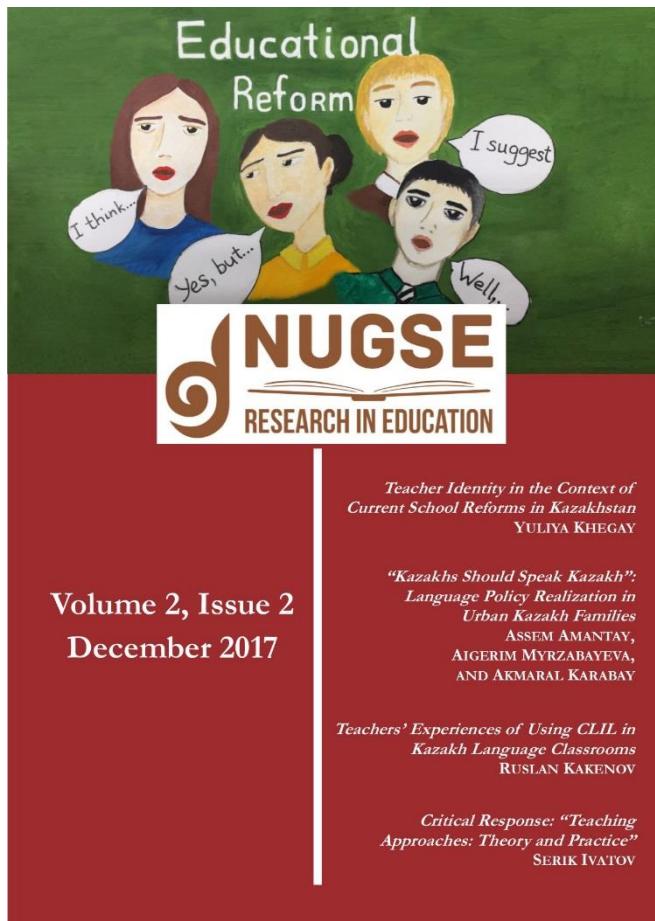


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Title: Teacher Identity in the Context of Current School Reforms in Kazakhstan

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Page numbers: 3-12

Citation: Khegay, Y. (2017). Teacher identity in the context of current school reforms in Kazakhstan. *NUGSE Research in Education*, 2(2), 3-12. Retrieved from nugserie.nu.edu.kz

Full issue available from nugserie.nu.edu.kz

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Teacher Identity in the Context of Current School Reforms in Kazakhstan

YULIYA KHEGAY

Kazakhstan is currently experiencing tremendous reforms in secondary education trying on best practices and experiences borrowed from abroad. Important figures at this stage are Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (NIS) created to implement new approaches to teaching, learning and managing the school. The problem is that the major focus is given to the reforms themselves while the voices of those who actually enact them are usually ignored. This qualitative interview-based study aims at exploring the complex phenomenon of teacher identity in its relation to the present school reforms from NIS teachers' perspective. The results of the study provide an insight on how teachers understand their professional identity within four dimensions: personal, social, professional and emotional, and how these are affected by different aspects of educational changes. The major findings have revealed that teaching-related aspect of school reforms has a mostly positive effect on teacher identity, whereas the administrative aspect tends to have a mostly negative influence.

Keywords: teacher identity, professionalism, school reforms, NIS

Introduction

The collapse of the Soviet Union was marked by what Silova (2009) calls a "teacher crisis" in the Caucasus and Central Asia characterized by low salaries, diminished social status and lack of teacher authority. These factors negatively influenced the whole essence of teacher professionalism, turning teachers into passive executors of educational reforms (Silova, 2009, p. 369). In this context, teachers faced the problem of 'deskilling' or 'deprofessionalisation' (Apple, 1995) which inevitably resulted in changing their inner perception of themselves as educators.

