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BUILDING PROFESSIONALISM THROUGH SENSE OF BELONGING AND POSITIVE CHARACTER

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Abstract.

Introduction. The VUCA era (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity) poses substantial challenges to the professionalism of educators and educational personnel, which can no longer depend solely on technical competencies, formal regulations, and structural supervision. These conditions necessitate a form of professionalism grounded in internal awareness, character resilience, and a clear value orientation. T

Purpose. This article aims to conceptually examine the role of sense of belonging and positive character as fundamental foundations in fostering educator professionalism within the educational sector in the context of the VUCA era.

Method. Using a conceptual framework and systematic literature review, the study explores how educators' psychological attachment to institutional values, vision, and identity contributes to the internalization of positive character traits, including integrity, responsibility, commitment, and exemplary conduct.

Result and discussion. Sense of belonging is conceptualized as a psychological mechanism that enhances the consistency of educators' professional behavior amid policy uncertainty, role complexity, and ambiguity in educational practice. The analysis indicates that value- and character-based professionalism demonstrates greater sustainability and adaptability than professionalism driven primarily by procedural compliance.

Conclusion. This article implicitly argues that strengthening sense of belonging and positive character represents a strategic approach to developing adaptive, reflective, and meaningful educator professionalism in the VUCA era, with important implications for educational policy development and professional practice.

Keywords: *Professionalism, Sense of Belonging, Positive Character*

INTRODUCTION

Background

Global developments that take place in a fast, non-linear, and unpredictable manner have brought the world of education into a context known as the VUCA (*Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity*) era. This term describes environmental conditions characterized by fluctuating changes, high uncertainty, increased complexity, and ambiguity in understanding and responding to various situations. In the education sector, the VUCA era is reflected in dynamic policy changes, the demands of adaptation to digital technology developments, the increasing complexity of the role of educators, and the unclear boundaries between professional, administrative, and social responsibilities.

This condition challenges the conventional education paradigm which has been built on the assumption of system stability and procedural certainty. In the past, the professionalism

of educators could be defined relatively clearly through competency standards, certifications, formal regulations, and structured evaluation mechanisms. Professionalism is understood as the ability of educators to meet the technical and administrative requirements that have been set by educational institutions and authorities. However, in the context of the VUCA era, this approach is increasingly showing its limitations. Many of the professional situations that educators face can no longer be fully answered by formal guidelines, thus demanding flexibility, professional judgment, and moral toughness that come from within the individual.

The VUCA era has put educators in an increasingly complex position. On the one hand, educators are required to meet ever-evolving performance standards; On the other hand, they are faced with policy uncertainty, limited resources, and changes in the characteristics of students and society. In this situation, professionalism is not enough to be interpreted as compliance with the rules, but needs to be understood as the internal capacity of educators to act adaptively, ethically, and responsibly in various conditions that are not fully structured.

In line with these conditions, there is a need to reconceptualize the professionalism of educators. Professionalism is no longer positioned solely as a result of external control, but as an internal construct rooted in values, professional identity, and moral commitment. This approach emphasizes that sustainable professional behavior is more likely to manifest when educators have a strong internal awareness of the meaning of their profession, as well as emotional attachment and values to the educational institutions and communities in which they belong.

Within this framework, the psychological dimension is becoming increasingly relevant to study. One of the psychological constructs that has a significant contribution to professionalism is the *sense of belonging*. *Sense of belonging* refers to the individual's sense of attachment, acceptance, and meaning in a group or organization. In the context of education, the *sense of belonging* reflects the extent to which educators feel an integral part of the educational institution, identify with the organization's vision and values, and view their role as a meaningful contribution to the broader educational goals.

The sense of belonging has far-reaching implications for educators' attitudes and work behaviors. When educators feel accepted, valued, and recognized as part of a professional community, they tend to show higher levels of intrinsic motivation and commitment. This attachment encourages educators to not only fulfill formal obligations, but also strive to make the best contribution to the institution and students. In an environment characterized by

uncertainty and rapid change, the *sense of belonging* serves as a psychological anchor that provides a sense of stability and direction.

Furthermore, the *sense of belonging* plays an important role in the process of internalizing values. Institutional values communicated through organizational policies and culture will be more easily accepted and embodied in professional behavior when educators feel emotionally attached to the institution. Thus, *the sense of belonging* not only impacts the affective aspect, but also shapes the ethical orientation and professional behavior of educators.

