most closely represent the research questions. In addition, snowball sampling was employed through the use of participant referrals in identifying additional individuals with similar experiences. Purposive and snowball sampling are frequently employed in qualitative studies since these approaches are centered on information-rich cases as well as populations not readily accessible (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016).

Inclusion criteria made participants relevant to the objectives of the study. The alumni were deemed qualified if they were graduates of the university within the last 1.5 to 5 years having pursued one of the four focus disciplines. Furthermore, the alumni's immediate family was included because of their significant influence on their professional and personal development. The immediate supervisors were chosen due to their potential in providing professional insights in terms of the workplace behaviors and identity use of the alumnus.

The sample size was 35 participants, comprising 25 alumni, 7 family members, and 3 immediate supervisors. This sample size was assumed to be adequate for saturation where no new theme or insight would emerge with additional interviews (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

Participants were sourced through university alumni networks and professional networks. Alumni were primarily contacted by email, informing them of the research objectives and interview details while relatives and supervisors were nominated through the contacted alumni and/or their close personal community (i.e., through the snowball sampling method). Standard ethical protocols were applied throughout the interview process. Participants provided verbal informed consent after being informed of the study details and their rights as participants. Each session lasted a minimum of one hour and up to a maximum of 1.5 hours with follow-up interviews conducted through telephone or email for clarification of the results. All interviewees responded positively throughout the interview process.

Table 1 summarizes the total number of interviewees from all faculty majors at Assumption University of Thailand. Table 2 elaborates the details of all the interviewees from the four majors namely, accounting, international business management, management, and marketing. Regarding parenthood, each interviewee independently selected and proposed a close family member, typically someone who had raised them closely. Immediate supervisors included managing directors, middle managers, supervisors, and entrepreneurs.

Table 1. Summary of all interviewees

Major	Alumnus	Family member	Immediate supervisor	Total
Management (MGT)	9	2	2	13
Marketing (MKT)	6	2	0	8
Accounting (ACT)	9	2	1	12
International business management (IBM)	1	1	0	2
Total	25	7	3	35

Table 2. Interview session details of students from four majors

No.	Interviewee code	Status	Major
1	MGT1	Alumnus	MGT
2	MGT2	Alumnus	MGT
3	MGT2.1	Family member	MGT
4	MGT2.2	Immediate supervisor	MGT
5	MGT3	Alumnus	MGT
6	MGT4	Alumnus	MGT
7	MGT4.1	Family member	MGT
8	MGT5	Alumnus	MGT
9	MGT6	Alumnus	MGT
10	MGT6.1	Family member	MGT
11	MGT6.2	Immediate supervisor	MGT
12	MGT7	Alumnus	MGT
13	MGT8	Alumnus	MGT
14	MKT1	Alumnus	MKT
15	MKT1.1	Family member	MKT
16	MKT2	Alumnus	MKT
17	MKT2.1	Family member	MKT
18	MKT3	Alumnus	MKT
19	MKT4	Alumnus	MKT
20	MKT5	Alumnus	MKT
21	MKT6	Alumnus	MKT
22	ACT1	Alumnus	ACT
23	ACT2	Alumnus	ACT
24	ACT3	Alumnus	ACT
25	ACT4	Alumnus	ACT
26	ACT4.1	Family member	ACT
27	ACT5	Alumnus	ACT
28	ACT6	Alumnus	ACT
29	ACT7	Alumnus	ACT
30	ACT8	Alumnus	ACT
31	ACT8.1	Family member	ACT
32	ACT8.2	Immediate supervisor	ACT
33	ACT9	Alumnus	ACT
34	IBM1	Alumnus	IBM
35	IBM1.1	Family member	IBM

Note: ACT = Accounting; IBM = International business management; MGT = Management; MKT = Marketing.

3.3. Instrument Design

The semi-structured interview guide was the primary data collection tool and was crafted specifically to gain in-depth exploration of PIF's dynamics. Semi-structured interviews were used since they facilitate consistency across interviews while also allowing participants a degree of latitude to share their experiences and perceptions (Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016). The interview guide was drafted based on social identity theory (Hogg, 2016) and organizational identity theory (He & Brown, 2013) as well as by a thorough review of the higher education, PIF and workplace studies literatures.

The interview questions were all taken from the University Academic Standard and were translated from Thai into English by three academic experts. They were the vice president of student affairs, the director of the institute

of academics, and a faculty member from the faculty of pharmaceutical sciences. The interview questions were therefore categorized into four subtopics.

First, introductory questions are relatively neutral, eliciting general and non-intrusive information that is not threatening. For example,

"*Based on your graduation from university a couple of years ago, do you think that you have grown in the area you like since then? If yes, please go to the next question. If no, in which area do you think you have grown?*"

Second, transitional questions link the introductory questions to the key questions. For example,

"*Based on your answer, do you have a chance to apply for the 3Es in your work experience after graduating from the university a couple of years ago? If yes, how do you apply the 3Es to your organization? If not, is there any chance that you will apply for the 3Es within your organization?*"

Third, key questions are mostly associated with the study's objectives and research topics.   Finally, closing questions are easy to answer and provide opportunities for closure. For example,

"*Before we conclude this interview, is there anything about your experiences at this university that you think has influenced how you engage with your life—personally, professionally, or within your social community—that we have not yet had a chance to discuss?*"

3.4. Data Analysis

The data from these semi-structured interviews were analyzed for patterns and themes related to professional identity formation using a thematic analysis approach. Thematic analysis is a widely used method in qualitative research due to its flexibility and its ability to provide deep insights into lived experiences (Sundler, Lindberg, Nilsson, & Palmér, 2019). This research strategy was especially fitting for this study as it made it possible to examine how alumni, their respective family members, and supervisors perceive and impact the formation of professional identity in educational and social as well as organizational environments.

Qualitative data analysis software, NVivo supported the analysis by systematically coding and structuring the data. NVivo managed large amounts of text effectively and offered features for visualization of patterns and associations of code and theme (Allsop, Chelladurai, Kimball, Marks, & Hendricks, 2022).