More recent dissemination of neo-liberal approaches in education across the world, with the emphasis on managerialism, a high level of accountability and leadership development (Hall & McGinity, 2015), affected to some extent the Kazakhstani education system as well. The project 'Twenty Intellectual Schools for gifted and talented children', which later received the status of the Autonomous Education Organisation Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (commonly referred to as NIS), was introduced in 2008 by the government in order to improve the country's economy through raising educational standards (Shamshidinova, Ayubayeva & Bridges, 2014). The introduction of the NIS network is an example of the educational shift which put teachers in front of a new challenge to identify their role in it. Along with the common responsibility of school teachers to deliver lessons, some completely new roles appeared in the new environment, which affected teachers' work and lives, and, as a consequence, their professional identities.

Problem Statement and Purpose

Research conducted in Kazakhstan in the area of teacher identity evolution is scarce. The reason for this might be the fact that the importance of teacher self-concept is underestimated in Kazakhstan since the main focus is given to the reforms themselves and what goals the government sets while the voices of those who actually implement them are usually ignored. However, the analysis of literature sources shows that there is a strong link between the way teachers perceive themselves as professionals and the effectiveness of the learning and teaching processes. For example, Davey (2013) claims that schoolteachers' values and beliefs, as well as how they see themselves in the school community and what role they play, directly influence students' success (p. 4). He points out that the problem arising in this respect is whether all the aforementioned are taken into account when reforms are implemented, whether teachers' voices are heard by policy-makers (p. 5).

Fimyar and Kurakbayev (2016) claim that the recent reformist initiatives in Kazakhstan, including the creation of Nazarbayev University and NIS schools, can be defined as radical and rapid changes (p. 87). In such a tense educational climate, teachers may feel confused about their ability to adapt to a new form of identity associated with an era of accountability (Davey, 2013, p. 17). Moreover, there is lack of understanding of the extent to which teachers experience identity change.

Therefore, the main purpose of this qualitative study is to deeply explore the influence of internal and external factors connected with the present school reforms on NIS teacher perceptions of their professional selves. The study focuses on the following research questions: 1) How do NIS teachers define their professional

identity? 2) How do teaching-related aspects of the reforms in Kazakhstan influence teacher identity? 3) How do administrative aspects of the reforms influence teacher identity?

Literature Review

Teacher professional identity and teacher professionalism, two notions interchangeably used in the literature, are difficult to define due to the complex and shifting nature affected by various internal and external factors (Cunningham, 2008; Gewirtz, Mahony, Hextall & Cribb, 2009; Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996). Analyzing different forms of professionalism, Hargreaves and Goodson (1996) argue that numerous responsibilities to which teachers are presently exposed, such as collective planning, mentoring, self- and peer-assessment, outcome assessment, participation in school organization events and others, do not necessarily lead to the improvement of teaching practices. On the contrary, these school reforms being superficial in nature can lead to teacher exploitation and burnout (pp.18-19). The authors, thus, oppose the term of *deprofessionalization* associated with teacher overload and ambiguity of work, to that of *reprofessionalization*, that is “stimulating dialog and decision-making about teaching among colleagues” (Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996, p. 18).

Regarding the term ‘identity’, it deals more with the inner perceptions of individuals of who they are and what their role is (Davey, 2013). These include professional identity as knowledge and expertise, job description and activity, group membership, personal qualities and values, and professional identity as motivation and aspiration (Davey, 2013, p. 38). The latter refers to the emotional aspect, which is believed to be closely connected with identity (Flores & Day, 2006). Kelchtermans (1993) claims that the professional self includes five interconnected parts: self-image, self-esteem, job-motivation, task perception, and future perspective. Among other constructs of teacher identity emphasized by scholars are professional agency (Vahasantanen, 2014), and autonomy and power (MacBeath, 2012). It can be concluded that teacher identity is a complex phenomenon dealing with personal, professional, social and emotional aspects, which in sum represent teachers’ self-image. Together, these concepts form the conceptual framework explained below.

Reforms and Teacher Identity: De-Skilling or Re-Skilling?

