A Review of Research on Teachers' Professional Identity

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Abstract

Teachers' Professional Identity (TPI) is a dynamic, multi-faceted construct affecting career destinations, pedagogy, and self-concept. The definition, theoretical underpinnings, predominant dimensions, determinant variables, and approaches to researching TPI are discussed in this thesis in a review of the extant literature. The deficits in current and allied studies are critiqued against this to promote development in associated studies.

Keywords: Teachers' Professional Identity, Teacher Development, Professional Growth

1. Introduction

1. Definition of Teachers' Professional Identity

Teachers' professional identity (TPI) in the previous literature refers to a conceptual scheme that combines personal views, personal and professional knowledge, and societal requirements to enable teachers to define themselves at a professional level (Sachs, 2005). It encompasses how teachers see themselves (Eteläpelto & Vähäsantanen, 2006), how personal and professional conceptions are connected (Burns & Bell, 2011), and how they perceive themselves to belong within learning contexts (Beijaard et al., 2004). TPI shapes teachers' professional roles, methodologies, and ways of tackling challenges in classroom contexts, being dynamic and influenced by actions, reflective practice, and interactions (Korthagen, 2004; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009).

1.1 Formation and Influences on TPI

Social interactions, belief systems, and life histories combine to influence attitudes, behaviors, and instructional methods (Ibarra, 1999; Bukor, 2015). Professional identities are linked to more dedication, more time invested in direct instruction, and better-quality instruction (İlgan et al., 2015; Yazan, 2019). Characteristics, educational level, settings within institutions, and requirements by policy are significant variables influencing ongoing identity negotiation (Rodgers & Scott, 2008; Cross, 2020). Teachers examine previous experiences to shape future practice in this ongoing cycle (Urzúa & Vásquez, 2008).

1.2 Core Characteristics of TPI

Based on Beijaard et al. (2004) and Beauchamp & Thomas (2009), TPI can be characterized by three key features: agency (teachers actively construct identity through action and reflection), sociocultural embeddedness (identity co-constructed within communities of professionals), and fluidity (it changes throughout career life). It connects self-concept to classroom practice and serves as a lens through which professional experiences can be interpreted as well as a motivator for educational choices (Eslamdoost et al., 2020). TPI is essentially the meeting point of professional demands and personal authenticity, which is continuously improved through contact and instruction.

To sum up, teachers' professional identity is an ever-changing and individually constructed self-perception of who they are as a teacher, which is shaped by the professional encounters lived, the personal happenings, and the needs of the context. It controls career commitment, role perception, and teaching strategies, but is flexible on the basis of variable conditions and times.

1.3 The Importance of Teachers' Professional Identity

Teachers' professional identity is a particularly important construct, as it has been found to have substantial relationships with educational performance, professional qualities, and general well-being among teachers (Beijaard, 2000; Esteve, 2009). The reasons why teachers' professional identity is important include:

1) Teachers' intentions to remain in or leave the profession are influenced by professional identity, and this relates to retention rates (Kubicek et al., 2017; Qadach et al., 2020).

2) The professional identity of teachers explains the teachers' response to educational innovations and reforms, and it also mediates how professionals can adopt and accommodate new approaches (Deniz, 2022; Vähäsantanen & Eteläpelto, 2009).

3) Teachers' perception of educational theories (Ghafar Samar et al., 2011), quality in teaching (Veisson & Kabaday, 2018), teacher pedagogical knowledge for content (Atai & Khazaee, 2014), pedagogic decisions (Beijaard et al., 2004; Pennington & Richards, 2016), and classroom practice (Eslamdoost et al., 2020; Widodo et al., 2020) are affected by teachers' professional identity.

4) Teachers' performance, effectiveness, development, and ability to cope with problems in the classroom are greatly affected by teachers' professional identity (Beijaard, 2000; Sercu, 2006).

5) Teachers' job values, abilities, professional knowledge, achievement, creativity, personal, and professional development are influenced by professional identity (Donato, 2017; Fahd Aljuhaish et al., 2020).

6) Professional identity among teachers promotes a healthy working environment, in turn affecting accountability, ethical practice, collegiality among peers, and institution-wide pride in being a teacher (Kelchtermans, 2009).

7) Professional identity among teachers affects work effort and confidence (Qadeer et al., 2018), career security and self-esteem (Nelson & Jackson, 2003), work ethics and policies, boundaries (Lasky, 2005), consciousness of services performed, and job satisfaction in general (Remley & Herlihy, 2005).