Triangulation was employed in this study to maximize the data validity and reliability. The data were collected from three groups of participants, i.e., alumni, immediate family members, and immediate managers, each of whom provided multiple observations of the same phenomenon. This research design made possible more depth, as well as cross-checking of results allowing for the outcomes to be strong and based on varied viewpoints (Natow, 2020). Besides, the study's conclusions were further confirmed by the use of cross-group comparisons to demonstrate trends or differences.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study examines how alumni self-identity is constructed into professional identity and shared with family members, immediate managers, and other stakeholders in the alumnus's everyday community and intra-organizational environment. Three related interviewees are involved in each case for this study: the alumnus, a family member, and the alumnus's direct line manager at the time of the interview in their present firm. This triadic approach was adopted to ensure a holistic portrait of the professional identity formation (PIF) process.

The interview questions in each case were specifically aligned with the three main identities (3Es) underlined by Assumption University of Thailand. *English proficiency, ethics*, and *entrepreneurial spirit* are the three identities. These three are the core with regard to the university's purpose of producing graduates who can succeed in a professional environment marked by globalization, ethical accountability, and entrepreneurial mindset. The following subsections further present the findings related to each of the 3Es, their sub-classifications, and how each contributes to shaping the professional identities of alumni:

4.1. English Proficiency

This paper explores the role of English proficiency in PIF, focusing on its constituent elements: *communication, understanding,* and *learning.* Since English is the medium of instruction and interaction at the first international university researched, it is bound to be of primary importance in shaping the academic and professional trajectories of its alumni. The section below discusses the findings from in-depth interviews and situates them within global and institutional contexts.

The case study has placed a high emphasis on English proficiency since its founding in 1969 and has managed to embed this within the core of its institutional identity. This ensures a commitment on the part of the university to provide opportunities for creating an English-speaking environment that low-to-medium-budget Thai students need for potential internationalized academic and professional environments. This is further reinforced by the intake of international students from over 70 nationalities, creating a multicultural environment with English as one of the common mediums of communication.

4.1.1. Communication

Communication, which is an element of English proficiency, has been demonstrated to be essential to helping alumni create their professional identities, which has an impact on both their personal and professional lives. In this case, the transformation brought about by English proficiency can be assessed by the articulation of sophisticated ideas and interaction with colleagues, supervisors and even family members among alumni. The results showed communication abilities that motivated peers, family, or workers, resulting in increased English proficiency and better linguistic and professional outcomes.

Alumni demonstrated a significant impact on their family members, motivating them to develop their English language skills. Family members expressed pride and admiration with some actively practicing English to emulate the alumni's success. The quotes highlight the familial influence of the alumni's professional identities, showcasing the interconnectedness between personal growth and family development. Alumni's success not only enhanced their own identity but also elevated the aspirations and linguistic skills of their immediate family members. For example,

> *"Since I was an English language teacher in high school, my students have always followed in the footsteps of my daughter as their English communication intelligence example as one of their future success graduates and career paths"* MGT2.1 (family member).

> *"Since my daughter acted as a Thai-English translator to the Dhamma relatives, I also continuously practice my English language along with her. Nowadays, my daughter is able to interact with foreigners more comfortably. I am so proud of her. I started practicing my English starting from simple words, and then creating short-to-long sentences. Now, I can engage in more religious activities and help more Dhamma relatives achieve peace"* MGT6.1 (family member).

Alumni's communication skills in English were highly valued within their professional environments, often cited as a key factor in their recruitment and career advancement. Supervisors frequently acknowledged their proficiency as a strategic asset for the organization. For instance,

> *"During the recruitment process, she interacted well in both English and Japanese. She was successfully recruited as the secretary to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) based on a mutual agreement between the CEO and the head of HR"* MGT2.2 (supervisor)

> *"Her English is very good because my Thai is terrible. We communicate very well"* MGT6.2 (supervisor).

Alumni themselves emphasized the role of English in building cross-cultural relationships and facilitating global collaborations. For example,

> *"English language is considered one of the key business competencies in any industry. Moreover, in-depth understanding of English fastens the conclusion of business deals"* MGT2 (alumnus).

"I have practiced English with people from diverse nationalities and cultures, like Bulgaria, Germany, and the USA. English makes it easier to start relationships with new teammates working on project assignments" MGT6 (alumnus).

The above results denote that English proficiency enables alumni to successfully work in a multicultural environment where teamwork, leadership, and problem-solving would necessitate communication.

These findings are supported by global research on the importance of proficiency in English for career success. Proficiency in the English language has been considered crucial to personal and professional success worldwide. Carhill, Suárez-Orozco, and Páez (2008) explain that the level of English proficiency includes "speaking about abstract or complex topics, using more formal, sophisticated grammar and vocabulary and using language in different ways." This corresponds with the view of Kandagor and Rotumoi (2018) who claim that "English is an important tool to access subject knowledge and develop hard and soft skills." According to these researchers, English promotes learning as the language of instruction by providing linguistic resources that let students express themselves, make sense of ideas, generate meaning, and ask questions or seek help in various context, including classrooms and foreign countries.

Additional studies by Martirosyan, Hwang, and Wanjohi (2015) and Takahashi and Takahashi (2013) also show evidence that academic success is highly correlated with English proficiency. For instance, Martirosyan et al. (2015) mentioned that measured English proficiency and academic achievement among students who were in the U.S. but not native to the U.S. showed a positive correlation. This signifies how low skill levels may cause academic problems or even compel students to drop courses early. Similarly, Takahashi and Takahashi (2013) noted that self-esteem has a wide role in encouraging language learners and English skill attainment can be supported when one has a sense of self-worth.

The snowball effect among family members resonates with the literature on the social dimensions of language learning. Takahashi and Takahashi (2013) underscored the motivating role of self-esteem among language learners, which was reflected in the pride and effort of family members inspired by the communication abilities of the alumni in this study.

The findings from a professional perspective support the claim made by Kwame and Petrucka (2020) that good communication is based on effective communication, as there are less instances of miscommunication. Hofstede's cultural aspects hypothesis of individualism and collectivism, together with egalitarian commitment, strongly supports this communication result (Rehman, 2022). In this study, alumni often stated how they could bridge the gap in culture through effective communication, reflecting the interplay between individual identity and collective organizational goals.