Despite teacher identity being closely connected with educational change and being continually reshaped within certain historical contexts (Tang, 2011, p. 364), they are not always considered by policymakers. Day (2002) explains that governments primarily introduce reforms to become more competitive economically through altering learning conditions and raising achievement standards, but tend to neglect teacher identities (p. 679). Since educational quality becomes a pre-condition of economic growth, teachers are supposed “to be demonstrably more accountable, efficient and effective in producing quality learning” (Smyth, as cited in Day & Smethem, 2009, p. 142). As a consequence, teacher work is becoming more and more overloaded and intensified while teacher voices are becoming more and more ignored and disempowered. Such consequences refer to the process of *deskilling* or *deprofessionalisation* defined by MacBeath (2012) as the process when people do not feel autonomous in doing their job anymore (p. 26). Using the case of Kyrgyzstan, Teleshaliyev (2013) demonstrates how teachers’ creativity and commitment can be destroyed by bureaucratic accountability measures. According to the findings of his research, teachers’ involvement in the reform is minimal and more symbolic than realistic.

On the contrary, the reform enthusiasts would substitute the phenomenon of deskilling with that of *reskilling* which implies shifting teacher professionalism to the form which will satisfy the newly emerged standards and needs (Whitty, 2000, p. 282). Gur (2014) uses the term *upskilling* to describe this process as a necessary attribute to adjust to new working conditions (p. 889). Nonetheless, any of these interpretations assume that teachers’ practices, roles, attitudes and beliefs will be reconsidered and, as a consequence, teacher identity transformed.

Identity Crisis: Democratic vs. Managerial Professionalism

In the changing educational environment discussed above, two controversial discourses of teacher professionalism—democratic and managerial—are rather significant. According to Sachs (2001), democratic professionalism is premised on the principle of respect, reciprocity and collaboration between teachers and the community of students, parents and other members. Conversely, managerial professionalism is characterized by individualism, competitiveness, and a high level of accountability. Teacher efficiency and effectiveness are externally defined by the standardized criteria which impose new roles and responsibilities on them not only as educators but also as managers (Sachs, 2001, p. 152).

These discourses of professionalism give rise to two opposing types of teacher identity. An *entrepreneurial* identity arises from the managerial professionalism and presents the ability to be effective and accountable for numerous administrative responsibilities, while an *activist* identity focuses on critical reflection and analysis, cultivating collaborative environments and creating communities of practice (Sachs, 2001).

Kazakhstani Context: NIS as Agents of Radical Change

Kazakhstan is part of a global trend of countries that have recently stated a need to implement significant and fast-paced reforms in secondary education in order to develop human capital and thereby enhance economic competitiveness (Nazarbayev, as cited in Shamshidinova et al., 2014). For this purpose, the project ‘Twenty Intellectual Schools for gifted and talented children’ was launched to serve the platform for introduction of a new education system (Shamshidinova et al., 2014, p. 75).

The key difference of NIS from the mainstream schools is their full autonomy and academic freedom. However, what does this autonomy mean for those who are to enact the reforms locally? Do teachers possess any kind or degree of autonomy in the given educational context? How do the imperatives to change affect teacher identities?

Bridges’s (2014) book, *Educational Reform and Internationalisation: The Case of School Reform in Kazakhstan*, “is arguably the first publication on education reforms in Kazakhstan based on thorough, empirical studies” (Shamatov, 2015, p. 369) and probably the only one which focuses on the implementation of current innovations taking place in NIS schools. However, it does not provide sufficient information to answer the questions above. According to Shamatov (2015), it also lacks a critical view on the initiatives in their relation to neoliberal forces which might have an important effect on the outcomes of the reforms.

Conceptual Framework

Considering the complexity of the central phenomenon and its multiple constructs discussed above, teacher identity can be defined as the way teachers view themselves from four different angles: personal, social, professional, and emotional. Each of these dimensions consists of several components connected with teachers’ both personal and professional lives. Thus, the framework illustrated in Table 1 comprises all the aforementioned definitions by different authors and became the basis for exploring teacher identity in one NIS school.

