

# Exploring Faculty Members' Perceptions of Professional Training in Higher Education: A Qualitative Study at the Faculty of Education, Al-Madinah International University, Malaysia

Ayman Aied Mohammed Mamdouh

Faculty of Education Al-Madinah International University (MEDIU), Malaysia

Corresponding Author Email: [ayman.aid@mediu.edu.my](mailto:ayman.aid@mediu.edu.my)

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## Abstract

This Research explored faculty members' perceptions of professional training as part of their academic role and professional identity in higher education, focusing on the Faculty of Education at Al-Madinah International University (MEDIU), Malaysia. A qualitative case study design within an interpretive paradigm was employed to capture participants' lived experiences. The study involved all full-time faculty members ( $n = 7$ ), representing complete coverage of the target population. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted face-to-face and online and analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework. The findings revealed four main themes: conceptualization of professional training, experience and relevance of training practices, institutional influence on engagement, and professional training as a dimension of identity construction. Faculty members demonstrated a clear understanding of training as workshops and development activities; however, training was often perceived as fragmented rather than strategically structured. Engagement was strongly influenced by the relevance of training content to academic responsibilities, while institutional policies frequently shaped participation as compliance-based. Despite these challenges, professional training contributed to reflective practice and the ongoing construction of professional identity when it was meaningful and contextually aligned. The study highlights the need for strategically integrated, needs-based, and context-sensitive training models, particularly within dual-mode learning environments. It concludes that embedding professional training within institutional development frameworks enhances its effectiveness, supports faculty development, and improves academic practices, offering practical implications and directions for future research in higher education contexts.

**Keywords:** Faculty Members' Perceptions, Professional Training, Higher Education, Faculty of Education, Qualitative Research, Al-Madinah International University, Malaysia

## **Introduction**

Higher education systems worldwide are undergoing continuous transformation in response to globalization, technological advancement, and increasing societal expectations. Universities are no longer limited to teaching and research functions; they are now expected to play a more active role in professional development, lifelong learning, and capacity building for various sectors of society. This evolving mission has reshaped the understanding of academic work and expanded the expected responsibilities of faculty members beyond traditional boundaries. (Marginson, 2016; Boud & Brew, 2013)

Within this changing landscape, the concept of academic professional identity has gained significant attention. Professional identity refers to how academics perceive, construct, and negotiate their roles in relation to institutional expectations, disciplinary cultures, and personal values. Recent studies emphasize that this identity is not fixed but continuously reconstructed through interaction with evolving academic environments and responsibilities. (Beijaard et al., 2004; Trede et al., 2012)

At the same time, increasing attention has been given to the diversification of academic roles, particularly the growing expectation that faculty members contribute to professional training and development activities. However, the extent to which such responsibilities are perceived as an integral part of academic work remains uneven across institutions. In many cases, professional training is still viewed as an auxiliary task rather than a core academic function. (Clegg, 2008; O'Meara et al., 2008)

Institutional structures and reward systems also play a critical role in shaping faculty engagement in broader academic responsibilities. When universities prioritize research output and teaching load over professional engagement activities, faculty members may be less motivated to invest time in training and development roles. This misalignment can influence how academics interpret their professional responsibilities and shape their identity within the institution. (Deem & Brehony, 2005; Altbach et al., 2015)

In faculties of education, these issues become more pronounced due to the dual responsibility of preparing pre-service teachers and supporting the ongoing professional development of in-service educators. Despite this expectation, limited research has explored how faculty members in education faculties perceive their role in professional training, particularly in contexts characterized by blended and distance learning systems.

The Faculty of Education at Al-Madinah International University (MEDIU), Malaysia, represents a relevant context for examining this issue. The institution operates within a flexible learning environment that combines face-to-face and distance education and serves a diverse international student population. This context provides a meaningful setting to explore how faculty members construct their understanding of professional training within their academic roles.

Therefore, this study aims to explore faculty members' perceptions of professional training as part of their academic role within higher education, focusing on the Faculty of Education at MEDIU, Malaysia. The study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how

academic staff interpret and negotiate their engagement in professional training within a rapidly evolving higher education environment.

### *Research Problem*

Although higher education institutions increasingly emphasize the importance of professional training and community engagement as part of academic responsibilities, there remains limited understanding of how faculty members interpret and integrate these expectations into their professional identity. Existing literature indicates that academic roles are expanding; however, the degree to which these expanded roles are internalized by academics remains unclear. (Beijaard et al., 2004; Boud & Brew, 2013)

In many universities, a persistent imbalance exists between institutional expectations and reward systems, where research productivity and teaching performance remain the dominant evaluation criteria. This may lead to ambiguity in how faculty members prioritize and understand professional training activities within their academic work. (Clegg, 2008; Deem & Brehony, 2005)

Within faculties of education, this ambiguity becomes more critical, as academic staff are expected to engage not only in teaching university students but also in supporting broader professional development in the education sector. However, empirical evidence on how faculty members perceive this dual responsibility remains limited, particularly in multicultural and flexible learning environments. (Trede et al., 2012; Marginson, 2016)

In the context of Al-Madinah International University (MEDIU), Malaysia, there is a need to better understand how faculty members perceive their role as professional trainers and how this perception aligns with their academic identity. This is particularly important in a system that integrates blended and distance learning modalities and serves a diverse academic community.

