

**Teachers' perceptions and practices of professionalism: A case of a private secondary
school in Central Kazakhstan**

Rsaldy Kaidarova

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53 Kabanbay Batyr Ave.
010000 Astana,
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21 October 2021

Dear Rsaldy Kaidarova,

This letter now confirms that your research project entitled: “Teachers’ perceptions and practices of professionalism: A case of a private secondary school in Central Kazakhstan” has been approved by the Graduate School of Education Ethics Committee of Nazarbayev University.

You may proceed with contacting your preferred research site and commencing your participant recruitment strategy.

Yours sincerely

A small, square image of a handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Tajik'.

Mir Afzal Tajik
Associate Professor
NUGSE

On behalf of Zumrad Kataeva
Chair of the GSE Ethics Committee
Assistant Professor
Graduate School of Education
Nazarbayev University
Block C3, Room 5006
Office: +7 (7172) 70 9371
Mobile: +7 777 1929961
email: zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate how secondary school teachers perceive and understand teacher professionalism and how their perceptions influence their practices of professionalism in a private secondary school in central Kazakhstan. The study explored teachers' views, beliefs, and understanding of what teacher professionalism is in the context of their school and how they demonstrate professionalism in their day-to-day work at the school. The main research question of this study is: How do teachers understand and demonstrate 'teacher professionalism' in their day-to-day work at a private secondary school in central Kazakhstan? Subsidiary research questions were addressed to reach the purpose of the study: What are the teachers' perceptions about teacher professionalism? To what extent do teachers' perceptions about professionalism influence their practices at the school? What are the factors that shape, support or hinder teacher professionalism?

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten participants and analysed with the help of thematic coding and interpretation. The researcher used purposeful sampling. The importance of this study is that it explores how teacher professionalism is defined and interpreted in the education field, especially by the teachers themselves. It also explores teachers' voices and the factors that support or hinder teacher professionalism. The research findings revealed that teacher professionalism in Kazakhstan is a broad notion consisting of various aspects of teaching and learning, including in-depth knowledge of subject matter, pedagogy, assessment, and child psychology, teacher emotional intelligence, ongoing professional and personal development, integrity, and strong moral and ethical disposition. The study also identified that an enabling school culture, charismatic leadership, collegiality and collaboration, values and norms help promote teacher professionalism. On the other hand, factors such as irrationally assigned workload, treating all teachers unequally, and lacking awareness of teacher rights can negatively affect teacher professionalism.

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Key words: *teacher professionalism, teacher competencies, teacher professional development, effective teacher*

Понимание учителей педагогического профессионализма и использование его на практике

Абстракт

Данное исследование было направлено на изучение того, как учителя средней школы воспринимают и понимают профессионализм учителей и как их восприятие влияет на их практику профессионализма в частной средней школе в центральном Казахстане. В исследовании изучались взгляды, убеждения и понимание учителей того, что такое профессионализм учителей в контексте их школы, и как они демонстрируют профессионализм в своей повседневной работе в школе. Главный вопрос данного исследования: как учителя понимают и демонстрируют «педагогический профессионализм» в своей повседневной работе в одной из частых средних школ в центральном Казахстане? Для достижения цели исследования были заданы дополнительные исследовательские вопросы: как учителя относятся к профессионализму учителей? В какой степени представления учителей о профессионализме влияют на их практику в школе? Какие факторы формируют, поддерживают или препятствуют профессионализму учителей?

Полу структурированные интервью были проведены с десятью участниками и проанализированы с помощью тематического кодирования и интерпретации. В данном исследовании была использована целенаправленная выборка. Актуальность данного исследования заключается в том, что оно исследует, как профессионализм учителя определяется и интерпретируется в сфере образования, в особенности самими учителями. Данное исследование также исследует голоса учителей и факторы, которые поддерживают или препятствуют профессионализму учителей. Результаты исследования показали, что профессионализм учителей в Казахстане представляет собой широкое понятие, состоящее из различных аспектов преподавания и обучения, включая углубленное знание предмета, эмоциональный интеллект учителя, непрерывное профессиональное и личностное развитие, а также эффективно созданную культуру школы. Профессионализму учителей препятствуют определенные факторы, в том числе нерационально распределенная рабочая нагрузка, неравное отношение ко всем учителям и незнание прав учителей. Ограничением этого исследования является небольшое количество участников. Только десять участников были вовлечены в текущее исследование, чтобы поделиться своим восприятием профессионализма учителей. В будущих исследованиях можно было бы привлечь больше людей из разных частных школ, чтобы разработать больше идей для понимания восприятия учителями «педагогического профессионализма»