4.1.2. Understanding

English proficiency is a complex and multilayered component of PIF in multicultural and international settings. On the one hand, this research shows that English was perceived as an instrument for professional growth. On the other hand, it is a problem necessitating constant work. The results are consistent with international studies on how people perceive the English language which show that perceptions differ greatly among countries regarding English as a second language.

The alumni also highlighted how important English was for communication when working abroad. Their professional development depends mainly on their ability to comprehend verbal and phonetic instructions, adjust to cultural norms, and collaborate across borders. According to the aforementioned sample statement, listening comprehension can be crucial in international commerce due to the possibility of missing cultural quirks and explicit direction. The alumni clarified that knowing English is more than simply knowing the language; it also involves understanding the "where" and the context of cross-border communication. For example,

"I must directly communicate with foreigners like Germans, Indonesians, British, and Americans to deeply understand insightful details of several project assignments. In any English communication circumstances, writing, listening, and speaking via emails and conference calls are mainly practiced almost always. However, listening to understand is the most valuable practice of all" ACT8 (alumnus).

Parents also recognized the importance of understanding English, reflecting on their personal challenges with language barriers in their professional experiences. For example,

"I learnt about how important it is to understand the English language, grammatical structure and specific business terms, the hard way through unpleasant experiences in my working life. Therefore, I encouraged all my children to acknowledge English as a primarily significant media language to promote personal social life and career paths" ACT8.1 (family member).

This quote illustrates the intergenerational influence of language proficiency with parents advocating for English education based on their personal difficulties in international work environments. These experiences highlight the broader societal and familial implications of language learning.

These findings are consistent with the literature that positions English understanding as central to both professional and personal development. For example, Gao (2021) showed that the literature-based approach to teaching English at the university promotes students' comprehension, critical thinking, and cultural understanding. Understanding English in this regard appears to go beyond linguistic ability involving cognitive and intercultural dimensions. The same trend is manifested when the respondents from this study highlighted the understanding of English as significant in closing cultural gaps, adapting globally held strategies to fit local contexts, and catalyzing international collaboration.

The challenges highlighted by these alumni and parents are supported by research conducted by Almekhlafy (2020) and Vattøy and Smith (2019) in which negative perceptions of English are influenced by the place where English is taught through traditional teaching methods and the lack of practical use. These very barriers suggest that immersive learning approaches and context-specific learning are more effective in improving understanding and attitudes toward the English language.

Furthermore, such emphasis by alumni on listening comprehension as a very important skill agrees with Muftah's (2024) findings that students who have positive feelings toward English usually perform well in oral communication and listening. Active listening is further cemented as one of the strong pillars of understanding and using English in professional contexts.

4.1.3. Learning

The development of proficiency in English is an important feature of PIF in this study. The alumni had a lifelong interest in languages and self-improvement. Therefore, the alumnus always appeared engaged in honing their developing English proficiencies with the aid of advanced and higher education institutions, applications in workplaces aligned with global standards, and technological development and innovation. Ultimately, these contributed not only to professional competencies but also induced a culture of continuous learning in their families and workplaces to learn and innovate toward sustainable development.

The alumni emphasized the importance of lifelong learning in English proficiency for personal and professional development. Continued self-improvement was necessary to continuously adapt to evolving global markets and organizational environments. The finding underpins the view held by alumni that learning does not stop after formal education but is a continuous process related to professional innovation and adaptation. For example,

"After graduation, I continued my graduate study in the marketing department before joining a firm. My value towards self-development is that if studied, self-development is the goal. Therefore, if not, why study and work, then? I think that I have a good attitude and the courage to propose innovative ideas to my team. My boss and my

teammates accept most of my new product development ideas during turbulent changes in demand during the pandemic. Then, it helps me to develop myself and design new ideas continuously" MGT6 (alumnus).

Alumni highlighted the role of technology in facilitating English learning, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic which accelerated the adoption of digital tools for communication and training. Supervisors also recognized the importance of leveraging digital platforms for language development. For instance,

"I am doing my thesis right now on artificial intelligence (AI) and natural language processing. So, I have a lot going on in my life now, and this is why I am okay" MGT6.2 (supervisor).

This statement reflects how technology and advanced digital tools are integral to both academic pursuits and professional development, bridging the gap between learning and application.

These findings are further supported by the wider literature that identifies continuous learning in English proficiency as central to professional success. Sukavatee and Khlaisang (2023) highlighted how communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and English Language Teaching (ELT) are still applicable today and will remain so for the next decade. These methods, which make use of technology promote significant relationships between teachers and students, making language acquisition more interesting and realistic.

According to Sarica and Cavus (2009), digital tools that support web-based learning experiences include language improvement through various platforms. Such digital tools have become an upward trend in technology use for self-directed learning, a very significant aspect of lifelong education adopted by the alumni themselves.

English proficiency is viewed as one of the primary skills that would be highly valued for international trade and services, which aligns with Thailand's Digital Government Development Plan (DGA, 2020). The alumni's efforts to enhance their language skills contribute to this national drive, placing them at the forefront of Thailand's global competitiveness in tourism, supply chain management, and marketing services. Moreover, English is used even in international organizations like the World Trade Organization, the World Health Organization, and the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries indicating its applicability within international professional settings (Zainuddin, Pillai, Dumanig, & Phillip, 2019). In addition, the commitment by alumni towards learning meets these standards and further underscores the relevance of the role that English plays in facilitating wider communication and collaboration across borders.

This has also brought changes in the lives of not only the alumni themselves but also their families and colleagues, who are encouraged by the pursuit of language learning. This ripple effect suggests the role of professional identity in promoting a culture of lifelong learning. The claim made by Wiriyachitra (2002) that cooperating with other organisations, like the British Council and CNN International, develops the cause of language instruction and cultural exchange is supported by alumni's capacity to inform their professional networks of the value.

Consequently, the researcher's goal is to help students become globally proficient in English so they can develop their professional identities. In this study, the alumni's competence has been used to successfully and ethically communicate this goal. The alumni have successfully conveyed and encouraged their family members and colleagues in (international) organizations to view themselves as creative contributors to the bright future of Thailand's international trade.