Therefore, the core problem of this study lies in the limited empirical understanding of how faculty members at MEDIU perceive and construct their role in professional training within their academic identity framework, despite increasing global emphasis on expanding the functions of higher education beyond traditional teaching and research.

### *Research Questions*

How do faculty members at Al-Madinah International University perceive, experience, and construct professional training as part of their academic role and professional identity in higher education?

#### Sub-Research Questions

1. How do faculty members define and interpret professional training within their academic context?
2. How do faculty members experience participation in professional training activities in higher education?
3. How do faculty members perceive the relationship between professional training and their academic responsibilities?
4. How does professional training contribute to shaping or reshaping faculty members' professional identity?

5. How do institutional policies and academic culture at Al-Madinah International University influence faculty members' engagement with professional training?

### *Research Objectives*

To explore how faculty members at Al-Madinah International University perceive, experience, and construct professional training as part of their academic role and professional identity in higher education.

### *Specific Objectives*

1. To identify how faculty members, define and interpret professional training within their academic context.
2. To explore faculty members' experiences of participating in professional training activities in higher education.
3. To examine how faculty members, perceive the relationship between professional training and their academic responsibilities.
4. To investigate how professional training contributes to shaping or reshaping faculty members' professional identity.
5. To analyze how institutional policies and academic culture at Al-Madinah International University influence faculty members' engagement with professional training.

### **Significance of the Research**

This Research is significant at both theoretical and practical levels. Theoretically, it contributes to the growing body of literature on professional training in higher education by offering an in-depth understanding of how faculty members construct meaning around training practices within their academic roles. Unlike prior research that primarily focuses on evaluating the effectiveness of professional development programs, this study emphasizes the interpretive and experiential dimensions of faculty engagement, particularly in relation to professional identity formation and adult learning processes.

Practically, the study provides valuable implications for multiple stakeholders in higher education. For university leaders and policymakers, the findings offer insights into how professional training can be better aligned with faculty members' academic roles and institutional expectations, supporting more effective policy design and strategic planning. For faculty development units and training providers, the study highlights the importance of designing contextually relevant and meaningful training programs that respond to faculty needs and experiences. For faculty members themselves, the study contributes to increasing awareness of the role of professional training in shaping their academic practice and professional identity. Additionally, for higher education institutions such as Al-Madinah International University, the findings may support efforts to enhance teaching quality, promote professional engagement, and strengthen the integration between academic responsibilities and professional development practices.

### **Operational Definitions**

#### *Exploring Faculty Members' Perceptions*

In this Research, exploring faculty members' perceptions refers to the in-depth qualitative investigation of how faculty members at the Faculty of Education, Al-Madinah International University interpret, understand, and assign meaning to professional training within their academic roles. This exploration is conducted through semi-structured interviews to capture

participants' lived experiences, reflections, and subjective interpretations within their institutional context.

### *Professional Training*

Professional training refers to the formal and informal development activities provided within the university context that aim to enhance faculty members' competencies in teaching, research, and academic service. In this study, it is understood as a continuous, context-based process that includes workshops, seminars, and institutional development initiatives as experienced and interpreted by faculty members.

### *Faculty Members*

Faculty members refer to academic staff working at the Faculty of Education, Al-Madinah International University, who are involved in teaching, research, and academic responsibilities during the period of data collection and who participate in the study as interview respondents.

### *Perceptions*

Perceptions refer to the subjective interpretations, beliefs, and meanings that faculty members attach to professional training based on their experiences, institutional environment, and professional roles.

### *Academic Role*

Academic role refers to the set of professional responsibilities carried out by faculty members, including teaching, research, supervision, curriculum development, and participation in institutional and community-related academic activities.

### *Professional Identity*

Professional identity refers to the dynamic and evolving understanding that faculty members have of themselves within their academic profession, shaped by their experiences, interactions, institutional context, and engagement in professional practices such as training and development.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Understanding how faculty members perceive professional training in higher education requires a theoretical lens that captures the social, cognitive, and identity-related dimensions of learning. Professional training in academic contexts is no longer viewed as a purely technical or administrative process; rather, it is increasingly understood as a complex phenomenon involving participation in communities, adult learning processes, and identity construction. For this reason, this study integrates Communities of Practice, Adult Learning Theory, and Professional Identity Theory to interpret how faculty members at Al-Madinah International University experience and construct meaning around professional training within their academic roles (Wenger, 1998; Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2015; Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004).

### *Communities of Practice (CoP)*

The Communities of Practice framework conceptualizes learning as a socially situated process that occurs through participation in shared practices, rather than through formal instruction

alone. Wenger (1998) argues that knowledge is created and sustained through engagement in collective activities, where meaning is continuously negotiated among members of a professional community. In higher education, faculty members operate within academic communities where teaching, research, and service are collectively shaped through interaction and collaboration (Wenger, 1998; Li et al., 2020).

From this perspective, professional training is not an isolated event but part of ongoing participation in institutional practices that shape academic work. Faculty learning is therefore embedded in social relationships, departmental cultures, and institutional norms (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

Despite its strong emphasis on social learning, the Communities of Practice framework has been criticized for underrepresenting individual differences in perception and agency. Not all faculty members engage equally in communities, and institutional hierarchies may influence access to participation and learning opportunities. This limitation is particularly relevant in diverse higher education contexts such as international universities, where cultural and organizational differences shape engagement with professional training (Wilson & Smith, 2021).

