Critical Review on the Concept of Professionalism within Teaching: Definition and Factors

Professionalism is an intricate and composite subject to discuss which has been widely cerebrating people's minds over the years. The concept of professionalism in teaching is always controversial and a popular topic in scholarly debates. There are multiple interpretations and conceptions for teacher professionalism in sociological, educational and ideological contexts which changed and developed over time to satisfy different interests [Demirkas?mo?lu., 2010]. This essay aims to achieve a critical review on the notions of professionalism in teaching. I will be taking a critical chronological view of the literature defining professionalism, analysing the factors affecting teacher professionalism, discussing the autonomy in teaching and evaluating the importance of Teacher Regulation Agency (TRA) in maintaining teacher professionalism.

What is Professionalism in teaching?

In the literature, professionalism is defined in numerous ways from different perspectives. One of the earlier attempts to define professionalism was from Harvard Hoyle in 1975. According to him, it is "those strategies and rhetorics employed by members of an occupation in seeking to improve status, salary and conditions'' [Hoyle., 1975 cited in Evans., 2008, p.22]. Hoyle's definition seems very realistic after all these years as the professionalism is still a set of guidelines set out by the policy makers to enhance the outcomes of a profession. In teaching, it's the improvement of student outcomes and thereby the enhancement of the education systems.

Twenty years later, in 1995 Ozga analysed it as a vocational control for teachers. The author argued that 'the professionalism explores the value of the service offered by the members of an occupation to those in power' [Ozga., 1995, p.22]. This argument clearly depicts the ideology of professionalism as a tool to apply surveillance over teaching occupation.

Sachs (2001) also has somewhat the same opinion but from a different perspective. According to Sachs, 'professional identity is a set of attributes that are imposed upon the teaching profession either by outsiders or members of the teaching fraternity itself' [Sachs., 2001, p.153]. The term 'imposed' suggests that the teachers have no input in the level of professionalism required of them. This approach to professionalism can be interpreted as a set of social and political strategies which promote the status of teaching profession.

Hoyle (2001) modified his earlier definition of professionalism [Hoyle., 1975 cited in Evans., 2008, p.22] to state that it is more related to the improvement in the quality of service than the enhancement of the status. This illustrates that the quality of service and status are interrelated as the improved quality will end up in an enhanced status automatically. Thus, public think professionals as those people who are capable of delivering high quality service and thereby earning a professional status in the society.

However, some authors take different approaches to define teacher professionalism. Boyt etal

(2001) suggests that, 'Professionalism consists of the attitudes and behaviour one possesses toward one's profession. It is an attitudinal and behavioural orientation that individuals possess toward their occupations' [p.322]. This approach emphasises the influential capacity of the professional through their attitude and behaviour.

Later in 2008, Hilferty defined professionalism as a social construct: 'that is being defined and redefined through educational theory, policy and practice'. He interpreted professionalism as a 'process of social engagement through which teachers attempt to control their worklives' [p.53]. This argument is relevant as teachers work in collaboration with the society for their good future. This approach goes in line with Demirkas?mo?lu's (2010) multi-dimensional suggestion which states that 'it is a structure that includes one's work behaviours and attitudes to perform the highest standards and improve the service quality' [p.2048]. This is how the general public see a professional: people with elegant attitudes and behaviours who are able to maintain highest standards and quality.

Factors affecting teacher professionalism:

There are multiple factors to consider, which influence and shape the teachers' professionalism. Sachs (2016) identified the three main factors shaping teacher professionalism as performance cultures, increased accountability, and the continued imposition of teacher standards. Performance culture is a strategy which measures the student learning outcomes and teacher performance in schools by selective performance indicators [Elliot., 2001]. They provide a systematic approach for the recognition and reward of teaching by allowing outsiders to recognise the scope and scale of teachers' work [Sachs., 2016]. Professional competencies of teachers include the mastery of field knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and general world knowledge [Uyangor et al., 2016]. That means, in order to be professionally competent, the teachers should have knowledge about their society as well as culture, along with their knowledge and teaching ability.

The increased accountability teachers have, to the students, to the community and to the government plays a crucial role in shaping the teacher professionalism. According to Halstead (1994), there are two different forms of accountability: contractual and responsive. The former refers to the degree to which teachers are fulfilling the expectations whereas latter is concerned with decision making [Sachs., 2016]. This argument implies that the accountability can be double sided as it has a brighter, more powerful side which provides the teachers the authority and a darker side with huge external regulation. Even though the surveillance from the government is there, the accountability can shape the teacher professionalism in a sophisticated manner as it can employ transparency and trustworthiness.

Teachers are, and always have been, the most influential people in the educational system as only well-qualified teachers can deliver high quality education [Uyangor et al., 2016]. Teachers' professional competencies and educational philosophies are critical in fulfilling their primary duty of teaching and educating their pupils into individuals with solid characters. The teachers' standards set out by the DfE [DfE., 2011] guide the student teachers in the training path enabling them to attain a professional standard of best practice and become effective teachers. Although these standards set out as provisions for government to regulate education activity, they improve the schooling and learning outcome in a very systematic manner.