Table 1
Teacher identity dimensions

Personal	Social	Professional	Emotional
Personal qualities	Community membership	Knowledge and expertise	Job motivation and aspiration
Values	Shared commitment	Roles	Agency
Beliefs	Collaborative culture	Autonomy and power	Commitment
Self-image		Reflective practice	Self-esteem
Self-regulation		Multiple	Self-efficacy
Self-reflection		responsibilities	Guilt
Future perspective			Stress
Task perception			

(Davey, 2013; Flores & Day, 2006; Kelchtermans, 1993; Vahasantanen, 2014)

Additionally, to reveal if Kazakhstani teachers experience any of the forms of teacher professionalism in the context of radical changes, another conceptual framework based on the literature analysis was developed to guide the design of the study. Two aspects of school reforms, internal (or teaching related) and external (or administrative), are viewed as the main factors influencing teacher identity evolution. In the suggested framework, teaching-related reforms lead to *reskilling* of teachers, i.e. letting them acquire new skills and help them adapt to the changes. On the contrary, administrative factors of the reforms lead to the process of *deskilling* teachers, i.e. depriving them of autonomy and diminishing the sense of agency by focusing more on accountability and demonstrable effectiveness.

Two conflicting types of teacher professionalism suggested by Sachs (2001), democratic and managerial, are associated in the framework with the processes of reskilling and deskilling respectively. The former focuses on improving skills and practices for the common good, and the latter focuses on increasing standards and the

school's formal efficiency. Activist and entrepreneurial identities, emerging from these types of professionalism, are therefore the two main forms of teacher identity in the framework.

Methodology

Scott and Usher (2011) explain that “qualitative researchers examine the meanings that social actors give to their activities” (p. 97), which is exactly what the present study aimed to research. The research questions and literature reviewed prove that this method is best suited to exploring the given issue, taking into account the importance of personal attitudes and opinions of the participants. To be more specific, the study employed a qualitative interview design which is an ideal instrument to hear the voices of people (Rabionet, 2011, p. 563). Since identity refers to the inner perceptions of teachers which cannot be easily observed or understood from the survey results, an interview as a single method employed in this study was effective to explore the phenomenon of teacher identity.

Purposeful sampling was used since it enables researchers to collect information from cases best suited to answer the research questions (Patton, 1990, p. 169). Therefore, one NIS school was selected as the site of the research, which revealed the process of teacher identity evolution within this newly created environment. The study employed maximal variation strategy which is typically used to convey opinions of different individuals to present a holistic picture of the issue (Creswell, 2012, p. 207). Despite the many different perspectives that purposeful maximal variation sampling generally allows researchers to investigate the problem from, the small number of participants in this study prevent the results from being applied directly to other teachers belonging to these categories. The criteria for sampling the participants are the following: age, years of experience and area of specialization. Teachers' education background (locally educated and abroad) was also taken into consideration. A total of ten NIS teachers were chosen for the study: three experienced teachers aged over fifty, four teachers aged over thirty, and three young teachers, including those who studied abroad.

To collect data, two semi-structured face-to-face interviews with 10 teachers were held, each lasting roughly 40 minutes. The interview questions were constructed in alignment with the categories emerged from the literature review. The data collection process started in the end of January, 2017 and lasted till the end of February. All interviews were held within the research site (NIS) due to the busyness of the participants and inability to leave the workplace during the whole day. There were some issues associated with that at the stage of data collection. For instance, some teachers felt tense when answering sensitive questions related to autonomy and disempowerment they experienced at work. For this reason, I selected the participants from the teachers who I believe trusted me as a researcher and a colleague to get reliable information from them.

The process of data analysis occurred simultaneously with the process of data collection due to the qualitative nature of the study (Creswell, 2012). The purpose of this analysis was to reveal how teachers define their professional identity and what challenges, if any, they face in the tough conditions of constant and rapid changes. Firstly, all the recorded interviews were transcribed and the responses were organized by the age of participants and the subject they teach. The next stage was coding the data, going from the specific features to the broader themes about the central phenomenon in order to generate a larger, consolidated picture (Creswell, 2012). I used the original Russian-language transcriptions of the interviews to code the data, and only translated the parts related to any of the emerged themes in their regard to the literature review analysis.

Findings and Discussion

The findings of the study are grouped into three parts according to the research questions: 1) how NIS teachers define their professional identity from different angles, 2) how the new philosophy of teaching affects teacher professionalism, and 3) the influence of the administrative aspect of the reforms on teacher professionalism.