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Мұғалімдердің педагогикалық кәсібилігі туралы түсінігі және оның мектептегі**тәжірибесіне әсер етуі**

Абстракт

Бұл зерттеу Орталық Қазақстандағы жекеменшік орта мектепте мұғалімдерінің педагогикалық кәсіби шеберлігін қалай түсінетінін және тәжірибесіне қалай әсер ететінін зерттеуге бағытталған. Зерттеудің негізгі сұрағы: Орталық Қазақстандағы орта мектептердің бірінде мұғалімдер күнделікті жұмысында «педагогикалық кәсіби шеберлікті» қалай түсінеді және көрсетеді? Зерттеу мақсатына жету үшін қосымша зерттеу сұрақтары қойылды: мұғалімдер кәсіби шеберлігін қалай түсінеді? Мұғалімдердің кәсіби шеберлік туралы түсініктері олардың мектептегі тәжірибесіне қаншалықты әсер етеді? Мұғалімдердің кәсібилігін қандай факторлар қалыптастырады, қолдайды немесе кедергі жасайды? Зерттеу барысында жартылай он қатысушының қатысуымен жартылай құрылымдалған сұхбаттар жүргізілді. Сонымен қатар, сұхбаттар тақырыптық кодтау мен интерпретацияны қолдану арқылы талданды. Зерттеуде мақсатты іріктеу әдісі қолданылды. Бұл зерттеудің өзектілігі мұғалімнің кәсіби шеберлігінің білім беру саласында, атап айтқанда мұғалімдердің өздерімен қалай анықталатынын және түсіндірілетінін зерттейтіндігінде. Бұл зерттеу мұғалімдердің кәсібилігін қолдайтын немесе кедергі келтіретін факторларды зерттейді. Зерттеу нәтижелері көрсеткендей, Қазақстандағы мұғалімдердің кәсіби шеберлігі оқыту мен оқудың әр түрлі аспектілерінен, оның ішінде пәнді терең білуден, мұғалімнің эмоционалды интеллектінен, үздіксіз кәсіби, тұлғалық дамудан және мектептің ішінде құрылған мектептің мәдениетінен қалыптасады. Мұғалімнің кәсіби шеберлігіне келесі факторлар кедергі келтіреді: жүктеменің дұрыс бөлінбеуі, барлық мұғалімдерге тең емес қатынас, мұғалімдердің өз құқықтарынан бей хабар болуы. Бұл зерттеудің шектеуі – қатысушылар санының аздығы. Мұғалімнің кәсіби шеберлігі туралы пікірлерімен бөлісу үшін ағымдағы зерттеуге тек он қатысушы қатысты. Болашақ зерттеулер мұғалімдердің «оқыту кәсіпқойлығы» туралы түсінігін түсіну үшін көбірек ойларды әзірлеу үшін әртүрлі жеке мектептерден көбірек адамдарды тартуы мүмкін.

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Teachers' perceptions and practices of professionalism: A case of a private secondary school in Central Kazakhstan

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

In this chapter, I introduce the topic of my study followed by the background of the study, research questions, and the purpose of the study. I also discuss the significance of the study. The chapter ends with an overview of the thesis.

In the successful enforcement of the teacher's work, the teacher's professionalism plays an essential role. Before going into a deep exploration of “teacher’s professionalism”, it would be useful to note the difference between the terms “professionalism” and “professionalization”. Professionalization is identified as “promoting the material and absolute interest of professional groups” (Godson, 2000, p.89). Professionalism is defined as ‘socially useful’ which means to be flexible, have a moral dimension and prioritize universal traits of people. Professionalism also includes planning and defining goals, as well as leading and interacting with others. (Banks & Mayes, 2012).