4.2. Ethics

Ethics and morality were a critical point of this research, thus reflecting something that was important in both personal and professional life as expressed by all alumni of the Christian university under investigation. These values involve *integrity*, *social consciousness*, and *discipline*, nurtured through academic curricula, extracurricular activities, and cultural immersion. The alumni repeatedly emphasized how such ethical values shaped their attitudes and behaviors, decision-making processes allowed them to influence their families, colleagues, and society in

general. This section emphasizes the results and discussion of the ethical role in professional identity formation (PIF) in the personal and organizational contexts of an alumnus.

The Christian foundation of the university emphasizes a clear focus placed on ethics and morality, a focus integrated into classroom learning as well as social campus life from the first semester. The graduates said ethical foundation was a by-product of the integration of academic theory with actual practice, unique in this university. For instance, students participated in volunteer services such as assisting in local schools, aiding tsunami survivors, and helping organizations such as the Thailand Association of the Blind. These volunteer services instilled a sense of accountability while reinforcing students in adhering to ethical behaviors in their future professional engagements.

Moreover, the "triple gem" promoted at this university, comprising the nation, religion, and the King of Thailand, further underscored such values. Graduates shared that ethics, and morality had been implemented both in the classroom and beyond, thus offering an overall structural system for ethical development. For example, in business studies, at least eight classes on ethics had been completed by that time, thereby grounding students with a sufficient foundation to serve others and tackle complex moral decisions in their future careers.

4.2.1. Integrity

Integrity emerged as a foundational component of professional identity formation among alumni, driving behavior and decision-making in personal and professional contexts. Integrity herein refers to adherence to moral and ethical principles and reflects a commitment to fairness, honesty, and impartiality, those essential qualities underpinning the development of trust and credibility in society (Mason, 2001). This study has also brought into focus how the university inculcated a sense of integrity among its students to act as ethical leaders and role models for their families, organizations, and communities.

The university stressed that integrity is an important cornerstone in its curriculum fostered through ethical training and put into practice. It reviewed how it nurtured their studies into the spirit of fairness, honesty, and impartiality within their character, so they can confront even abstruse ethical dilemmas with clarity and confidence. It is revealed that the university is capable of instilling integrity in everyday practices as the habitual performance of ethics beyond professional duty. For instance,

"I am very strict with myself. I am punctual. Even if it is charity work, I am willing to do it not just to kill time but to contribute meaningfully. These activities are not only fulfilling but also have become a strong habit when I have time off work" ACT5 (alumnus).

Alumni also consistently emphasized the role of integrity in their professional lives, particularly in fostering trust and credibility within their organizations. Their ability to adhere to ethical standards and reject unethical practices was a recurring theme. For example,

"As a mediator, I must be loyal and fair to both Thai and Japanese parties. I reject additional fees (considered bribery) and fully support both sides of the business partnership. My loyalty lies with the firm and the organizations I work with" MGT2 (alumnus).

Such adherence to ethical principles reflects the alignment of personal values with professional responsibilities, highlighting the importance of integrity in building long-term relationships and sustaining organizational success. The influence of alumni's integrity extended to their families, where ethical practices became a model for younger generations. For example,

"My bosses trust me in handling all financial situations within the company. They do not even know how much money the company has in the bank. I believe I am an honest person, and this is reflected in my children's behavior and attitudes. I brought my children to the company, and my boss became fond of them as potential future members of the company" ACT8.1 (family member).

This intergenerational transmission of integrity underscores the broader societal impact of professional identity formation, demonstrating how alumni's values resonate within their personal networks.

Integrity stands at the center of professional identity construction and works as a kind of moral guideline regarding behavior and decisions. According to Mason (2001), integrity nurtures relationships through respect for the dignity of others and taking responsibility for the consequences of decisions made. Persons demonstrating such values reflect those who graduated from university with a core set of values. The finding tallies with Loyens, Claringbould, Rossem, and van Eekeren (2022) conceptualization of integrity as a salient source of identity construction. The alumni had the ability to sustain ethics in various testing environments, gaining them more credibility and effectiveness in their professional engagement. It is also illustrative of a wider resonance with the research by Killinger (2010) who depicts integrity as the activity of the true self characterized by compassionate impartiality.

In the digital era, integrity is confronted by modern challenges, such as cyberbullying, digital scams, and misinformation. Soler-Costa, Lafarga-Ostáriz, Mauri-Medrano, and Moreno-Guerrero (2021) underlined the need for ethical etiquette in the process of navigating this complexity. Alumni can uphold a code of ethics in the modern use of communication technology and in intercultural contexts speak to their flexibility and dedication to integrity even within dynamic environments. Integrity in organizations enhances employees' performance and develops better relationships which is mediated through job satisfaction and organizational identification (Konadu et al., 2023). Businesses that operate on the premise of integrity build competitive advantages, attract consumers, and contribute to economic growth (Indriani & Sartika, 2024).

The findings also converge with studies associated with academic and business integrity. Eaton and Edino (2018) advocated a culture of academic integrity preserved through the collaboration of the community whereas Gorman, Elkins, and Lawley (2019) emphasized that efforts toward the institutionalization of integrity in research should be systematic. These views support the importance of integrity as a social value shared by everyone which is necessary to create trust and responsibility in academic and professional life. Enron and the subprime mortgage fiascos of the early 2000s, therefore, make cases for integrity that plays its revitalizing role in rebuilding trust after ethical lapses have been committed. Based on these arguments, Robinson and Robinson (2016) concluded that integrity is at the core of both sustainable business practices and long-lasting happiness, which aligns personal and organizational values.

4.2.2. Social Consciousness

Another significant constituent of PIF among alumni is social consciousness or the realization of interconnectedness and responsibilities in society. According to Cooley (1907), the idea that the self and society are interconnected enables social consciousness to serve as a means for people to improve their communities and humanity. This section analyses how graduates acquired and exhibited social consciousness with respect to their education, values, and personal experiences.

The curriculum and extracurricular activities around the university contributed greatly to the social consciousness of students. Many alumni expressed that it was due to the university experience that their awareness of societal needs had been shaped, along with their ability to take action. A variety of charitable initiatives they took part in, community service, and social clubs created engagement in this respect. The following is a review of how this kind of experiential learning fosters a feeling of direction and social engagement. The alumni were urged to look beyond their personal achievements and instead contribute to the upliftment of their communities. For instance,

> "At the university, I willingly joined the Thai Red Cross Society as staff to contribute to our society. Since AU, I have contributed to club activities like painting which gave me a sense of fulfillment by addressing the needs of people in society beyond just studying in the classroom" MGT6 (alumnus).