8) The sense of well-being, work routines, and sense of efficacy are all affected by teachers' professional identity, affecting their overall performance at work (Donato, 2017; Kumpulainen et al., 2023).

2. Selection of Studies about Teachers' Professional Identity

The criteria for inclusion and exclusion of studies were established as follows:

1) Studies were sought that were conducted on any type of teachers' professional identity, such as English teachers, science teachers, and so on. We excluded studies focused solely on pre-service teachers without in-service implications.

2) The search was not confined to any period, and it involved searching relevant electronic databases: Google Scholar, Web of Science, and ERIC with the use of the keywords 'teacher professional identity'.

3. Theoretical Perspectives on TPI

Based on the analysis and synthesis of prior literature, teachers' professional identity has been synthesized into three perspectives, namely:

Cognitive Perspective: Cognitively, teachers' professional identity reflects their inner processes of self-reflection and sense-making. Professional self-concept, according to Korthagen (2004), is framed through reflective questions like "Who am I, a teacher?" Beijaard et al. (2004) emphasize the role of identity in teaching, one that arises from an identity practice. This we understand from Beauchamp and Thomas' (2009) perspective: identity is a set of values that inform the teaching duties, ambitions, and educational beliefs of teachers. It also links identity to individual characteristics, life experiences, and classroom practices (Ibarra, 1999; Pennington & Richards, 2016); it demonstrates the role of cognitive evaluation in pedagogical approaches and the way learners perceive themselves (Ivanova & Skara-Minçne, 2016).

Social-Cultural Perspective: Professional identity of teachers is theorized in the social-cultural approach to be a process and product of relational-contextual workings. Identity is co-constructed in a variety of contexts involving encounters with peers, institutional norms, and broader educational worlds (Rodgers and Scott 2008). The influence upon collaborative quality of pedagogy by identity is evidenced by İlgan et al. (2015) and Yazan (2019), while Bukor (2015) shows how identity regulates collective attitudes and response. This perspective weighs external conditions against each other for identity formation through ongoing balancing of agency with structural pressures, e.g., societal demands, professional settings, and policy reform (Beijaard et al., 2004; Olsen, 2008; Cross, 2020).

Narrative Perspective: Narratively, professional identity exists as a dynamic story shaped by reflection and by time. Urzúa and Vásquez (2008) discuss how teachers utilize social activities to develop a fluid self-narrative by blending retrospective developments with prospective intent. This aligns with Beijaard et al. (2004)'s positioning of identity as dynamic, and Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) focus on lifetime development. Teachers utilizing the narrative approach redefine roles as they navigate through personal/professional milestones, embracing identity as a process of "becoming" (De Fina et al., 2006). These narratives are found in educational activities (Widodo et al., 2020) and are shaped by sociocultural scripts in addition to personal agency (Olsen et al., 2017; Yang et al., 2022).

Even though each of the three perspectives ─ cognitive (internal), social-cultural (relational), and narrative (temporal)─is distinguished by a certain focus, collectively they affirm that teachers' professional identities are complex, dynamic, and contextually embedded. Self-concept is described by the cognitive perspective, communal impact is evidenced by the social-cultural perspective, and identity formation over time is tracked by the narrative perspective. Together, they provide a holistic approach to understanding how teachers form, embody, and reconstruct their professional identities (Halim Masnan et al., 2021).

4. Key Dimensions of TPI

Various studies have yielded different dimensions for teachers' professional identity (TPI), a multifaceted notion. One universal model doesn't exist, yet after synthesizing the

literature, recurring leitmotifs appear. Here we have a succinctly organized account of the key dimensions, listed according to frequency and logical relationship.

Table 1: The Dimensions of Teachers' Professional Identity

Core Dimensions	Definition	Source
Self-Image & Self-Efficacy	How teachers perceive themselves (self-image) and their confidence in performing professional tasks (self-efficacy).	Kelchtermans(2009), Hong (2010), Atal & Deryakulu (2019), Syah et al. (2022)
Job Satisfaction & Work Commitment	Emotional fulfillment and good salary in teaching and dedication to the profession.	Heled & Davidovitch (2019), Canrinus et al. (2012), Day (2002)
Professional Values & Beliefs	Ethical principles, pedagogical philosophies, and personal convictions about teaching.	Wei (2008), Atal & Deryakulu (2019), Syah et al. (2022)
Motivation & Future Perspective	Intrinsic/extrinsic drives and long-term career aspirations.	London et al. (1993), Kelchtermans (2009), Dilek & Altas (2022), Syah et al. (2022)
Knowledge & Skills	Pedagogical expertise, subject mastery, and professional development.	Hong (2010), Shouder (2018) Atal & Deryakulu (2019), Syah et al. (2022)

Teachers' Professional Identity (TPI) consists of a complex, interrelated notion embracing competence (skill, knowledge), professional involvement (motivation, dedication, work satisfaction), and self-perception (self-image, efficacy). Even without a unitary frame, teachers' conceptions of their work are shaped at any moment by these essential components. Some formative interactions between these components need to be observed within learning contexts to understand TPI.