However, psychological attachment alone is not enough to explain the professionalism of educators in its entirety. Another dimension that is no less important is positive character. In the context of education, positive character encompasses a set of moral values and qualities, such as integrity, responsibility, commitment, empathy, justice, and example. This character becomes the ethical foundation that guides educators in carrying out their professional roles, especially in situations that demand complex decision-making and are not always explicitly governed by formal procedures.

Positive character has a very strategic position in the educator profession. Educators not only play the role of transmitters of knowledge, but also as role models for students. Therefore, the professionalism of educators cannot be separated from the qualities of character displayed in everyday interactions. In the VUCA era, when professional challenges and dilemmas are increasingly diverse, positive character serves as a moral compass that allows educators to act consistently and responsibly, even under pressure and uncertainty.

In educational practice, many situations require educators to use professional judgment outside of procedural guidance. For example, in the face of students' differences in backgrounds, social dynamics in the classroom, or rapidly changing policies, educators often have to make decisions that involve ethical and value considerations. In this context, positive character allows educators to maintain professional integrity and behavioral consistency, despite systemic limitations.

Although the *sense of belonging* and positive character have been widely studied in the educational literature and organizational behavior, studies that integrate the two concepts as the foundation of educator professionalism in the context of the VUCA era are still relatively limited. Most studies tend to address professionalism from a structural perspective, such as policies, standards, and performance evaluation, or address *sense of belonging* and character separately. In fact, conceptually, *sense of belonging* and positive character have interrelated and mutually reinforcing relationships.

A sense of belonging facilitates the internalization of professional values and identity, while positive character is an ethical manifestation of those internalized values. The integration of the two forms an internal foundation that allows educators to maintain professionalism consistently, even when external controls are not fully effective. In the VUCA era, this integration is becoming increasingly important as the complexity and ambiguity of the professional situation demands a strong and stable value orientation.

Based on this background, this article aims to conceptually examine the role of sense *of belonging* and positive character in building educator professionalism in the VUCA era. This study places professionalism as an internal, adaptive, ethical, and sustainable construction, which is not only supported by formal regulations and standards, but also by the psychological attachment and character qualities of educators. With a conceptual approach and literature review, this article is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of educational professionalism studies, as well as offer practical and policy implications for efforts to strengthen the quality of educators in dealing with the dynamics of education in the VUCA era.

The Don Bosco KAM Catholic Education Foundation (YPK Don Bosco KAM), a quality school that has become a favorite in North Sumatra, pays special attention to the importance of teacher professionalism in the VUCA era, how to build it, so that the institution can maintain its existence.

PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION AND FORMULATION

Identification and formulation of problems from the background of community service activities, including;

1. Procedural Professionalism → Internal Awareness
Still focused on administrative compliance, less rooted in identity and moral responsibility.
2. Sense of Belonging → Bottom-Up
Teachers have the potential to actively build a sense of belonging to the organization, by not always demanding institutional support.
3. Role Models & Practice Gaps
Teachers' professional behavior is not consistent with the role of role model
What should be shown
4. Internalization of Positive Character

Integrity, responsibility, and exemplary have not been fully the foundation of professional behavior.

5. The Vulnerability of Professionalism in the VUCA Era

Rapid change and complexity magnify the risk of weak professionalism without a sense of belonging and strong character.

6. Limited Development Approach

The focus of development is still technical, has not touched on the psychological and essential character for sustainable professionalism.

PURPOSE AND BENEFITS

The purpose of the activity is to:

1. Implementing the Tridharma of Higher Education.
2. Fostering a Substantive Understanding of Teacher Professionalism
3. Reorienting the Meaning of Sense of Belonging from Top-Down to Bottom-Up
4. Strengthening the Role of Teachers as Role Models
5. Internalizing Positive Character as the Basis of Professionalism
6. Improving Teachers' Professional Resilience in the VUCA Era
7. Driving a Holistic Professional Development Approach

With benefits :

1. Strengthening Teacher Professionalism
Increasing the understanding of teacher professionalism as an internal awareness based on professional identity and moral responsibility.
2. Development of a Bottom-Up Sense of Belonging
Fostering an authentic *sense of belonging* as the basis for commitment, loyalty, and professional attachment of teachers.
3. Internalization of Positive Character and Example
Reinforce the values of integrity, discipline, and responsibility so that they are consistently reflected in the professional practice of teachers.
4. Increasing Professional Resilience in the VUCA Era
Equipping teachers with a reflective and adaptive attitude in facing educational dynamics and competition.