#### *Adult Learning Theory (Andragogy)*

Adult Learning Theory, particularly Knowles' concept of andragogy, emphasizes that adult learners are self-directed, experience-based, and motivated by the relevance of learning to their professional roles. Knowles et al. (2015) argue that effective adult learning occurs when learners are actively involved in planning, implementing, and evaluating their learning experiences. In the context of higher education, faculty members are considered autonomous learners whose engagement in professional training depends largely on perceived relevance and practical applicability (Knowles et al., 2015; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

Research in faculty development supports this view, indicating that professional training is most effective when it is aligned with faculty members' disciplinary needs and institutional responsibilities (Steinert et al., 2019).

However, andragogy has been critiqued for overemphasizing individual autonomy while underestimating institutional constraints and power dynamics. In many higher education settings, participation in professional training is influenced by mandatory policies, workload pressures, and organizational expectations rather than purely personal motivation. This raises questions about how "self-directed" faculty learning truly is in structured institutional environments (Illeris, 2018).

#### *Professional Identity Theory*

Professional Identity Theory focuses on how individuals construct and reconstruct their professional selves through interaction, experience, and reflection. Beijaard et al. (2004) define professional identity as a dynamic and evolving construct shaped by both personal beliefs and social contexts. In higher education, academic identity is multidimensional, encompassing roles such as teacher, researcher, and institutional contributor (Henkel, 2005; Trede et al., 2012).

Recent studies suggest that professional development activities, including training programs, play a significant role in shaping how faculty members perceive their professional roles and responsibilities (Kreber, 2010; Canrinus et al., 2017). Thus, professional training is not only a mechanism for skill enhancement but also a process of identity negotiation and transformation.

Although Professional Identity Theory provides a powerful lens for understanding meaning-making processes, it is often criticized for being conceptually broad and difficult to operationalize empirically. Without clear contextual grounding, identity can become an abstract construct that does not fully capture the institutional realities shaping faculty experiences, particularly in culturally diverse universities (Gee, 2000; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009).

#### *Integrated Theoretical Perspective*

The integration of these three theoretical perspectives provides a comprehensive framework for understanding professional training in higher education. Communities of Practice explains the social dimension of learning, Adult Learning Theory explains the individual and experiential dimension, and Professional Identity Theory explains the transformative identity dimension of professional development.

Together, these perspectives allow this study to examine professional training not merely as a set of activities, but as a socially embedded, experientially meaningful, and identity-shaping process that reflects how faculty members at Al-Madinah International University interpret and construct their academic roles in higher education (Wenger, 1998; Knowles et al., 2015; Beijaard et al., 2004).

In light of the three theoretical perspectives discussed above Communities of Practice, Adult Learning Theory, and Professional Identity Theory it can be concluded that each theory contributes a distinct yet complementary dimension to the understanding of professional training in higher education. Communities of Practice provides a social lens that explains learning as a participatory and collaborative process within academic communities. Adult Learning Theory offers an experiential lens that highlights the role of faculty members' prior knowledge, self-direction, and perceived relevance in shaping their engagement with professional training. Professional Identity Theory adds an interpretive dimension by explaining how such training contributes to the ongoing formation and negotiation of academic identity. The integration of these perspectives allows for a more comprehensive analytical framework that aligns with the complexity of the present study's problem, enabling a deeper understanding of how faculty members at Al-Madinah International University perceive, experience, and construct professional training within their academic roles.

## Conceptual Framework



## Literature Review

### *Professional Training in Higher Education*

Professional training has become an integral component of academic work in contemporary higher education systems. It is increasingly viewed not merely as a set of isolated activities, but as a continuous and structured process aimed at enhancing faculty members' teaching effectiveness, research productivity, and overall professional competence. Research suggests that effective professional development is characterized by being sustained over time, content-focused, and aligned with institutional goals and academic practice. This reflects a broader shift toward understanding training as part of institutional capacity building rather than individual skill acquisition (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Steinert, 2012).

From a critical perspective, however, the literature reveals a persistent gap between this conceptual understanding and actual institutional practices. While theoretical models emphasize coherence and continuity, professional training in many universities is still implemented in fragmented and short-term formats. This inconsistency raises important questions about the extent to which institutions are able to translate theoretical principles of effective training into practice, particularly in complex higher education environments.

### *Effectiveness and Design of Faculty Development Programs*

A considerable body of research has examined the effectiveness of faculty development initiatives in improving teaching and learning outcomes. Empirical evidence indicates that well-designed training programs can positively influence instructional practices, enhance pedagogical knowledge, and improve student learning experiences. However, the effectiveness of such programs is highly dependent on their design, particularly in terms of

relevance, duration, and opportunities for active engagement and reflection (Steinert et al., 2016).

Recent studies further suggest that there is a growing shift toward transformative approaches to professional development, where training is not limited to knowledge transmission but extends to reflective practice and professional growth. In this sense, training becomes a process of continuous learning and meaning-making rather than a one-time intervention (Steinert et al., 2019).

From the researcher's perspective, this shift is particularly significant, as it highlights that the real challenge is not the availability of training opportunities, but the extent to which these opportunities are designed in ways that promote deep and sustained professional learning.

#### *Faculty Members' Perceptions and Engagement with Training*

Faculty members' perceptions play a central role in shaping their engagement with professional training. Studies consistently show that academics are more likely to participate in training when they perceive it as relevant to their disciplinary needs and directly applicable to their teaching and research responsibilities. Relevance, therefore, emerges as a key determinant of engagement and perceived value (O'Meara et al., 2008).