Family influence also emerged as an important factor in developing social consciousness. Alumni and their families often collaborated on charitable and spiritual activities, reinforcing shared values of compassion and service.

"I and my daughter cooperate to preach in several Dharma practice centers. We visit Dhamma relatives in several provinces together. During these travels, my daughter teaches me English, and we support each other spiritually. During the pandemic, we visited Dhamma relatives to check the body temperature and remind them of the fragility of life. I believe that the more courteous people are, the more humanized society becomes" MGT6.1 (family member).

This story illustrates how social consciousness is transmitted through generations with each family member encouraging and supporting the other in giving back to society. Alumni also inculcated social consciousness into their business or professional lives, applying their values to their organizations' practices. This is in line with the study by Dibrell, Craig, Kim, and Johnson (2015) who found that proactive social responsibility initiatives taken by an organization lead to increased innovation and enhanced competitive advantage.

Cooley (1907) theory of self and society provides the underpinning for how social consciousness is developed and expressed. The experiences shared by the alumni testify that self-awareness and societal awareness go hand in hand, and personal growth happens alongside community engagement. Schlitz, Vieten, and Miller (2010) and Ukpokodu (2007) have highlighted the fostering of social consciousness through educational programs, with an emphasis on this increasingly being taken as a core competency for each global citizen through all these shared experiences. This paper constitutes one example of how the service-learning and community engagement emphases at this university cultivated those capacities among its students.

Parris and McInnis-Bowers (2017) highlighted the need for creating socially conscious entrepreneurs who would be concerned with the welfare of society coupled with business success. Such a mindset is represented by the alumni in this study who practice ethical and socially responsible personal and professional conduct. Compassion and service toward their fellow beings were cherished values at the university which prepared the graduates to take up challenges confronting society in an innovative and sustainable manner.

This generally resonates with the role of the family in nurturing social conscience, as most ethical and social values are first instilled at home. The partnership between alumni and their families in caring for Dhamma relatives and organizing spiritual activities also extends to a broader impact on society. This corroborates research by O'Connor (2005) highlighting the importance of familial and cultural contexts in social responsibility.

4.2.3. Discipline

Discipline is a core aspect of professional identity formation (PIF), contributing to individual self-regulation, organizational success, and societal impact. Defined by the Cambridge Dictionary[1] as "training that makes people more willing to obey or more able to control themselves (self-discipline), often in the form of rules, and punishments if these are broken," discipline fosters consistency, reliability, and accountability in personal and professional contexts. This section examines how alumni have disciplined habits, cultivated through family upbringing and educational experiences that contributed to their professional and personal achievements.

Many alumni made references that this discipline was instilled in them by their families at a very young age as a building block for disciplined responsibility that forms the basis of how they handle responsibilities and deal with unforeseen situations, such as COVID-19. Each one shows just how early exposure to structured routines and rules primed the alumni for carrying on disciplined habits into adulthood, especially during life's crises. For instance,

"I grew up with strict discipline because of my mother's career as a teacher in one of the famous high schools located in the Bangkok district. Such a strong disciplinary habit helps me during the pandemic to strictly wear a mask and use hygiene utensils all the time before meeting others" MKT5 (alumnus).

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[1] DISCIPLINE | English meaning - Cambridge Dictionary.

Self-discipline was also evident in alumni's professional environments where they emphasized time management, adaptability, and accountability as essential traits. Alumni described how these qualities helped them navigate flexible work arrangements and achieve organizational goals. This demonstrates how self-discipline enables individuals to balance autonomy with accountability, contributing to workplace efficiency and performance. For example,

> "At *this company, time is flexible. We start work from 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. We can work at any time. We must count eight working hours. For example, if we start at 7:00 a.m., we stop at 4:00 p.m. It's up to us. Furthermore, they gave work-from-home arrangements during the pandemic"* ACT3 (alumnus).

Parents also highlighted their role in modeling discipline for their children, emphasizing how their own disciplined behavior influenced their families and workplaces. For example,

> *"My boss has complimented me about how hard I work and how I deliver each work assignment on a timely basis in front of my kids all the time. From there, I am a role model for them regarding discipline. My two kids were so proud of my motherhood"* ACT8.1 (family member).

This reflection underscores how disciplined practices have a ripple effect inspiring others and fostering a culture of reliability and commitment. Discipline is not merely about adherence to rules; it also serves as a foundation for creativity and innovation in professional contexts. Boutellier (2000) highlighted how discipline facilitates structured collaboration and idea implementation. Drucker and Maciariello (2014) emphasized its role in systematic innovation.

In these aspects, alumni's habits of disciplined nature are indeed good examples for living the principle through time management and self-regulation in providing notable help and organizational responses toward creativity and adaptability among the unexpected COVID-19 crisis. These findings supplement previous related research by the World Economic Forum (Goleman, 2015) identifying two components: one in respect of creativity (about the level of imagination) and the other centering on the idea of innovation (the process of translating imaginative capacity into concrete practice). Because of the creative capability among these alumni to pursue a great opportunity or threat presented, their innovation potentials also led the path necessary to exhibit this very capability through controlled behavior.

From a constructivist perspective, discipline as a professional identity can be closely related to job satisfaction and organizational performance (Jawitz, 2009). Empirical studies from Asian contexts also accord with this connection. For instance, Nasir (2019) found the positive influence of work discipline on job satisfaction and corporate performance at the National Islamic University of Makassar. Yuliandi (2019) reported similar findings at Indonesia's Ministry of Agrarian Affairs and Spatial Planning. The alumni in this study modeled how disciplined practices reinforce better individual and organizational outcomes, thus reinforcing the value of recruiting employees with strong self-regulation and accountability.

Discipline also plays a decisive role in the learning process. According to Simşir and Dilmaç (2020), it boosts students' confidence, happiness, and independence. On the other hand, Waschull (2005) defined self-discipline as one of the critical predictors of success in fully online learning environments during the pandemic period when most of the graduates shifted to remote work and education. Kline (2016) further cited that schools and universities can nurture disciplined students when social, emotional, and behavioral competencies become integral to every program of studies. In a nutshell, this kind of approach pays off when graduates come to show how well discipline taught within the school secures a long period of success in life.