METHODS

Realization of Problem Solving

Community Service in the form of a seminar held at the Hall of the Samadi Vinsensi Retreat House Jl. Batu Permata Raya, Bah Kapul, Kec. which is still top-down, as well as the weak consistency of example in the midst of the challenges of the VUCA era, this seminar activity is designed as an effort to solve problems that are educational, reflective, and transformative. The purpose of the seminar is to provide a space for learning and critical reflection for teachers to understand professionalism as an internal awareness rooted in professional identity, moral responsibility, and positive character. The purpose of the seminar activity is directed to reorient the understanding of *the sense of belonging* from the institutional approach to the process of internalization of the individual (bottom-up), strengthen positive character as the foundation of example, and equip teachers with an adaptive perspective in facing increasingly complex educational dynamics and competition. Through an integrative and contextual approach to seminars, this activity is expected to be able to encourage changes in teachers' professional perspectives and behavior in a sustainable manner, while contributing to strengthening professional culture in the educational environment.

Method of Activity

The method of this seminar activity is designed conceptually-reflective by integrating four main variables, namely "Building Teacher Professionalism, Sense of Belonging, and Positive Character". *The VUCA era* is positioned as an external context that illustrates the dynamics, uncertainties, complexities, and competition in the world of education that demands professional toughness. *Teacher professionalism* is understood as the main goal of the activity, namely the quality of behavior and professional commitment rooted in internal awareness, professional ethics, and moral responsibility as an educator. *Sense of Belonging* acts as a psychological foundation that is built in a bottom-up manner, which encourages attachment, loyalty, and a sense of belonging to teachers towards the profession and educational institutions. Meanwhile, *Positive Character* serves as a manifestation of values and ethics that are reflected in integrity, discipline, responsibility, and exemplary in professional practice. The four variables are integrated through an interactive, reflective, and contextual seminar approach to encourage the internalization of values and the strengthening of teacher professionalism in a sustainable manner.

The seminar activities were decorated with active interactions, pretest and posttest, and *ice breaking* so that participants followed them carefully and joyfully.

Evaluation Design

The evaluation design of this seminar activity was prepared to assess the achievement of the objectives of the activity and the effectiveness of the implementation of the seminar in as g g e. S, e n are used as a basis for the improvement and development of similar activities in the future, as well as an indicator of the success of the seminar in encouraging the strengthening of teacher professionalism in the midst of the challenges of the VUCA era.

The following is a picture of PKM activities on November 15, 2025

Picture 1 : Group Photo : Resource Person & Participant Person

Photo 2 : Initial Presentation Photo by Resource



Figure 3: Mobile Resource Persons the Material

Figure 4: Participants Seriously Pay Attention to

Figure 5: Active Interaction of Resource Persons & Participants



Figure 6: Ice Breaking



Figure 7: Participants Appear to Take Quiz Persons



Figure 9 : Representing the Participant Receiving the Gift



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Professionalism is a complex concept, which includes knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, and behaviors that are consistent in carrying out the roles and responsibilities of a particular profession. Professionalism is not simply compliance with formal rules or procedures, but is an internal orientation rooted in moral awareness, ethics, and a commitment to the quality of work.

Many people think they have professionalism when they actually don't. As for the underlying thing is that those with respectable professions consider themselves to have professionalism when in fact they do not have professionalism, among other things due to:

1. Have an academic degree, honorable position, institutional affiliation, social recognition of their profession.
2. Having limited competence, not being aware of their limitations, valuing their performance higher than reality and rejecting corrective feedback.
3. Having normalized deviations, for example, considers it reasonable to be unprepared, minimal performance and ethics compromised for the sake of convenience.

Professionalism, according to Hoyle (1974), encompasses aspects of knowledge, technical skills, and ethical awareness, in which individuals actively seek to maintain quality standards and integrity in professional practice. Professionalism cannot be imposed only through external control; It was born from intrinsic motivation, self-reflection, and identification with professional values and teacher professionalism are dynamic and involve emotional, reflective, and moral dimensions that are intertwined. (Day, 2002).

Psychologically, professionalism involves moral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. The moral dimension emphasizes ethical commitment and integrity, the emotional dimension relates to empathy, stress management, and self-awareness, while the cognitive dimension includes mastery of knowledge, skills, and reflective capacity to improve professional practice (Hargreaves, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 2006). Hargreaves added that professionalism that is too externally controlled has the potential to give birth to pseudo-obedience and covert

resistance. Meanwhile, Darling-Hammond emphasized that the professional quality of teachers is determined by their capacity for reflection, personal integrity, and long-term commitment to learners' learning.