At the same time, engagement is influenced by broader institutional factors, including workload, time constraints, and reward systems. In many higher education contexts, research productivity and teaching performance remain the dominant criteria for evaluation, while participation in professional training is often undervalued. This misalignment can lead to a situation where faculty members engage in training primarily to meet institutional requirements rather than for intrinsic professional development (Clegg, 2008; Deem & Brehony, 2005).

From an analytical standpoint, these findings suggest that professional training cannot be fully understood without considering the institutional structures within which it operates. Faculty engagement is not solely an individual choice but is shaped by organizational priorities and cultural expectations.

#### *Professional Training and Academic Identity*

Recent literature has increasingly emphasized the relationship between professional training and the development of academic identity. Academic identity is understood as a dynamic and evolving construct that is shaped through experience, reflection, and interaction within institutional contexts. Professional development activities provide important opportunities for faculty members to reflect on their roles and to negotiate their professional identities (Beijaard et al., 2004; Trede et al., 2012).

Furthermore, research indicates that meaningful and well-designed training experiences can contribute to strengthening professional identity by enhancing self-awareness, confidence, and role clarity. In this sense, professional training extends beyond skill development to become a process of identity construction and transformation (Steinert et al., 2019).

From the researcher's perspective, this dimension is particularly important, as it shifts the focus of professional training from technical improvement to deeper processes of professional meaning-making. This perspective provides a strong conceptual foundation for examining training within the broader context of academic work and identity.

#### *Professional Training in Dual-Mode and Flexible Learning Environments*

The expansion of blended and distance learning systems has introduced new challenges for professional training in higher education. Faculty members are increasingly required to operate across multiple teaching modalities, adapt to digital technologies, and respond to diverse student needs. These changes have expanded the scope and complexity of academic roles, making professional training more critical than ever (Marginson, 2016).

However, existing research on professional training in higher education has largely focused on traditional institutional contexts, with limited attention given to dual-mode or flexible learning environments. This gap is particularly relevant in international and multicultural institutions, where faculty members must navigate diverse expectations and teaching conditions.

From an analytical perspective, this limitation in the literature highlights the need for context-specific research that captures the complexity of professional training in such environments.

### **Emerging Trends in Professional Development**

#### *Artificial Intelligence and Faculty Development*

Recent studies indicate that artificial intelligence is increasingly reshaping professional development in higher education by introducing new demands related to digital competence, pedagogical adaptation, and institutional readiness. Faculty members are expected not only to use AI tools but also to integrate them meaningfully into teaching, research, and academic decision-making processes. However, research shows that many academics still feel insufficiently prepared for this shift due to a lack of structured professional development opportunities focused on AI literacy and application. This highlights a growing gap between technological advancement and institutional training provision, suggesting that professional development must evolve into a more strategic and continuous process rather than remaining fragmented and optional. (Mah & Groß, 2024)

#### *Digital Transformation and Faculty Training*

The digital transformation of higher education has significantly altered the nature and expectations of faculty professional development. Recent evidence suggests that effective training programs in digital contexts must go beyond technical instruction and incorporate pedagogical transformation, reflective practice, and sustained institutional support. Studies show that when professional development is designed as a continuous and context-sensitive process, it leads to more meaningful improvements in teaching practices and faculty engagement. In contrast, short-term or isolated training sessions are often insufficient to support long-term instructional change, particularly in blended and technology-rich learning environments. (Mekheimer, 2025)

### *Faculty AI Literacy and Competency Development*

Emerging research emphasizes the growing importance of artificial intelligence literacy as a core component of faculty professional development. AI literacy is increasingly conceptualized as a multidimensional competency that includes technical understanding, pedagogical application, and ethical awareness. Recent frameworks suggest that faculty development programs should be differentiated according to academic roles and disciplinary needs, rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach. This reflects a shift in higher education toward competency-based professional development models that are aligned with evolving technological demands and institutional expectations. (Song et al., 2026)

### *Faculty Perspectives on Generative AI and Training Needs*

Recent qualitative research on generative AI in higher education highlights that faculty members experience both opportunities and concerns regarding its integration into academic practice. While many academics recognize the potential of generative AI to enhance teaching efficiency and research productivity, they also express concerns related to academic integrity, workload transformation, and ethical implications. Importantly, studies emphasize that these challenges cannot be addressed without structured professional development programs that support faculty adaptation to emerging technologies. This indicates that institutional readiness and targeted training are essential for the responsible and effective adoption of generative AI in higher education. (Dotan et al., 2024)

### *Research Gap*

Despite the growing body of literature on professional training in higher education, several gaps remain evident. First, most studies focus on evaluating the effectiveness of training programs rather than exploring how faculty members interpret and construct meaning around these experiences. Second, limited research has adopted qualitative and interpretive approaches to examine the relationship between professional training and academic identity. Third, there is a lack of empirical studies conducted in multicultural and dual-mode learning environments.

Therefore, this study addresses these gaps by providing an in-depth qualitative exploration of how faculty members at Al-Madinah International University perceive, experience, and construct professional training as part of their academic role and professional identity within a flexible higher education context.

## **Methodology**

### *Research Design*

This Research adopts a qualitative research design to explore faculty members' perceptions of professional training within the context of higher education. A qualitative approach is particularly appropriate for this study because it allows for an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, meanings, and interpretations, which cannot be captured through quantitative methods.