Professional Identities of NIS Teachers

Consistent with the literature, the questions were designed to reveal NIS teachers' identity on four dimensions: personal, social, professional and emotional. Regarding the *personal* dimension, the majority of respondents consider human traits such as honesty and responsibility to be more important in the teaching profession than being knowledgeable in their discipline, since the profession itself is associated with humanism and is based on human relationships. As Participant 8 noted, “Honesty is very important. We do not have the right to lie to children, their parents and our colleagues. Only openness and honesty will allow us achieve our own professional growth and good results of our students”. This result aligns with the statement of Day, Kington, Stobart, and Sammons (2006) that “teaching demands significant personal investment” (p. 603). It is

also partially consistent with the findings of Sahin and Adiguzel (2014) who studied the qualities of an effective teacher from the teachers' perspective and found out that teacher personal traits were rated higher than professional skills.

Several themes related to the *social* dimension of teacher identity are as follows: (1) relations with students, (2) relations with parents, (3) relations with colleagues, and (4) the attitude of society. Firstly, almost all participants agree that the student-teacher relationships have become more formal and impersonal. Some teachers consider these changes to be positive as they provide students with more autonomy and relieve teachers from the responsibility of nurturing students. Others think they negatively affect students' attitude towards teachers making them less respectful. This idea is evident in the following comment:

I miss that system because my relationships with learners were closer, much closer. I knew each student very well, even students from other grades. Those relations were warmer and more personal. Here, they are more official, we are becoming 'lesson deliverers' rather than teachers. If we continue like that, we will lose the generation. (Participant 6)

This finding is not supported by any of the literature reviewed, since the common difficulty between teachers and students mentioned by different authors (Flores & Day, 2006; Shamatzov, 2011; Teleshaliyev, 2013) is learners' misbehavior, a topic which was not raised by NIS teachers. However, this idea supports the emphasis Flores and Day (2006) place on the emotional factors needed in the teaching profession.

As for relations with parents, all participants reported there is no regular connection between them and teachers. Thus, the respondents believe that the NIS system of parental involvement does not work well at this stage. Some teachers are happy with the current situation while others are concerned about it.

There are two views among respondents regarding relations with colleagues. While the majority of them said they felt the part of a community, only some of them believe they have effective collaborative relations with colleagues. The remaining participants often find it difficult to work as a team due to lack of support and understanding on behalf of team members. Surprisingly, young novice teachers reported they feel absolutely comfortable working with much older and experienced colleagues and are always supported when needed. This finding does not support the idea of young teachers' socialization problems mentioned by Shamatzov (2005), such as a lack of support or even resentful attitude of the senior colleagues towards newcomers. However, it would be incorrect to conclude that all novice teachers of NIS feel the same because these two respondents are representatives of the English department which has a stronger connection with international staff than other departments. This fact might have a certain effect, since the idea of collaboration was brought from abroad, and international teachers can help build this climate among the local staff. Moreover, these two participants have international experience themselves studying in Europe and the US, which probably makes them more open to such innovations and help them adapt better to new conditions.

Finally, almost all participants define the current social status of teachers as low, both in terms of payment and attitude of society towards the teaching profession. Shamatzov (2011) and Silova (2009) have discussed these issues, highlighting the low status of teachers in the Post-Soviet era. Despite the fact that sufficient time has passed since the dissolution of the Soviet Union and considerable changes are being presently implemented in the secondary school education of Kazakhstan, the comments of interviewees in this respect reveal that the situation has not changed much overall. Respondents admit that the financial aspect is not an issue for most NIS teachers of their region, but it remains the problem for the education system of Kazakhstan as a whole.

Analyzing teacher identity from the *professional* point of view, the majority of teachers define their role in the classroom as a guide directing and facilitating the learning process rather than the one who delivers knowledge. This can be explained by the fact that teachers have reconsidered their teaching views and practices which, in turn, influenced their behavior and teaching styles. The study also shows that NIS teachers fulfill numerous responsibilities and play different roles beyond their classroom duties. Nevertheless, most of them are not ready to say that their contribution to school improvement is significant, preferring to be a small part of a large mechanism. This fact can be explained either by the attitudes of local people or the influence of administration on teacher self-esteem.