In the context of education, the professionalism of teachers is not only characterized by technical teaching skills, but also by example, integrity, and positive influence on students. A professional teacher is a figure who not only masters the material, but is also able to build meaningful relationships, motivate learning, and behave consistently according to educational values (Lickona, 1991; Korthagen, 2004).

In addition, professionalism also has a social and organizational dimension. As stated by Schein (2010), professional individuals are able to adapt to the organizational culture, contribute to common goals, and consistently uphold organizational values. Solid professionalism serves as a foundation for collaboration, innovation, and adaptation in the face of the challenges of the VUCA era, where uncertainty, complexity, and rapid change demand the ability to reflect and make informed decisions (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014; Fullan, 2001). In other words, professionalism is an attitude and behavior that brings together technical competence, moral integrity, and emotional attachment to the profession, so that individuals are able to work effectively, responsibly, and contribute positively to society and institutions.

Authentic professionalism arises from the integration of internalized values, intrinsic motivation, and psychological attachment to the profession, rather than simply mechanistic adherence to rules. Thus, this seminar succeeded in strengthening the understanding that true professionalism can only grow if teachers interpret their profession as a moral call and social responsibility.

A sense of belonging is a psychological condition in which individuals feel an emotional attachment, self-identification, and strong recognition of a group or institution. In the context of teacher professionalism, *the sense of belonging* serves as a psychological foundation that fosters commitment, loyalty, exemplarship, and moral responsibility. Theoretically, this is in line with Baumeister & Leary (1995) who emphasized that the need for social attachment is a basic human need, while Osterman (2000) asserts that this attachment affects motivation, participation, and sustainability of professional performance.

A sense of belonging bottom-up is a psychological attachment that grows from individual awareness and experience, not solely from policies or institutional pressures. In the context of education, this means that teachers internalize their values, goals, and professional

roles personally, so that attachment to the profession or institution emerges authentically and voluntarily.

Baumeister & Leary (1995) emphasize that human beings have a fundamental need to be accepted and recognized in social groups; when these needs are met from self-awareness, individuals tend to show stronger intrinsic motivations. Maslow (1954) emphasized that *belonging* is a basic need that supports self-actualization, and is only achieved when individuals feel valued, recognized, and relevant in the group.

In the context of education, Goodenow (1993) emphasizes that the *sense of belonging* built from direct experience and reflection of teachers increases involvement in the teaching and learning process and professional resilience. This is reinforced by Allen & Meyer (1990) who show that emotional attachment that arises bottom-up affects professional loyalty and commitment more than formal institutional influence.

Ryan & Deci (2000) through *the theory of Self-Determination* emphasized that intrinsic motivation and a sense of *connectedness* are the key to the internalization of professional values. Teachers who build *a sense of belonging* bottom-up not only follow rules or procedures, but feel a moral responsibility to their profession and students. Krause & Coates (2008) added that learning experiences that allow teachers to actively participate, discuss, and collaborate, foster more lasting and authentic attachments than formal rewards or rules.

Furthermore, Tinto (1993) in the study of student engagement emphasizes the importance of meaningful social interaction for a sense of belonging; this principle also applies to teachers, where bottom-up involvement through interaction, reflection, and active contribution builds deep psychological attachment. Bandura (1977) also emphasized the role of social reinforcement and modeling in the internalization of values; teachers who emulate the behavior of senior professionals and feel voluntary acceptance are better able to internalize professionalism.

In addition, Osterman (2000) emphasized that the *sense of bottom-up belonging* forms self-identification with the profession, which gives rise to proactive, innovative, and consistent behavior towards professional responsibility. Teachers do not simply "follow instructions" or meet administrative targets, but have an emotional, moral, and psychological attachment to their profession. Thus, bottom-up forms a solid psychological foundation for authentic and sustainable professionalism.

In the VUCA era, *a sense of belonging* bottom-up has become increasingly important. Bennett & Lemoine (2014) emphasize that individuals who have internal attachments are able

to deal with uncertainty, are adaptive to change, and are resilient to external pressures. Fullan (2001) also emphasized that strengthening teachers' internal capacity—including an authentic sense of belonging—is more effective in building sustainable professionalism than rule-based reinforcement alone.

Thus, *the sense of belonging* bottom-up is the psychological, moral, and professional foundation for teachers. This approach emphasizes:

1. Internalization of professional values and identities
2. Emotional attachment and intrinsic motivation
3. Active participation and continuous reflection
4. Professional resistance to external changes and pressures

The bottom-up approach not only strengthens individual attachment, but also forms a more authentic, resilient, and sustainable professional culture in the educational environment. Bottom-up integration with top-down is the most effective strategy to build teacher professionalism as a whole.