The study is guided by an interpretive research paradigm, which assumes that reality is socially constructed and that individuals develop meanings based on their experiences and interactions within a specific context. This paradigm aligns with the aim of the study, which is

to explore how faculty members at Al-Madinah International University perceive, experience, and construct professional training as part of their academic roles and professional identity. More specifically, the study employs a qualitative exploratory design, as it seeks to investigate a relatively underexplored phenomenon within a specific institutional context. This design enables the researcher to gain rich, detailed insights into participants' perspectives and to capture the complexity of their experiences in relation to professional training practices.

### **Participants and Sampling**

This Research adopts a purposive sampling strategy to select participants who can provide rich and relevant insights into the phenomenon under investigation. Purposive sampling is particularly suitable for qualitative research, as it allows the researcher to intentionally select individuals who have direct experience with professional training within the academic context.

The population of the study consisted of all full-time faculty members at the Faculty of Education, Al-Madinah International University (MEDIU), Malaysia, across both face-to-face and distance learning systems, as well as across all academic departments and specializations within the faculty. The total number of faculty members in this population was seven.

Given the relatively small size of the population, the study adopted a comprehensive sampling approach, whereby all eligible faculty members were invited to participate. This approach enhanced the depth and inclusiveness of the data and ensured that multiple perspectives within the faculty were represented.

To ensure the relevance and quality of the data, specific inclusion criteria were applied. Participants were required to: (1) be full-time faculty members at the Faculty of Education, (2) have at least one year of teaching experience at the university, and (3) have participated in or been exposed to professional training activities within the institution. These criteria ensured that participants possessed sufficient experience to provide meaningful and reflective insights into the research topic.

All seven faculty members agreed to participate in the study, resulting in a total sample of seven participants. This full participation enhanced the comprehensiveness and richness of the data, as it allowed for the inclusion of all perspectives within the Faculty of Education. Data collection continued until data saturation was achieved, that is, when no new themes or insights emerged from the interviews.

### **Data Collection**

This study employed semi-structured interviews as the primary method of data collection. Semi-structured interviews were considered appropriate for this qualitative study because they allowed for in-depth exploration of participants' perceptions while maintaining a flexible structure that enabled the researcher to probe emerging ideas and clarify responses.

The interview guide was developed in alignment with the research questions and the theoretical framework of the study, which integrated Communities of Practice, Adult Learning Theory, and Professional Identity Theory. The questions focused on faculty members'

perceptions, experiences, and interpretations of professional training within their academic roles.

Interviews were conducted individually with faculty members from the Faculty of Education at Al-Madinah International University. In line with the institutional teaching modalities, face-to-face interviews were conducted with faculty members involved in the direct (on-campus) education system, while online interviews were conducted with faculty members engaged in the distance learning system. This dual approach ensured accessibility while maintaining consistency in data collection procedures across both groups.

The interviews were scheduled at times convenient for participants to ensure their comfort and willingness to provide detailed responses. Prior to each interview, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and informed consent was obtained.

All interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the participants to ensure accuracy of data capture. In addition, brief field notes were taken during and immediately after each interview to document initial impressions and non-verbal cues that supported the later analysis.

Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes, depending on the depth of the discussion. The interviews continued until data saturation was reached, meaning that no new themes or significant insights emerged from the final interviews.

After completion, all recordings were transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and to preserve the original meaning of participants' responses. The transcripts were then prepared for thematic analysis.

This table presents the alignment between the study's research questions, objectives, and data collection instrument to ensure methodological coherence.

Table 1

*Alignment of Research Questions, Objectives, and Data Collection Method*

No.	Research Question	Research Objective	Data Collection Method
1	How do faculty members define and interpret professional training within their academic context?	To identify how faculty members, define and interpret professional training within their academic context.	Semi-structured interviews
2	How do faculty members experience participation in professional training activities in higher education?	To explore faculty members' experiences of participating in professional training activities in higher education.	Semi-structured interviews
3	How do faculty members perceive the relationship between professional training and their academic responsibilities?	To examine how faculty members, perceive the relationship between professional training and their academic responsibilities.	Semi-structured interviews

4	How does professional training contribute to shaping or reshaping faculty members' professional identity?	To investigate how professional training contributes to shaping or reshaping faculty members' professional identity.	Semi-structured interviews
5	How do institutional policies and academic culture at Al-Madinah International University influence faculty members' engagement with professional training?	To analyze how institutional policies and academic culture at Al-Madinah International University influence faculty members' engagement with professional training.	Semi-structured interviews

The table presents the correspondence between the research questions, objectives, and data collection method. It shows that each research question is directly translated into a specific objective that guides the inquiry, and all items are addressed through semi-structured interviews as the main qualitative data collection method, consistent with the exploratory nature of the study.

### *Data Analysis*

This study employed thematic analysis to analyze the qualitative data obtained from the semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis was considered appropriate for this study because it provides a systematic yet flexible approach for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative data.

Data coding in this study was conducted manually rather than using qualitative data analysis software such as NVivo. This decision was made due to the relatively small number of participants and the limited size of the dataset, which allowed for efficient and systematic manual coding without compromising rigor or depth of analysis. Manual coding enabled the researcher to remain closely engaged with the data throughout the analytical process, facilitating a deeper interpretive understanding of participants' meanings and perspectives. This approach is consistent with the interpretivist paradigm guiding the study, which emphasizes close interaction with textual data and the researcher's active role in meaning-making.