In accordance with the 2018 TALIS (Teaching and Learning International Survey) report, teacher professionalism consists of knowledge, autonomy and peer networks. These qualities are considered as the main aspects of a high standard of the teaching profession. Autonomy is one of the fundamental factors in professionalism. According to Imangaliyev (2020, p. 68), teacher autonomy incorporates “ freedom to express one's own opinion, freedom to choose teaching methods, freedom from excessive paperwork”. Based on the OECD report (2018) on teacher professionalism, the teachers are the experts of their subjects, they can activate the lesson through different activities, being caring and helpful. They allow students to show what they can in practice; they can deliver the lesson in a clear way and are ever-ready (OECD, 2018). Phelps (2003) defines teacher’s professionalism in practice as a set of commitments.

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One of the most important of these commitments should focus on students' learning. She claims that the teacher's professionalism is obvious when the learners are the first priority. Alongside these commitments comes the acceptance of challenges of the teacher profession, being flexible and competent. To increase the level of teachers' professionalism should eagerly accept the challenges of the classroom and reveal dedication towards learners. Therefore, improving teacher quality became recognised as integral to student achievement. Teachers' knowledge and professional development are increasingly considered as critical to improving their performance effectiveness (TALIS, 2018).

Teacher professionalism carries the concept in which teachers evolve their professional occupations in educational institutions. On the other hand, teacher professionalism is defined as what is unique about teachers' actions, such as the set of habits, knowledge, abilities, mindsets and values that define the uniqueness of being a teacher. Teachers' professional communication promotes learners' academic progress to a greater or lesser extent and is frequently linked to the quality of teacher professionalism.

Keywords: *teacher professionalism, professional development, effective teacher*

Background of the study

The term "teacher profession" has a long history when many scholars were debating whether to call the teachers full or semi-professionals. Many of them could not even come to one conclusion about counting teaching as a profession or not (e.g. Barton *et al*, 1994; Baggini, 2005; Kerchner & Kaufman, 1995; Wilkinson, 2005; Whitty, 2008). This happened because of the nature of teaching, this is a profession where the teachers use theoretical knowledge in order to bring up a new generation, whereas the "professional" types of jobs require applied knowledge. However, there are plenty of resources, where the authors claim that teaching should be considered a "professional" occupation (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Hurst & Reding, 2000; Sachs, 2003; Wise, 1989). Each of these scholars proposed their own theoretical findings and

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inferences of why this specific profession needs to be considered as a professional one.

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) in their book *Professional capital transforming teaching in every school* noted classic features of the term “professionalism” that can address the issues of modern education in Kazakhstan. In earlier times there was a belief that teacher effectiveness is directly related to his / her expertise in the field of knowledge and the number of years the teacher spent teaching the same subject (Recchia & Puig, 2011; Reoyo *et al.*, 2012). However, reforms undertaken in Kazakhstan during the last five years have proved the obsolescence of this approach and understanding. In order to become competent in an instantly changing world, the teachers and students must become not only knowledge seekers but also knowledge producers.

Furlong (2000) stated:

The assumption behind policy within this area has been that changes in the form and content of initial teacher education will, in the long run, serve to construct a new generation of teachers with different forms of knowledge, different skills and different professional values (as cited in Morris, 2008 p.119).

Thus, by educating today’s teachers, changing their perceptions and structuring new sets of values for becoming a professional we can bring up the next generation who will be responsible for creating a new world of professional teachers. As Furlong *et.al* (2000) state, the time of isolated professionals who were responsible for designing curriculums and pedagogical decisions torn apart from the world has gone. A new type of professionalism called “managerial professionalism” is coming into the pedagogical world. This study will be focusing on researching the perceptions and practices of Kazakhstani teachers regarding the term “teacher professionalism”.

Statement of the problem

The socio-economic changes taking place in Kazakhstan and the modernization of general secondary education caused by these changes require a new approach to the professional competence of teachers (OECD, 2014). The professionalism of the teacher becomes a decisive factor in ensuring the quality of education. Therefore the concept of "professional competence"

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of a teacher is often used as synonymous to "professionalism" and high "qualification". It is considered a complex combination of general and professional knowledge, practical skills, and professionally significant personality traits that ensure a teacher's successful activity (Amirova, 2020).