Referring back to different types of teacher professionalism described by Hargreaves and Goodson (1996), it can be concluded that NIS teachers' identity can be associated with the complex discourse of professionalism characterized by the complexity of roles and variety of responsibilities which can destructively affect teaching practices and lead to teacher burnout.

The major findings regarding the last, *emotional*, dimension of teacher identity are connected with the reported level of job satisfaction and motivation to teach. Most teachers reported that they are generally satisfied

with their job, with teaching students being the major source of job satisfaction. This result cannot be juxtaposed with other studies on teacher job satisfaction since the majority of them focus on the relations between job satisfaction and other constructs of teacher identity, such as self-efficacy, commitment, and relationship satisfaction (Canrinus, Helms-Lorenz, Beijaard, Buitink & Hofman, 2012), or school culture and self-efficacy (Buyukgoze-Kavas, Duffy, Guneri, & Autin, 2014; Malinen & Savolainen, 2016; You, Kim & Lim, 2017), rather than on the sources of job satisfaction itself. The factor that diminishes the level of job satisfaction is paperwork, which aligns with the results of the study conducted in Kyrgyzstan (Shamatov, 2011; Teleshaliyev, 2013). As Participant 9 reported, "I am not satisfied by endless paper work and wrong distribution of my work time by administration. Sometimes, this 10% of dissatisfaction absorbs all the positive things of the remaining 90%".

Salary was reported to be another factor contributing to teacher job satisfaction, as well as one of the reasons for high levels of motivation. This finding can be explained by the fact that low payment was one of the causes of the so-called crisis of teaching profession during the Post-Soviet era (Silova, 2009). This fact is also reflected in the works of Shamatov (2011) and Teleshaliyev (2013) who discussed tough conditions teachers of Central Asia were exposed to after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The finding that opportunities for professional growth were identified as the foremost reason of high motivation level by the majority of the participants was an expected result. It is consistent with the fact that government provides funding for NIS teachers to undergo various trainings including those conducted abroad, while mainstream school teachers have to develop professionally at their own expense.

Another interesting finding related to teacher motivation was that its level was not stable throughout the time of work in NIS. More specifically, it decreased over time due to intensification of work and bureaucracy. This finding is in line with the Day's (2002) discussion on the negative influence of reforms characterized by work intensification and increased accountability on the emotional aspect of teacher professional identity.

Influences of Teaching-Related Aspects of Reforms on Teacher Identity

The findings relating to how reforms affect teachers can be classified into two categories: 1) the influence of reforms on the professional aspect, and 2) the influence of reforms on the emotional aspect of teacher identity.

Overall, the influence of teaching-related reforms on the *professional aspect* of teacher identity has been mostly positive. More specifically, teaching views and beliefs have changed considerably as teachers stopped giving "ready" knowledge and started to develop skills in their students. As a result, teaching practices have also shifted from an authoritarian teacher-centered to a more learner-centered approach. This fact supports the theory of instability of teacher identity which tends to shift in different conditions (Cunningham, 2008; Gewirtz et al., 2009; Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996) and the idea that reshaping of professionalism is closely connected with the educational change (Tang, 2011, p. 364).

However, the participants emphasized that the process of shifting views and practices was not an easy one. At first, they experienced what Bennis (1963) called *mimicry*, which means they were trying to implement changes in their classrooms without conscious understanding why they needed to implement them and what results they expected. Among the challenges teachers also encountered were their personal resistance to change and interference of the local context (often referred to as *local mentality*). The first one finds reflection in the study conducted by Fimyar and Kurakbayev (2016) who concluded that "Kazakhstani teachers still experience difficulties in departing from the strong embrace of the knowledge-based curriculum" (Fimyar & Kurakbayev, 2016, p. 94). The second one refers to unexpected results (not considered in the literature part), however it aligns with the idea of Masemann (2003) who claims that there is a strong connection between culture and education. Adoption of a new system does not guarantee the effectiveness of this system since even the most perfect one can be distorted due to the culture of local people. For example, Masemann posits that many teachers do not perceive the idea of collaboration correctly, believing that it means shifting or imposing one's own ideas or responsibilities on colleagues.