4.3. Entrepreneurial Spirit

Entrepreneurial spirit, encompassing *leadership* and *management knowledge* emerged as a defining characteristic of professional identity formation (PIF) among alumni. The university's emphasis on fostering entrepreneurial skills through its business management program, initiated in 1969 has contributed to a legacy of alumni who excel in

leadership and innovative practices. This section explores how entrepreneurial identity is cultivated through academic and extracurricular experiences shaped by challenges and conveyed back to families and organizations.

Responses to the theme show that entrepreneurial spirit identity can be accumulated from classes and project assignments, including extracurricular activities that students have chosen to join during each academic year. Such identity has unique characteristics in which students must come across accumulated errors, difficulties, and dilemmas to become charismatic leaders. Leaders' identity can be conveyed back to family members once they have been through class lessons, teamwork, and club activities which will lead them to transiently adjust themselves among colleagues in organizations and real business practices later in life.

4.3.1. Leadership

Leadership, whether inborn or acquired is a key aspect of professional identity formation (PIF) designed to prepare individuals for dealing with the intricacies of contemporary challenges, such as digitalization, social change, and global threats in the form of climate catastrophes and pandemics (Marques, 2010). This research looks at whether leadership is fostered through learning experiences, family, and individual development, highlighting the importance of ongoing learning, collaboration as well as emotional competence in forging effective leaders.

The university cultivated leadership skills through team projects, clubs, and presentation participations. These experiences helped develop students' confidence, communications skills and the skill of working together. Alumni often attributed these experiences as key in developing leadership skills. This is evidence of how leadership is cultivated through technical skills (e.g., language skills) as well as interpersonal skills (e.g., communications skills, confidence), showing the university's holistic leadership development. For example,

> *"I like directly expressing what I think to my boss, whose nationality is American. She has positive responses and a confident character. I feel good about being fluent in English, and I have just been promoted by two steps this year (in 2020). I am now a senior marketing executive and head of a telecommunication corporation handling soft product assignments"* MGT2 (alumnus).

Family members also played a crucial role in shaping leadership traits, acting as role models and mentors for alumni. Parents shared how their guidance influenced their children's attitudes, behaviors, and professional success. This highlights the intergenerational transmission of leadership values, where parental guidance fosters a foundation for effective decision-making and professional integrity. For example,

> *"My role as a parent may not be considered leadership, but all my kids follow my suggestions and paths in terms of attitude, behavior, way of thinking, and beliefs. They are all graduates and good employees within the organizations they work for"* MGT2.1 (family member).

In professional settings, leadership often requires balancing confidence with cultural awareness and emotional intelligence (EI). Alumni and parents emphasized the importance of adapting to organizational cultures and managing interpersonal dynamics. This example underscores the importance of EI in leadership, particularly in multicultural and hierarchical environments, where understanding and respecting organizational norms is critical. For example,

> *"I have experienced employees who graduated from international universities with overconfidence at work. They are often careless about the internal working culture within private Thai organizations. I encourage them to improve their emotional intelligence (EI) or emotional quotient (EQ), which is a key success factor within organizations nowadays. I also share such experiences with my two children"* ACT8.1 (family member).

Leadership development is both an individual and collective process of continuous learning, deliberate practice, and adaptation (Rousmaniere, Goodyear, Miller, & Wampold, 2017). The findings also align with Mai, Do, and Ho Nguyen (2022) in that the successful leader gains appropriate knowledge and skills and applies them effectively. In this study, the alumni did this by integrating academic, extracurricular, and professional lessons into their leadership practices. Again, such emphasis on EI and cultural sensitivity reflects the contemporary research

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direction in the field of leadership effectiveness. Goleman (1998) identified EI as an important variable in leadership performance, including traits such as self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. The alumni demonstrated this through their adaptation to the cultural context in which they found themselves and through building relationships at work. It also aligns with findings that the concept of EI helps a person handle difficult interpersonal relations and sustain cooperation at work (Cole, Cox, & Stavros, 2019).

The findings also underscore the need for adaptive leadership in addressing modern challenges, such as digital transformation and global crises. Bag, Gupta, Choi, and Kumar (2021) emphasized that effective leaders must be resilient and innovative, leveraging technology and collaboration to address evolving demands. Alumni in this study demonstrated these traits through their ability to lead teams, manage projects, and implement solutions in dynamic environments.

4.3.2. Management Knowledge

Management knowledge involves the way one can solve thorny organizational problems, create team synergies, be continuously innovative, and move with changing times. Therefore, PIF seeks to develop this area as an important basis on which students build their professional identity. The study takes a deeper dive into how such management knowledge has developed through academic curricula, practical experience, and family influences, and how these enable alumni to make constructive contributions in an organization or at professional network sites.

The alumni shared the view that management knowledge is one of the vital influences on effective leadership and successful organizations. Knowledge goes beyond technical expertise and encompasses people management, strategic thinking, and ethical decision-making. In this regard, the alumni described how their academic and professional roles informed their understanding of management. This demonstrates how management knowledge encompasses client engagement, problem-solving, and ethical practices, which are crucial for building trust and achieving organizational objectives. For example,

"Before the auditing process begins, I must engage and acknowledge customers myself, leading to a long-term relationship. At the same time, I must address specific issues they raise and meet their demands with morally righteous behavior. I also research my customers' business details, such as process, location, and investment type, before meetings" ACT1 (alumnus).

Effective communication emerged as a key component of management knowledge, facilitating collaboration and long-term relationship building. Alumni highlighted how their ability to communicate effectively with clients and colleagues contributed to organizational success, particularly in roles requiring cross-cultural sensitivity and collaboration. For instance,

"Verbal face-to-face communication is another key success factor for achieving goals with mutual willingness. My communication style has evolved through years of working experience" MKT3 (alumnus).

Family values and upbringing also played a role in shaping management knowledge. Parents often acted as role models, instilling principles of perseverance, ethical behavior, and adaptability. For example,

"I engage and acknowledge customers personally to create and maintain long-term relationships while addressing their specific demands with morally righteous behavior" ACT9 (alumnus).