There are many concerns and discussions about teachers' competence in their profession and how teachers communicate with students, parents and colleagues at the workplace and deal with the progressively changing education reforms in Kazakhstan (OECD, 2018). Consequently, professional-pedagogical issues are particularly relevant nowadays. A teacher is usually viewed as a role model in building a student's personality, as the basic knowledge is perceived and acquired with teacher's assistance. It is often implied that the subjects are associated with the particular subject teachers. It is commonly understood that students' subject preferences resonate with the teacher's attitude. Tichenor&Tichenor (2007), defined teacher professionalism by teachers' ability to remain patient, loving, kind, systematic, adaptable, and mindful of her job as a role model. Therefore, the teaching process demands commitment at the highest level, dedication and openness towards the educational institutions and their participants.

It is indicated that teaching profession requires professional teachers and therefore, in addition to teachers' sound knowledge of subject matter and pedagogy, teachers' professionalism plays a significant role in building their personality and earning considerable respect and high status in the society. A teacher's failure to demonstrate professional ethics is unacceptable as such failure could lead to violations of children's rights and other laws and ethics surrounding the profession of teaching. As stated in the 'Law On on the Rights of a Child in the Republic of Kazakhstan', "Each child shall have the right to life, personal freedom, inviolability of dignity and private life" (article 5, 2002). In this case, a child may lose interest in learning, refuse to attend school and even become depressed. Consequently, if a teacher fails or lacks awareness of professionalism, it will become an obstacle to the schools, students and the overall growth of society and undoubtedly affect students' academic results. In addition to the Kazakhstani laws on education

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and the teaching profession, literature originating mainly from the western context also emphasizes the importance of values and ethics to be embraced and demonstrated by teachers in their day-to-day work. Law on Education, (2007). However, not much is known about how teachers understand, develop and demonstrate professionalism in the context of Kazakhstan. There is hardly any study that exclusively investigates this phenomenon in Kazakhstan. Therefore, this study aimed to explore factors that improve or influence teacher professionalism.

Purpose of the study

This study aimed to investigate how secondary school teachers perceive and understand teacher professionalism and how their perceptions influence their practices of professionalism in a private secondary school in central Kazakhstan. The study explored teachers' views, beliefs, and understanding of what teacher professionalism actually is in the context of their school and how they actually demonstrate professionalism in their day-to-day work at the school.

Research questions

Based on the study's primary purpose and the issues discussed above, the main research question that guided this study was developed as: How do teachers understand and demonstrate 'teacher professionalism' in their day-to-day work at a private secondary school in central Kazakhstan?

Subsidiary Questions:

1. What are the teachers' perceptions about teacher professionalism?
2. How do teachers practice / demonstrate professionalism at the school?
3. What are the factors that shape, support or hinder teacher professionalism?

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Significance of the study

This section will discuss what this study offers to teachers and schools and how they will benefit from it. Through asking critical questions, participants will be engaged in discussion and reflect on teacher professionalism.

The importance of this study is that it explores how teacher professionalism is defined and interpreted in the education field, especially by the teachers themselves. It also explores teachers' voices and the factors that contribute to or impede teacher professionalism. Therefore this study may be helpful for policymakers and the authorities of the educational sphere who may want to bring about improvement in the teaching profession and raise the status of teachers by promoting professionalism among teachers. In addition, this thesis presents a list of recommendations for pedagogical higher institutions and colleges to educate young teachers in a manner that the teachers not only become competent in terms of pedagogical knowledge and skills but also demonstrate high standards of professionalism and professional ethics. Finally, it can also provide a guideline for educational institutions/schools to support the teaching profession and teacher professionalism.

Teachers and schools can get insights from this study and use it in their future practices. The school where this study was conducted may also benefit from the insights and recommendations it provides. The research participants may reflect and reconceptualize their professional identity for future development in their teaching career. Educators can improve better skills in ensuring quality learning and creating a positive environment for learners and school communities. The findings of this study will be shared with school administrators who may be able to reflect on how professionalism is understood and practised in schools. For example, what are the gaps in teacher professionalism and how can they be addressed? Teacher professionalism standards will help schools formulate essential attributes, skills, and tendencies necessary for teaching. Other schools will also benefit from this study as well as the topic 'teacher professionalism' is relevant to schools all over the world. The research results may be

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used in the teacher education programs in Kazakhstan, as these programs prepare teachers by instilling in their subject knowledge, teaching skills, attitudes, values and ethical standards that make them professional teachers. This study may also contribute to the literature on teacher professionalism in the context of Kazakhstan and CIS regions.