5. Factors Influencing TPI Development

Earlier studies have reported how a teacher's gender, age, and marital status can impact their professional identity (Lasky, 2005; Chang et al., 2017; McCall, 2020). On a related note, it also highlights how the social and cultural context plays a crucial role in identity formation, i.e., family, school, and society (Beijaard et al., 2004; Huang & Varghese, 2015; Widodo et al., 2020; Volkov & Chikarova, 2021; Yang, Buck & Nageotte, 2022). In addition, it has been found that personal experience, teacher education, and subject matter knowledge also impact teachers' professional identity (Flores & Day, 2006; Moslemi & Habibi, 2019; Volkov & Chikarova, 2021).

These influencing factors can be categorized into two main groups: internal factors and external factors. External factors primarily involve the family environment, school environment, and social environment, while internal components encompass demographic variables and individual factors (see Table 2).

Table 2: The influencing factors of teachers' professional identity

Level 1 influencing factors	Level 2 influencing factors	Contents
Internal factors	Demographic variables	Including the teacher's age, gender, education, professional title, teaching years, and marital status
	Individual factors	Teachers' educational background, personality characteristics, life experience, work experience, individual attitude towards the teaching profession, and the influence of important events or key figures
External factors	Social environment	Including the level of local economic development, national and government policy support, social status and reputation, social support, etc.
	School environment	Including management system, wage and welfare security, campus environment, interpersonal relations, etc.
	Family environment	Including family members' occupations, expectations, etc.

Source: Gao (2021)

6. Research method of teachers' professional identity

Qualitative and quantitative research are the two main methodological approaches used in studies on teachers' professional identities. A thorough grasp of identity formation processes can be gained by qualitative approaches, which usually include case studies, interviews, literature reviews, theoretical analysis, and narrative inquiry (Yang, Buck & Nageotte, 2022; Volkov & Chikarova, 2021; Othman & Fahd Aljuhaishi, 2021). To evaluate identity dimensions and their statistical correlations, quantitative approaches mostly use scale analysis and questionnaire surveys (Simon, 2022; Syah et al., 2022).

However, mixed-methods research designs are becoming more and more popular due to recent methodological advancements. To accomplish methodological triangulation and enable more thorough studies, researchers are increasingly combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies (Celebi & Eraldemir-Tuyan, 2022; Hashemi, Karimi & Mofidi, 2021). This integrated method makes a more comprehensive knowledge of teachers' professional identities possible, allowing researchers to capture both the breadth of patterns via quantitative analysis and the depth of individual experiences through qualitative data. These complementary methods strengthen the validity of the studies and allow for a better understanding of this complex construct.

7. Conclusion

An emerging, multidimensional concept, teachers' professional identity (TPI), influences who teachers are, what teachers do, and how teachers grow. However, this review argues that TPI is not homogeneous, but is indeed a complex phenomenon, involving cognition, social aspects, and narrative ones. Drawing on a range of theoretical traditions, the development of teacher identity as a professional in complex environments is construed as a dynamic phenomenon within which agency and context interact.

While existing research has significantly advanced our understanding of Teachers' Professional Identity (TPI), several key limitations remain:

1) Theoretical Fragmentation: Current research studies do not use inclusive frameworks that indicate the complex features of TPI; instead, they often use single theoretical dimensions (cognitive, social, or narrative).

2) Limitations of methodology: Most research uses only one method design (qualitative or quantitative). A few researchers have recently employed mixed approaches for thorough analysis, but the number is still quite limited.

3) Longitudinal Insights: Because TPI is dynamic, more longitudinal research is needed to monitor identity development throughout a career rather than depending just on cross-sectional snapshots.

4) Practical Applications: Although the value of TPI is widely acknowledged, not many studies convert research results into workable plans for professional development, teacher preparation, or policy formation.

Filling up these gaps could improve methodological rigor, theoretical coherence, and practical relevance—all of which would enhance teachers' professional development and the quality of education around the world.

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