From this perspective, there is a clearer focus on family influence as integral in developing the knowledge of management, as a portion of entrepreneurial and professional identity.

It is about the critical need for management knowledge to navigate the complex nature of modern organizations decisively in dynamic environments brought about by digital transformation and global competition. The findings tally with the corporate finance institute in its assertion that learning and practice are needed to build management skills aimed at achieving effective leadership (Kim & Kim, 2011). Indeed, incorporation also stresses that management knowledge should be central in managing teams and organizational goals (Bunker, 2023). Management knowledge is also supported in the academic literature as being critical in ensuring organizational

performance. Singh, Gupta, Busso, and Kamboj (2021) established the influence of top management knowledge and practices on open innovation which, in turn, affects organizational performance. This is consistent with the experiences of the alumni participating in this study where management knowledge was applied to foster innovation, build client relationships and uphold ethical standards.

Knowledge of management has to be flexible in light of technological changes and must appreciate the implications of technology on business strategy and operations. According to Nwankpa, Roumani, and Datta (2022), this competence includes effective communication, technological literacy, and implementation skills. Alumni who participated in this study exhibited these traits in how they integrated technical skills with interpersonal skills in addressing customer issues as well as organizational issues. In addition, management knowledge extends beyond the workplace into organizational and even family culture. Pellegrini, Ciampi, Marzi, and Orlando (2020) perceived management knowledge in terms of informing leadership best practices and human resource policies in yielding such behaviors as teamwork as well as ethics in the organizations the alumni directed. Miura (2024) also identified impacts of family values.

5. THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The theoretical foundation for this current study enhances the comprehension of PIF in business studies and substantially broadens its scope of application outside more traditional fields of medicine, law, and engineering. The study combines empirical evidence from the three identities to present a detailed account of how business students build their professional identity in both academic and professional contexts. The results confirm PIF is not a linear problem but a multilayered one with effects originating from institutional values, cultural norms, and social interfaces (Barbour & Lammers, 2015).

Firstly, combining identity formation models with business education frameworks situates PIF theory in a more in-depth manner as well as providing a more advanced description of how students come to constitute themselves as professional in combination with academic training, socialization, and cultural background. Overall, the results contradict linear identity formation models but instead a multi-dimensional model would be a proper pursuit—one in which PIF in business education is acknowledged in terms of its fluidity, complexity, and cultural specificity (Garner & Kaplan, 2019).

Secondly, from a constructive-developmental standpoint, Kegan's (1982) theory of the developing self provides a valuable foundation from which to examine how alumni make sense of and navigate professional identities in the long term. The research detailed here illustrates briefly that PIF is less a question of gaining competence in a fixed structure rather than a developing process integrating individual values, organizational requirements, and civic understandings. The alumni continuously distill their identity through experiences associated with multicultural environments, ethical decisions, and entrepreneurial problem-solving (Kock, 2020). Therefore, this is a confirmation study that higher learning shapes professional identity through significant learning experiences, reflective practices, and transformative challenges facing students.

Lastly, organizational identity theory provides further insight into how the professional identities of alumni are aligned with those of institutional values (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). Indeed, strong messages about *English proficiency*, *ethics*, and *entrepreneurial spirit* truly inculcated lasting professional traits among the graduating students, which influence behaviors within international business contexts. This result would ensure that higher education institutions can consciously create professional identities by developing specific institutional cultures focused on ethical leadership, global competencies, and an innovation-driven mindset. Therefore, this aligns with the institutional processes of socialization where universities act as lead agents in constructing identity alignment via structured curricula, experiential learning, and mentorship programs (Lee, Kramer, & Guo, 2019).

6. PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

In the context of a university, the development of professional identity formation (PIF) requires collaboration among key institutional actors. These include university leaders, faculty members, alumni, student affairs staff, and others who influence student growth both directly and indirectly. Their contributions are reflected in curriculum design, classroom teaching, club activities, support programs, learning environments, and faculty teaching practices. This study introduces the conceptual process model shown in Figure 1 to improve professional outcomes among graduates.

The model includes four stages which are *input*, *process*, *output*, and *outcome*. At the input stage, institutional values are introduced through academic subjects, student clubs, and faculty engagement. These values are embedded in the student experience. The process stage shows how these values are applied through teaching methods, classroom activities, and co-curricular involvement. The output stage reflects short-term results, such as how students and alumni demonstrate these values during and after graduation. The outcome stage shows the long-term impact of identity formation, including how alumni influence their families, supervisors, and professional environments. Notably, the model highlights that feedback is not linear. Arrows between stages depict iterative feedback loops that enable each stage to feed forward and inform the one that preceded it. For instance, insights taken from alumni behavior (outcome) can lead to new teaching methods (process). Results of evaluation (output) can lead to changes in the curriculum (input). These mechanisms of feedback facilitate adaptive learning, ongoing quality assurance and enduring relevance in how universities shape professional identity.
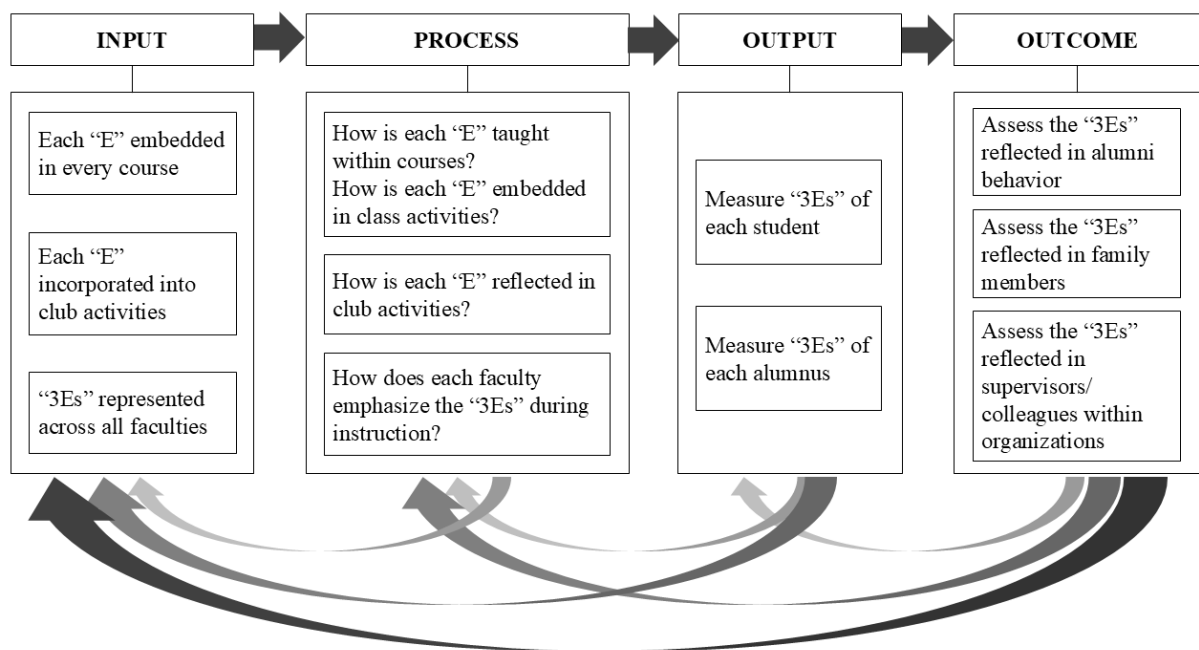