Outline of the thesis

There are six chapters in this dissertation. The first chapter presents general information about the research. It includes background information, problem statement, research questions, and the purpose of the research.

The second chapter provides review of relevant literature available on what characterizes teacher professionalism at various times and in different contexts, and what factors contribute to or inhibit the development of teacher professionalism in schools.

Chapter three discusses the research design and methodology along with the rationale for choosing the methodological approach, setting, and target population for conducting the given research. Additionally, this chapter provides information about the instruments employed for gathering the data and procedures used for data analysis.

Findings of this study are presented in chapter four, which is followed by chapter five on discussion, analysis, and interpretation of the study results with regard to the research questions and literature review.

The final chapter, Conclusions and Recommendations, summarizes the main findings of the study, drawing conclusions in relation to the overarching research question: How do teachers understand and demonstrate 'teacher professionalism' in their day-to-day work at a private secondary school in central Kazakhstan? This chapter also discusses the implications of the study results.

Chapter 2: Literature review

Introduction.

In this chapter, I explore the basic notions of 'teacher professionalism' by reviewing the relevant literature. More particularly, I reviewed relevant literature comprising scholars' findings, concepts, and thoughts on 'teacher professionalism' and the factors that are perceived to support or hinder this notion. The literature reviewed in this chapter covers the following themes concerning teacher professionalism such as the notion, concept and perspectives on teacher professionalism, key elements and characteristics that shape teacher professionalism and factors influencing teacher professionalism.

Since there is a lack of research studies on 'teacher professionalism' in the context of Kazakhstan, I draw upon studies conducted in Asian and Western countries.

The notions, concepts and perspectives on teacher professionalism

Historically, the term "professionalism" was not formed and used to define teachers' work quality and load. Traditionally this term was used in relation to law or medicine (Webb, et al., 2004 as cited in Kilinc, 2014). As an example, Barber (1965) for example, proposed categories of professional behavior. He claimed that people with a high level of knowledge and intellect who can put community interest above individual interest and growth can be recognized as professionals of possessed profession. (as cited in Demirkasimoglu, 2010). Evett (2008) contributes to this debate by proposing three definitions of professionalism: a) professionalism as an occupational value; b) professionalism as an ideology; c) professionalism as a discourse of occupational change and managerial control (p.779). Singh et al. (2008) proposed two dimensions of professionalism: institutional and individual. Institutional professionalism stands for such aspects of teaching as "teachers' rights, salary, status, tasks and role in the society; at the same time individual professionalism is about teachers' choices within the scope of classroom teaching (Wermke & Hostfalt, 2014). In order to

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define the characteristics of teacher professionalism, Miros (1996), designed a 13-item Likert type questionnaire. This questionnaire comprises of 13 different points: independent practice, code of ethics, licensing, single major professional association, exclusive practice rights, the body of specialized knowledge, application of knowledge in professional practice, collaboration among members, candidate selection, rigorous and protracted study/training period, high status, high compensation and life-long commitment (as cited in Toh et.al, 1996, p. 232-233). Adding to the above, Demirkasimoglu (2010) in his studies suggests that teacher professionalism is focused on such characteristics as “being good at his/her job”, “fulfilling the highest standards” and “achieving excellence” (p.2048). Hilferty (2008) also argues that there is an urgent need in recognizing the effect of changing historical, political and social contexts, as they bring multiple understandings and meanings into the teaching practice. Interestingly, Ozga and Lawn (2017), state that teacher professionalism can act as the ideological weapon to control teachers, thus forcing them to maintain the roles and actions necessary for the State or the school itself. New times and the new conditions that the human being is set, require reforms in defining the teacher professionalism, too. Whitty (2000) states:

We need to ask some fundamental questions about who does have a legitimate right to be involved in defining teaching professionalism. Are state control and market forces or professional self-governance the only models of accountability available to us – or can we develop new approaches to teacher professionalism, based upon more participatory relationships with diverse communities? (p.291)

After the country became independent, due to different economic and social factors teachers were undervalued, and teaching faculties let many students with low marks enter as a result the quality of the teaching profession has lowered a lot. This brought tension in the society, parents do not trust teachers and often teachers' actions are put into doubt. The new law that has been accepted in Kazakhstan “On teacher status” (law on the status of a teacher, 2019) aims to support teachers and give them more authority.