Positive character is a collection of values, traits, and attitudes that shape an individual's behavior ethically, productively, and constructively, which benefits not only oneself but also the community and the environment. Positive character is the moral and ethical foundation that supports professionalism, wise decision-making, and exemplary in daily practice. Lickona (1991) stated that positive character includes integrity, responsibility, honesty, discipline, empathy, and respect. These values form the foundation for teachers to be role models for students, while strengthening emotional and professional attachment to their profession.

Berkowitz & Bier (2005) emphasize that positive character development must be done systematically through meaningful experiences, habituation of good behavior, and consistent self-reflection. Peterson & Seligman (2004) through *Character Strengths and Virtues* groups positive characters into several main dimensions, such as courage, *justice*, humanity, wisdom, *temperance*, and *transcendence*). In the context of teachers, this dimension is reflected in the ability to be fair to students, show empathy, control emotions, make wise decisions, and foster a spirit of learning for themselves and students.

Psychologically, positive character plays a role in forming resilience, intrinsic motivation, and professional satisfaction. Peterson & Park (2006) show that individuals with strong positive characters are better able to cope with stress, conflict, and work pressure, so their professionalism is more durable and consistent. In education, this means that teachers who

have a positive character can adjust to class dynamics, remain ethical in facing challenges, and become models of healthy behavior for students.

Kohn (1993) emphasizes that positive character is not only formed through formal moral instruction, but through real experience, reflection, and meaningful social interaction. In other words, teachers need to have space to internalize character values through practice and collaboration, not just theories or institutional rules. Narvaez (2006) also emphasized that effective character education must integrate cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions, so that teachers are able to assess, feel, and apply ethical values in every professional decision.

Furthermore, positive character is closely related to a sense of belonging and professionalism. Teachers who have a positive character tend to show higher commitment, consistent ethical behavior, and emotional attachment to their profession (Day, 2002; Korthagen, 2004). The integration of positive character and *a sense of belonging* allows teachers to be role models for students, effective collaborators, and leaders in the school environment, thus creating a healthy and resilient professional culture in the VUCA era.

Thus, strengthening positive character in teachers includes internalizing values, reflective practices, habituating ethical behavior, collaboration, and continuous learning. This not only enhances individual professionalism, but also builds a school culture that is characterful, inclusive, and adaptive, supporting the continued success of education.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusion

The science seminar in Community Service activities for teachers in the YPK Don Bosco KAM environment with the theme "*Building professionalism Through a Sense of Belonging and Positive Character*", implicitly, emphasizes that true professionalism is rooted in the connection of individuals with shared values, which is then manifested in positive character and responsible and sustainable work behavior, and opened their insight that in the VUCA era professionalism is a necessity, even with a noble profession such as a teacher, it does not automatically have professionalism but must be built with deliberate effort. The material presented is highly relevant to educational challenges in the VUCA era, where rapid change, uncertainty, complexity, and competition demand teachers to have intrinsic motivation, adaptability, and professional resilience, with an approach that emphasizes the internalization of values, reflection, and active involvement of participants proven effective in building commitment, integrity, and exemplary teachers in daily practice.

This seminar has succeeded in providing a deep understanding for teachers about the importance of psychological attachment and positive character in improving professionalism, and received appreciation from the Chairman of the Foundation and assessed that the themes and materials are very appropriate and needed to equip teachers to be able to face the dynamics of modern education in a resilient and sustainable manner. Thus, these seminars not only strengthen the professionalism of teachers individually, but also contribute to the development of an authentic professional culture in the school environment.

Suggestions

The seminar activity "*Building Professionalism through Sense of Belonging and Positive Character*" should be used as a foothold for teachers to internalize professionalism through psychological attachment and self-identification with the profession. Teachers need to be given the opportunity to build *a sense of belonging* bottom-up through active participation, reflection, and collaboration, so that intrinsic motivation and professional commitment grow authentically. Positive characters such as integrity, example, discipline, and responsibility must be integrated in real life in daily practice through mentoring and collaborative learning. The development of ongoing professionalism can be strengthened through community discussions, peer-review, and the use of technology to share best practices. With the implementation of this strategy, teachers will be role models for students, demonstrate consistent professional behavior, and be able to face the challenges of the VUCA era in a resilient manner. This seminar is expected to foster an authentic and sustainable professional culture in the educational environment

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