Figure 1. Conceptual process model of identity development.

Moreover, the findings from this study have equipped universities, organizations, and all other policy formulators with pragmatic insights to better position professional identity formation in the post-pandemic scenario. These implications highlight that specialized educational strategies, organizational support, and collaboration across sectors must be directed toward preparing individuals to be globally oriented workers.

Firstly, universities also need to develop experiential learning through actual simulations, real case studies, and projects in the learning and development of students. These approaches will significantly enhance students' speaking, critical thinking, and analytical problem-solving skills, providing a realistic link between education and employment. For example, programs that focus on teamwork, public speaking, and culturally appropriate learning

can foster adaptability and cross-cultural competencies, preparing students to work in diversified environments. That can all be complemented by organizations providing internships, mentorship, and continuous training, further supporting the shift from campus academic life into the workplace.

Secondly, integrating ethics and social awareness into enterprise and education will ensure that universities produce graduates dedicated to the good of society with the same or even more emphasis placed on business objectives. Universities can make courses and community involvement in the subject of ethics part of the curriculum and enable students to grow in a morally responsible manner. Firms can design plans with a focus on openness, ethical management, and involving workers in social activities. It can lead to a better society in terms of equity and empathy and organizational responsible cultures.

Thirdly, knowledge of management and leadership is important in professional training. For this purpose, the curriculum in the university should cover training in decision-making, time management, and emotional intelligence, among others, with an interdisciplinary focus placed on experiential learning. These can be complemented by the cultivation of an entrepreneurial spirit through project-based creativity and extracurricular involvement. This can also be aided by organizations through structured courses in leadership development and cross-functional teamwork in ensuring the latter can survive in changing contexts.

Lastly, it should be a priority for new technologies to be incorporated into educational systems and businesses. For example, there should be contributions from universities towards e-learning as well as blended learning to expand participation as well as access. This also demands policymakers that they facilitate such a process through proper policies introduced at a countrywide level, putting education in line with professional life while closing the gap through technology for lifelong learning. Moreover, these organizations should have a policy in place that avails professional development programs for their employees to be able to compete in changing business environments.

7. CONCLUSION

This paper represents an investigation into professional identity formation in business education, focusing on the development of *English proficiency*, *ethics*, and *entrepreneurial spirit* as integral pillars in shaping the professional paths of alumni. Though PIF has been extensively researched in scientific professional contexts, this study reveals its distinctive usage and dynamic development in business studies.

The findings further placed in the foreground how the 3Es were integrated into the graduates' lives in influencing professional behaviors, decision-making, as well as family, colleagues, and social network interaction. The results showed individuality in PIF's journey with alumni reporting the impacts of family values, intellectual exposure, and organizational contexts. Those with a strong ethical foundation expressed a firm commitment to moral accountability in professional and everyday decisions. Other alumni employed rigorous academic training in outlining their career trajectories in a persistent manner, while a few recognized entrepreneurial understandings of business issues in the real world, complemented by academic guidance. Collectively, these experiences depict a portrait of complexity and dynamism concerning PIF's activities at the interface between the personal, cultural, and organizational realms.

Moreover, self-directed choices that alumni make to be part of any social, academic, or professional community shape the development of identity. This can be done with intent speaking about the role of the university in providing a variety of opportunities for growth, adaptability and resilience. This research has emphasized the significance of forging an environment in which students may construct professional identities aligned with ethical values, international competence, and business agility.

Thus, it positions higher education at the core of the lifelong PIF process, producing graduates capable of handling the demands of a global business environment as well as contributing towards the betterment of society. The institution thus becomes prepared to equip alumni to successfully navigate difficult professional environments

and make positive impacts on their immediate circles and society by inculcating ethical, globally oriented, and innovative thinking. This underlines the irreplaceable role that higher education can play in building individuals who will thrive as professional and moral leaders in an interdependent world.

8. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study contributes significantly to the understanding of the dynamics of PIF during the transition from higher education to professional life. However, it is not without its limitations. Firstly, this study relied solely on semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method. While this is an appropriate approach for researching participants' experiences, combining interviews with other qualitative or mixed-method approaches, such as focus groups, participant observations or quantitative surveys would have yielded more robust findings.

Secondly, the current study was conducted within a particular cultural and institutional context, i.e., an international university in Thailand. Hence, it might reflect unique influences stemming from its cultural, social, and temporal positioning. Further research is needed on PIF in different educational and organizational contexts, particularly in environments characterized by distinctive socio-cultural dynamics or global trends, such as digitization or globalization.

Lastly, this study investigates how one university's identity, articulated through the 3Es influenced students' professional identity construction; other aspects of professional identity could also be tested for relevance using the same population of current or former students. For example, dimensions such as intercultural competence or digital literacy are becoming increasingly important in today's global workforce and knowledge-based economy. Longitudinal studies would also be valuable in observing the development of professional identity over time, thereby yielding insights into the long-term impact of educational experiences and environmental influences.

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