Regarding teacher autonomy, two opposing opinions emerged during the data analysis. On the one hand, teachers feel independent in their classrooms, whereas at the school level they don't possess any sense of autonomy; rather, they feel they must merely implement the decisions of others. Participant 8 stated, "I don't feel independent at all. I depend on everything outside the classroom, from planning to distribution of my work time. Each of my steps is dependent on some external factors". These contradicting answers align with the finding of a small-scale study in England where the teachers felt autonomous mainly at the micro-level, teaching students or planning their lessons, whereas the management culture of the school drives them into certain

frames depriving them freedom at macro-level (Wilkins, 2011, p. 401). This finding also echoes the results of the study on professionalism of Kyrgyzstan's teachers which showed that their voices were not taken into account during the decision-making processes and led to teacher disempowerment and deskilling (Teleshaliyev, 2013).

The results related to the *emotional aspect* of teacher identity were classified as follows: 1) influence of reforms on teacher self-esteem, and 2) influence of reforms on teacher motivation. Both of these components proved to be positively affected by the teaching related aspects of reforms, although the level of self-esteem and motivation was not high at the beginning of teachers' career in NIS. As Participant 6 noted, "I have become more professional. I actually learned again, but now in practice. My self-esteem has definitely increased. If I go to work in a mainstream school, I'll be a god there". This finding can be compared with the results of a study conducted in Israel, which concluded that the recently implemented reform positively affected teacher motivation and teacher's general perception of their profession due to the improved quality of teaching, opportunities for professional development, and better working conditions (Taub, 2015).

Influences of Administrative Aspects of Reforms on Teacher Identity

The following themes were identified within this question: 1) the influence of formal accountability, 2) the influence of work intensification, and 3) the influence of school leadership styles on teacher identity.

The influence of formal accountability. Despite the fact that all teachers reported that formal accountability takes too much of their working and personal time and is mostly repetitive, not all of them stated that it negatively affects their professionalism. Therefore, the findings can be classified as having both negative and positive influences. On the one hand, bureaucracy negatively affects the quality of planning and teaching, leaving no space for creativity. Moreover, it has disruptive effect on teacher motivation and job satisfaction as they feel they are doing useless things instead of their primary responsibilities. This result is consistent with the findings of the research conducted in Kyrgyzstan, which vividly demonstrated the negative influence of managerial trends in education on teacher professionalism (Teleshaliyev, 2013).

On the other hand, some participants found formal accountability beneficial for their development as professionals, since "reports mobilize your work when you see your own results and results of your colleagues" (Participant 2). This finding aligns with the one conducted in England, which showed that a new generation of teachers accept record-keeping or bureaucracy as something inevitable in the teaching profession, and even see the advantages as it allows them to be aware of what they need to achieve at the end of the year (Wilkins, 2011, p. 401). It remains rather questionable whether teachers of NIS can use accountability for real and practical professional development, or only on paper.

The influence of work intensification. Consistent with the literature, the increased level of accountability leads to the overload and intensification of teachers' work. This conclusion found its reflection in the findings of this research, as all participants reported that their current work at NIS takes almost all their time, including after working hours, leaving no opportunity for spending time with families or having hobbies. Work overload is also connected with extra responsibilities teachers have to combine with teaching to correspond to the requirements of the system. Although teachers accept intensification of work as a necessity for development and accept it as their own choice, the consequence can be rather destructive for the learning process, as teachers are becoming more stressed. A similar finding was described by De Simone, Cicotto and Lampis (2016), who studied occupational stress, job satisfaction, and physical health of Italian teachers.