The analysis process followed the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), which ensured a rigorous and transparent approach to data interpretation.

In the first phase, all interview transcripts were read and re-read several times to achieve data familiarization and to gain an overall understanding of the content. During this stage, initial notes and ideas were recorded.

In the second phase, initial codes were generated manually by systematically identifying meaningful segments of data relevant to the research questions. These codes reflected significant features of participants' perceptions, experiences, and interpretations of professional training.

In the third phase, related codes were organized into potential themes by grouping similar patterns of meaning. This process involved comparing and clustering codes to identify broader categories that captured significant aspects of the data.

In the fourth phase, the identified themes were reviewed and refined to ensure coherence within each theme and clear distinctions between different themes. Some themes were merged, while others were redefined or discarded based on their relevance to the data.

In the fifth phase, themes were clearly defined and named to accurately reflect their underlying meaning and conceptual focus. This stage ensured that each theme provided a clear and coherent representation of the data.

In the final phase, a detailed and coherent narrative was developed, supported by direct quotations from participants. These quotations were used to illustrate key findings and to ensure that participants' voices were authentically represented in the analysis.

### *Scope and Delimitations of the Study*

This study is situated within a specific qualitative case study design focusing on one academic unit within a higher education institution. It was conducted at the College of Education at Al-Madinah International University (MEDIU), and it included all faculty members within the selected unit (n = 7), thereby representing a complete coverage of the target population in this particular context.

The study is geographically and institutionally bounded to a single higher education institution, which allows for in-depth exploration of professional training practices within its unique organizational structure and dual-mode learning system. As such, the findings are context-specific and are not intended for statistical generalization beyond the studied case. Instead, they offer analytical insights that may be transferable to similar institutional contexts.

In terms of temporal boundaries, data collection was conducted during the April 2026 academic semester. This temporal context should be considered when interpreting the findings, as institutional practices and professional training policies may evolve over time. Overall, these delimitations define the boundaries within which the study was conducted and help situate the findings within a clearly specified institutional, contextual, and temporal framework.

### *Trustworthiness*

To ensure the rigor and quality of the qualitative findings, this study adopted the criteria of trustworthiness as proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), which include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

### *Credibility*

Credibility was ensured through prolonged engagement with the data and repeated reading of interview transcripts to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' perspectives. In addition, member checking was applied, where participants were given the opportunity to review and confirm the accuracy of their interview responses and interpretations. This process helped ensure that the findings accurately reflected participants' intended meanings.

### *Transferability*

Transferability was addressed by providing a rich, detailed description of the research context, participants, and data collection procedures. This allows readers to determine the extent to which the findings may be applicable to similar academic contexts. Although the study is context-specific, the detailed documentation enhances its potential relevance to other higher education settings.

### *Confirmability*

Confirmability was achieved by maintaining neutrality during data analysis and interpretation. The researcher ensured that findings were grounded in participants' responses rather than personal bias. In addition, reflexive notes were used to track assumptions and ensure that interpretations remained data-driven.

### **Results and Findings**

The findings of this study were analyzed using thematic analysis and are presented in alignment with the research questions and the semi-structured interview guide. The analysis explored how faculty members at Al-Madinah International University perceive, experience, and construct professional training within their academic roles.

Four main themes emerged:

1. conceptualization of professional training.
2. experience and relevance of training practices.
3. institutional influence on engagement.
4. professional training as a dimension of identity construction.

#### *Theme 1: Conceptualization of Professional Training*

This theme addresses how faculty members define and interpret professional training within their academic context.

Faculty members generally defined professional training as structured activities aimed at enhancing teaching effectiveness, research skills, and overall academic performance. Participants commonly referred to workshops, seminars, and institutional development programs as the main forms of professional training offered within the university.

One participant explained:

"Professional training includes workshops and seminars that aim to improve our teaching and academic skills."

However, despite this clear understanding, participants emphasized that training practices were often not systematically organized within a long-term developmental framework.

Another participant noted:

"Training is useful, but it often feels like separate activities rather than a continuous development process."

These findings indicate that while the concept of professional training is well understood, it is not always experienced as an integrated part of academic development.

#### *Theme 2: Experience and Relevance of Professional Training*

This theme reflects faculty members' experiences with professional training and its perceived relevance to their academic responsibilities.

Participants reported varied experiences. While some training programs were perceived as beneficial, many were described as too general and not sufficiently aligned with specific academic or disciplinary needs.

One participant stated:

"Most training sessions are quite general and do not address the specific challenges we face in teaching."

Another added:

“Training becomes valuable when it is directly related to my subject or teaching methods.” In addition, several factors were identified as influencing participation and engagement. These included the relevance of training content, time constraints, workload pressures, and institutional requirements.

As one participant explained:

“If the training is relevant and scheduled at a suitable time, I am more motivated to participate.”

These findings highlight that relevance and practical applicability are key determinants of faculty engagement in professional training.

### *Theme 3: Institutional Influence on Engagement*

This theme explores how institutional policies, culture, and training modalities influence faculty engagement.

Participants indicated that training participation is often shaped by institutional expectations and administrative requirements, sometimes leading to compliance-based engagement.

One participant remarked:

“Sometimes we attend training because it is required, not necessarily because it is useful.”