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Key elements and characteristics that shape teacher professionalism.

Tichenor & Tichenor (2005) characterized professional teachers as individuals who know about their subjects, and are committed to their subject. They are familiar with the intellectual needs of the students whom they are responsible for. They know the principles of their profession. They acknowledge that students' success in a subject depends on their knowledge and actions. It is also true that changing times and different social, political and cultural dimensions brought new insights into the teaching profession. Sachs (2016) proposed two different versions of the term "teacher professionalism", the "old" teacher professionalism, where the teachers were conservative, easily controlled and slow to change. In the new version of teacher professionalism, collaboration, activist orientation, flexibility and progressiveness, and knowledge building are present. Whilst Sachs talks about the general characteristics that each teacher needs to possess, a number of scholars list specific qualities for teacher professionals. Thus, Hurst and Reding (2000) discuss teacher appearance, time-management, proper language and even strong bonds built with their colleagues (as cited in Kramer,2003). Stronge (2003) developed this idea by adding that teacher professionals are excellent in multiple areas, including being analytic, responsible, competency, and thoughtful. Choosing a universal definition for teacher professionals is no simple matter, as there are many definitions. Here are some of them:

Hargreaves and Fullan (2010), proposed a classic definition of what professionalism consists of:

- Specialised knowledge, expertise and professional language
- Shared standards of practice
- Long and rigorous processes of training and qualification
- A monopoly over the service that is provided
- An ethic of service, even a sense of calling, in relation to clients
- Teachers with ethical and moral standards
- Self-regulation of conduct, discipline and dismissals

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- Autonomy to make informed discretionary judgments
- Working together with other professionals to solve complex cases
- Commitment to continuous learning and professional upgrading (p.37).

The above-mentioned qualities are urgently needed in order to teach the new curriculum that was introduced in 2012, but still the Government is experiencing difficulties in implementing it. It is partially because teachers' professional level is far from the characteristics described in the list. In particular, teachers find continuous learning and professional upgrading as challenging due to the fact that in earlier times they could teach the same content for over 20-30 years without making any changes to the curriculum. But because education today is a continuously changing area, the teachers need to adapt to new realities. Continuous professional development would best suit teacher professionals with vast experience, knowledge, patiently accumulated throughout the years and authority, gained by both service and age. However, this does not allow to build up an image of a young, passionate individual. Most of the characteristics listed above are similar to those expected from teachers in Kazakhstan. In his framework for teaching, Danielson (2013) pays specific attention to teachers' professional responsibilities such as:

- Reflecting on teaching
- Maintaining accurate records
- Communicating with families
- Working in and contributing to the school and district
- Growing and developing professionally
- Showing professionalism (pp 80-98).

One of the indicators that measures teacher professionalism is teaching effectiveness. Stronge and Hindman (2003), argue that some scholars measure effectiveness by student achievement, whereas the other group of scientists focus on high ratings coming from supervisors, the third group insists on gathering information from students, parents, school administration and the other stakeholders. It seems the philosophy of teaching and demands set

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for teacher professionals have remained unchanged since the 1980s. The above-proposed qualities became especially important to achieve after the massive educational reform Kazakhstan Government undertook in 2012 in order to bring Kazakhstani education up to international standards. Newly designed curriculum came as a joint work of Kazakhstan and Cambridge scholars and educators, as a result, it required teachers to quickly change their attitude, teaching practices and professional development. The Government proposed teachers short-term preparation courses where the educators were guided through the reform implementation phase. Despite the amount of support given, the country is still facing the backlashes of quickly designed and implemented reform, as professional development courses were unable to cover teachers from all over the republic. Hargreaves (2000) stated that historically there were four broad professional development phases (a) the pre-professional age, which was strictly managed, however very simple where the concepts and principles were not questioned. "One learned to be a teacher, through practical apprenticeship and one improved as a teacher by individual trial-and-error". b) The age of autonomous professionals, when a teacher starts asking questions regarding his role in the changing processes. c) as collegial professionals when teachers build strong collaboration ties in order to achieve the set goals and the last post-professional or postmodern age. Set in different times these phases can interchange depending on the educational system or the requirements of the particular country. Referring to these, it is important to point out that in order to become professionals in the context of a newly set reform the teachers need to pass through the above-said ages.