The influence of school leadership styles. The results of the study show that relations between teachers and school administrators turned out to have significant impact on teachers' emotional state. As all the participants reported, leadership styles currently employed by the school management staff negatively affect their self-esteem and motivation. This fact is vividly expressed in the following comment:

It's always a different feeling. On the one hand, you feel important when you share your ideas, conduct seminars, help teachers from pilot schools. On the other hand, when administration shouts at you and blames you unjustifiably in everything that goes wrong at school, and doesn't give you a chance to say your opinion... you really feel miserable. No desire to do anything, no motivation. (Participant 10)

This finding is consistent with the previous studies on leadership (Day et al., 2011; Gronn, 2003; Harris, 2004; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005) which explore the connection of leadership style and school success as well as those which emphasize a strong link between the school management and job satisfaction and motivation level

of teachers (Eliophotou-Menon & Ioannou, 2016; Eyal & Roth, 2010; Olcum & Titrek, 2015). Whereas those studies describe the constructive effect of transformational or distributed leadership on all aspects of learning, the given research of Kazakhstani teachers deals with the opposite correlation.

The fact that administrators still use the instructional top-down approach in managing the school confirms once more a strong influence of the Soviet legacy on education described by Fimyar and Kurakbayev (2016). Teachers understandably feel puzzled about how they should behave since, on the one hand, the culture of NIS system as a whole encourages teachers to be activists and leaders, but school administration, on the other hand, tends to suppress any kind of teachers' interference in decision-making.

Conclusions

The purpose of the study was to investigate how different factors of the school reforms in Kazakhstan affect NIS teachers' perceptions of their professional selves, including professional and emotional aspects. The results of the research revealed that the professional identity of NIS teachers is currently being reshaped and cannot be defined clearly due to the constantly changing environment. Nevertheless, it is clear that teachers have significantly reconsidered their teaching views and believe they improved their practices despite the challenges of transition to a new system. Moreover, the majority of teachers under study seem to be highly motivated and satisfied with their job. The main reasons for the high level of teacher motivation are opportunities for professional growth, financial interest, and new challenges.

The study also showed that the aspects of school reforms which have a direct connection with learning and teaching constructively influence teacher identity, both professionally and emotionally in most cases. This includes new teaching methods and approaches as well as ongoing professional development, which make teachers feel more knowledgeable and confident in their own competence. At the same time, there are still factors hindering the process of moving to a higher level of school education such as resistance to change and interference of the local mentality. Regarding external factors of the reforms such as formal accountability, work intensification and school management, it can be concluded that they negatively influence NIS teachers' identity diminishing their autonomy and neglecting their opinions. As a consequence, these factors destructively affect the quality of teaching.

In sum, NIS teachers are presently exposed to both reskilling and deskilling processes discussed earlier. On the one hand, introduction of a new system makes teachers move forward in enhancing their professional competence and thus feel more confident and professional. On the other hand, all these initiatives are imposed by the top, and although teachers can see drawbacks and inconsistencies of the new system, their voices are still unheard. Therefore, it is quite challenging for teachers to identify their role in the process of educational changes since they have to move between "entrepreneurial" and "activist" identities, trying to meet individual and corporate goals. Problems occur when teachers fail to succeed in any of them.

Considering the limitations of the current study, the following recommendations for further research can be suggested. Firstly, the results of the study cannot be fully objective due to the fact that I am myself a part of NIS system. Hence, my personal bias might have predetermined the results of the research. It could be therefore beneficial to conduct other studies by outsiders of the NIS system to ensure dispassionate conclusions.

Secondly, since the selected research method did not provide anonymity of the participants and interviews were conducted at their work place, it can be assumed that teachers were not totally honest in their responses. Thus, a mixed method employing quantitative surveys or questionnaires can be conducted, which will also allow covering a much greater number of participants from each sampling category such as age and area of specialization.

Thirdly, it is important to investigate mainstream school teachers' perceptions of their professional identity in relation to the reforms to obtain a holistic picture of this issue. With work conditions being different from those of NIS teachers, educators of regular schools will probably give a completely new insight into the problem.

Despite these limitations, I believe that the results of the given study will be beneficial to the research on teacher identity and school reforms in Kazakhstan, since they provide rich information on how the reforms work in practice. Moreover, the study might attract the attention of other researchers to the importance of teacher identity and trigger them explore this phenomenon more deeply in the context of Kazakhstan. I also believe that Kazakhstani case will contribute to the overall discourse on the issue as it will help understand the process of transition from one system to another from the insiders' perspective. Thus, using the example of Kazakhstan, other countries might avoid the flaws revealed in this process.

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