Effective teachers are beneficial not just for their own students but also for their students' future peers [Opper., 2019]. They can influence their students in a very constructive and productive way which spill over to enhance the learning of pupils who later share a class with them. I have observed these in my placement school: pupils were helping others learn via group discussion and recalling the lesson on their plenary tasks. They learn more through peer discussion than a teacher's actual lesson. When I introduce a new scientific concept to the class, I saw pupils who have strong background knowledge helping others to understand the topic well. This is the obvious success of their previous Science teacher who made an effort to sow the seeds of scientific interest in their young minds effectively. Also, this will allow the teacher to work with other pupils who need support and thereby, increasing their academic performance. This way, the effective teacher can indirectly help a much larger group of students who later share class with her own students.

As part of the induction in my placement, I have observed ten different teachers and their professional behaviour in the classroom. They all have different teaching strategies and different styles of student management inspired from their professional attributes. Having observed all these diverse teachers, I think the professional attitudes of teachers can make a positive influence in their students.

Autonomy in Teaching:

Autonomy plays a vital role in the conceptualization and interpretation of teacher professionalism. Professionals should have the autonomous decision-making powers without any external involvement [Forsyth and Danisiewicz., 1985]. Autonomy functions as a buffer against the pressures on teachers as well as a means of strengthening them personally and professionally [Friedman, 1999].

There was a growing concern in the literature about the introduction of the national curriculum in 1988 and its impact on the teachers' autonomy. Helsby & McCulloch (1997) argue that the teachers' autonomy was significantly reduced by refusing their involvement in developing, defining and interpreting the curriculum. Howells (2003) also argued that being responsible for the development and implementation of curriculum is vital to the professional identity of teachers. Although the teachers' involvement in curriculum development is reduced, their autonomy is completely lost. They are still responsible for determining how to deliver the curriculum content in the classroom. They have full autonomy in introducing and executing the curriculum subject to the pupils. I have enjoyed it in planning, preparing and successfully completing my lessons. Hence, the thought to consider curriculum as an autonomy factor determining teacher satisfaction is not completely relevant. This is scientifically proven by Pearson and Moomaw in 2005: Through their study, they demonstrated that there was only little association between curriculum autonomy and job satisfaction.

However, being a Secondary Science teacher, I have genuine concerns in our autonomy. This is because we are specialised in one Science subject in which we got our training done. But when it comes to teaching, we must teach them all. Thus, our freedom to teach only the subject we are comfortable with, is denied and I find this as an attack to the Science teachers' autonomy.

In fact, autonomy can be a teacher's perception about how they control themselves and their

work environment [Pearson & Hall, 1993]. Individual teachers have their own way to interpret and conceive it. Some teachers flourish on autonomy, while others recognise it as a way of avoiding their duties [Frase & Sorenson, 1992]. Therefore, not everyone enjoys their autonomy equally. One teacher's autonomy may look like an isolation to another. [Pearson and Moomaw., 2005].

Thus, the main literature focuses on defining and conceptualizing the nature of professionalism are the respectability status of the occupation, improvement of service quality, and professional autonomy [Demirkas?mo?lu., 2010].

Teacher misconduct regulation:

As teachers are responsible for inspiring and educating young minds, their conduct and competencies really matter in shaping these characters. Even though the overwhelming majority of teachers are highly competent and effective, there is a minority engaging in some forms of misconduct. The safeguarding of pupils must be the top priority of any education system. Having a teacher with poor conduct in the system seriously affect their professional compatibility. The teacher misconduct is regulated by the Teaching Regulation Agency (TRA), on behalf of the Secretary of State for Education. In order to maintain public confidence in the teaching profession and also for the protection of pupils, prohibition orders will be issued against serious teacher misconduct incidents. This will ban the person from teaching in their lifetime [DfE., 2018]. This form of regulation is essential to uphold proper standards of conduct of teachers and thereby, keeping public trust in the teaching profession.

Conclusion:

Teacher professionalism is critical in establishing and maintaining the world civilization as teachers are the pioneers in educating and guiding the world. Hence, their professional competencies really matter to ensure the world peace, and welfare. The teacher's professional knowledge and capabilities help to create a vibrant and intelligent generation with beautiful souls. As they are central to the education systems, their efforts, knowledge and skills must be valued. Being accountable to the government, policy makers, students and the community make the teachers professionals.

In fact, monitoring their performance via student outcomes, regulating their teaching activities, and the tighter surveillance through teaching standards do not affect teachers' professionalism in a negative way. Instead, these regulations uphold the values of the profession and encourage public to have confidence and trust in the teaching profession. Especially, for a student teacher, these standards act as a framework to help them better equipped for quality teaching.

Professionalism is absolutely a personal point of view of one's own attitudes, ideologies and values towards their profession. In the public eye, it is the recognition of what is required and expected from a professional. It can be easily spotted when it's missing. The use of performance indicators, increased accountability and the teacher standards are the principles underpinning teacher professionalism. To achieve the professional effectiveness for teachers, they should have the opportunities to collaborate with other teachers in their own schools and with others as well. This will help them all to create and attain specific targets of professional practice.