Differences were also observed between face-to-face and online training experiences. While online training provided flexibility, it was often perceived as less interactive and less engaging.

Another participant explained:

“Online training is convenient, but face-to-face sessions are more interactive and engaging.”

In addition to these insights, participants offered several suggestions for improvement. These included the need for more specialized training, better alignment with academic roles, and increased opportunities for interactive and collaborative learning.

### *Theme 4: Professional Training and Identity Construction*

This theme addresses the role of professional training in shaping faculty members' professional identity.

Participants indicated that meaningful and relevant training experiences contributed to reflection and professional growth. Training was described as an opportunity to rethink teaching practices and professional roles.

One participant stated:

“Some training sessions helped me reflect on my teaching and how I see myself as an academic.”

Another noted:

“Training can change how we view our role, especially when it is practical and engaging.”

These findings suggest that professional training plays a significant role in shaping and reconstructing faculty members' professional identity, particularly when it is aligned with their experiences and institutional context.

The findings indicate that faculty members' perceptions of professional training are shaped by several interrelated factors. Participants demonstrated a clear conceptual understanding of professional training, commonly describing it as workshops, seminars, and development-

oriented activities aimed at enhancing academic performance. However, their engagement with training was strongly influenced by the degree to which these activities aligned with their actual teaching and research needs. In addition, institutional structures and expectations played a significant role in shaping participation, often positioning training as a requirement rather than a development-driven practice. Despite these challenges, the findings revealed that professional training contributes meaningfully to reflection and the ongoing construction of professional identity. Overall, while professional training is perceived as valuable, its effectiveness depends on greater alignment, coherent structure, and contextual relevance to fully support faculty development in higher education.

### **Discussion**

The findings of this study provide a contextually grounded understanding of how faculty members at Al-Madinah International University (MEDIU) perceive and engage with professional training within a dual-mode higher education environment. The results suggest that while professional training is recognized as an important component of academic work, its implementation and impact are shaped by structural, pedagogical, and institutional factors that extend beyond individual motivation. This reflects the increasing complexity of academic roles in contemporary higher education systems. (Marginson, 2016; Boud & Brew, 2013)

The finding that professional training is perceived as valuable yet inconsistently structured reflects a broader pattern identified in higher education research, where faculty development initiatives are often implemented as fragmented activities rather than as part of a coherent institutional strategy. This study extends existing literature by showing that such fragmentation is particularly pronounced in blended learning environments like MEDIU, where differences between face-to-face and distance systems may further complicate the continuity of professional development. This finding not only aligns with previous research but also highlights the need for integrated and context-sensitive training frameworks in flexible higher education systems. (Steinert et al., 2019)

The results also revealed a significant mismatch between training content and faculty members' academic needs, particularly in relation to discipline-specific teaching and research practices. This finding reinforces the central principle of relevance in Adult Learning Theory, which posits that adult learners are more engaged when learning activities are directly applicable to their professional context. In the case of MEDIU, the findings suggest that training programs that are not aligned with actual teaching and supervision demands may reduce faculty engagement and perceived value. This supports earlier research emphasizing that effective professional development must be tailored to disciplinary and contextual needs. (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020)

Furthermore, the study found that institutional culture and policy frameworks play a critical role in shaping faculty engagement with professional training. Participation was often influenced by administrative requirements, indicating a shift from intrinsic motivation toward compliance-based engagement. This finding suggests a potential gap between institutional expectations and faculty perceptions of meaningful professional development. In the context of MEDIU, where academic staff operate within both face-to-face and online systems, this gap may be further intensified by differences in workload, communication, and interaction opportunities. (O'Meara et al., 2008)

An important contribution of this study lies in its exploration of the relationship between professional training and academic identity. The findings indicate that when training is relevant and interactive, it contributes to reflection and supports the ongoing construction of professional identity. This extends the application of Professional Identity Theory by demonstrating how training functions not only as a skill-development mechanism but also as a space for identity negotiation within specific institutional contexts. In the MEDIU environment, this process appears to be influenced by the diversity of faculty backgrounds and the flexibility of the learning system. (Beijaard et al., 2004; Trede et al., 2012)

When interpreted through an integrated theoretical lens, the findings demonstrate that professional training in higher education operates across three interconnected dimensions: a social dimension shaped by participation and institutional context (Communities of Practice), an experiential dimension driven by relevance and adult learning principles (Andragogy), and an identity dimension related to professional self-construction (Professional Identity Theory). This study contributes to the literature by showing how these dimensions intersect in a multicultural and flexible higher education setting such as MEDIU, thereby offering a more comprehensive understanding of professional training as a complex and contextually embedded practice. (Wenger, 1998; Knowles et al., 2015; Beijaard et al., 2004)

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, a set of practical and research-oriented recommendations is proposed to enhance the effectiveness of professional training at Al-Madinah International University (MEDIU) and to support future development in this area.

#### *First: Strategic Integration of Professional Training*

Professional training should be embedded within a long-term institutional strategy that aligns with faculty development pathways, performance expectations, and academic promotion standards. Rather than being implemented as isolated activities, training initiatives need to be part of a coherent developmental framework that ensures continuity, cumulative learning, and sustainable institutional impact.

#### *Second: Institutional Framework and Policy Alignment*

There is a need to establish a unified and continuous professional development system that replaces fragmented training workshops. This system should ensure alignment between training content and faculty needs in teaching, supervision, and research.

Within the dual-mode educational context, training policies must be responsive to both face-to-face and distance learning environments by adopting flexible and context-sensitive delivery models. Institutional leadership should also institutionalize systematic needs assessment as a prerequisite for training design to ensure evidence-based planning and stakeholder involvement.

#### *Third: Faculty-Centered Development Approach*

Professional training programs should actively involve faculty members in identifying their developmental needs, thereby enhancing ownership and relevance. Training content should prioritize discipline-specific pedagogy, research capacity building, and practical academic skills that directly influence teaching effectiveness and scholarly productivity.

In addition, collaborative and reflective learning environments should be strengthened, as evidence suggests that interactive engagement significantly contributes to sustained professional growth.

*Fourth: Differentiated Training Design and Evaluation*

Training design should move beyond generic models toward differentiated approaches that account for academic rank, disciplinary specialization, and instructional modality. Blended and hybrid training formats are particularly suitable for institutions operating dual delivery systems such as MEDIU.

Furthermore, training effectiveness should be systematically evaluated using multidimensional criteria that extend beyond participation rates to include measurable indicators of teaching quality, academic performance, and applied outcomes in educational practice.

*Fifth: Strengthening Academic Identity Formation*

Professional training programs should explicitly incorporate reflective and developmental components that support the formation of academic identity. Structured reflective practices, such as guided reflection sessions and peer dialogue, can enable faculty members to critically examine their roles as educators, researchers, and institutional contributors, thereby deepening professional awareness and commitment.

*Sixth: Enhancing Participation and Engagement Mechanisms*

To move beyond compliance-based participation, institutions should adopt participatory models that engage faculty members in the co-design and prioritization of training topics. Such an approach fosters greater relevance, motivation, and ownership, ultimately transforming professional training into a meaningful developmental experience rather than an administrative requirement.

*Seventh: Contextualized Support for Dual-Mode Faculty*

Given the dual instructional structure of the institution, professional training should be contextually adapted to meet the specific needs of both face-to-face and distance education faculty. In particular, online faculty should be provided with structured opportunities for interaction, collaboration, and peer engagement to mitigate professional isolation and enhance their academic integration.

Overall, these recommendations reposition professional training as a strategically embedded, evidence-informed, and identity-oriented process. This shift strengthens faculty development, enhances instructional quality, and contributes to continuous institutional improvement within higher education contexts.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Future research is recommended to expand the scope of this study by including larger and more diverse samples across different faculties and higher education institutions. Comparative studies between traditional and blended universities may provide deeper insights into how institutional structures influence professional training effectiveness.

It is also recommended that future studies adopt longitudinal designs to examine the long-term impact of professional training on academic identity and performance. Additionally, quantitative or mixed-method approaches may complement the qualitative findings and provide broader generalizability.

### **Implications of the Research**

This study has important implications for higher education institutions in relation to the design and implementation of professional development programs. The findings indicate that professional training should be strategically integrated into institutional development plans rather than treated as isolated activities.

Practically, institutions are encouraged to adopt needs-based and context-sensitive training models that are aligned with faculty responsibilities in teaching, research, and supervision. In dual-mode learning environments, flexible and interactive training approaches are essential to address the specific demands of both face-to-face and distance education systems.

The study also highlights the importance of linking professional development to institutional quality assurance processes, ensuring greater coherence and measurable impact. Furthermore, it suggests that reflective and participatory training practices can contribute to strengthening faculty academic identity and enhancing long-term professional growth.

Overall, the study implies that repositioning professional training as a strategic and developmental process is essential for improving faculty performance and advancing institutional effectiveness in higher education.

### **Conclusion**

This study explored faculty members' perceptions of professional training within the Faculty of Education at Al-Madinah International University (MEDIU), Malaysia, within a dual-mode higher education context. The findings revealed several key insights.

First, faculty members demonstrated a clear conceptual understanding of professional training, commonly defining it as workshops, seminars, and institutional development activities aimed at enhancing teaching, research, and academic performance. However, despite this clarity, professional training was largely experienced as fragmented and lacking a coherent, long-term developmental structure.

Second, the study found that faculty engagement in professional training is strongly influenced by the relevance of training content to their academic responsibilities. Training programs that were perceived as generic or misaligned with disciplinary needs resulted in lower levels of engagement, while contextually relevant and practice-oriented training enhanced participation and perceived value.

Third, institutional policies and organizational culture played a significant role in shaping engagement. In many cases, participation in training was driven by administrative requirements, leading to compliance-based involvement rather than intrinsically motivated professional development.

Fourth, the findings highlighted that professional training contributes meaningfully to reflective practice and the ongoing construction of academic identity, particularly when it is interactive, relevant, and aligned with faculty members' lived experiences.

Overall, the study concludes that while professional training is perceived as valuable, its effectiveness depends on strategic integration, contextual relevance, and alignment with faculty needs within flexible and multicultural higher education environments.

Based on these findings, several recommendations are proposed. Higher education institutions should adopt a strategic and integrated approach to professional training, ensuring that development initiatives are aligned with institutional goals and faculty career pathways. Training programs should be designed based on systematic needs assessment and tailored to disciplinary and contextual requirements. In addition, institutions should move beyond compliance-driven models toward participatory and faculty-centered approaches that enhance engagement and ownership. Finally, professional training should incorporate reflective and developmental components that support the formation of academic identity and sustained professional growth.

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