Factors that influence teacher professionalism

It is evident that expert teachers cannot be just prepared in universities. In this regard, Ambrosie and Haley (1991) pointed out that professional teachers appear as the composite effort of well-prepared pre-service programs and the school standards set for the candidate. Apart from that, Hargreaves (2000) defines modern teacher professionalism as a polarised notion. On the one hand, today, the teachers have the opportunities to boost their professionalism through

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collaborations through engagement in the work of different groups and institutions. On the other hand, massive amounts of requirements and changing contexts force the teachers to work an immeasurable amount of time under the pressure of being blamed for non-professionalism. Goodson (2002), stated that different expectations set such as collaborative planning, mentoring of younger teachers, self and peer-assessment, outcomes of assessments, and participation in different school events can motivate the teachers. On the contrary, superficial policies and requirements set by the school administration or the stakeholder can negatively affect teachers' professionalism and lead to burnout and teacher exploitation. It is also true that, despite being one of the most required and important specializations, the teaching profession is not fully recognised as thoroughly professional. It is somewhat of a "semi" or "quasi" profession. Interestingly, the reason is not tied to the amount of education a teacher receives but to the level of autonomy teachers have whilst determining what to teach and how to teach. Teachers are often inspected and monitored by the administration; there are standards set and followed. Due to this, the teachers are always directed and shaped by the administration, who, in turn, restricts their autonomy and make them work for the goals of the whole organization rather than for the needs of individual students. Samuels et al. (2001), in turn, suggests that this phenomenon is directly tied to the fact that public school teachers cannot take major decisions and educational settings that further define their teaching practices. However, Terhart (2011) insists on considering teachers as full professionals as they act and maintain their roles in classrooms fully. This proves that two opposing theories are present in science, one states that teachers should act as professionals in order to fully perform their duties, whereas the opposing theory states that teachers would never become full professionals because they serve for universal goals rather than seeking for individual career opportunities. Despite the expectations set by the scholars, mainstream school teachers cannot fully recognise themselves, as stated above, due to dependency on government-provided curriculum and school policies that limit their independence in taking decisions. It is confirmed by the earlier works of the researchers Forsyth

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and Danisiewicz (1985), who stated that professionals are trusted with important tasks that are exclusive and complex by nature and in order to maintain the task, professionals should have the autonomy free from external powers, stresses and pressures.

In modern contexts, it must also be stated that teaching does not always appear as the need considered by policymakers (Tang, 2011). Day (2002) suggested that policymakers often design the reforms to gain economic achievements through educational instruments, thus refusing to consider the teaching identity and autonomy. Since education acts as the intensive to the economy, teachers are expected to present quality assured curriculums and learning practices (Smyth, as cited in Day & Smethem, 2009). As a result of such reforms, more and more teachers remain disempowered, being overloaded by different forms of reporting and testing systems. MacBeath (2012) defines this process as “deskilling” or de-professionalisation when the teachers feel no autonomy and become the “slaves” of the system. In this regard, Teleshaliyev (2013) introduces the case from Kyrgyzstan, where teachers’ creativity and involvement were completely destroyed by the state bureaucracy, thus demotivating the teachers. Jackson (2013) claims:

Teachers who continually experience threats to or a lack of autonomy can develop learned helplessness, similar to students who repeatedly fail or receive negative feedback. “Why bother?” Why bother thinking through their instructional practice and being reflective when they are only going to be told what to do anyway? Why bother trying to improve their instruction when the feedback they get is more directive than diagnostic – and often features the evaluator’s pet instructional strategies rather than suggestions tailored to their own teaching style and needs? (p.76).

Recent educational reforms introduced and undertaken by the Kazakhstani government have negatively affected the teachers’ professional well-being. (Khegay, 2017). Namely, the quick shift from teacher-centered curriculum and teaching to student-centered mode has forced the teachers to adapt to new conditions at the same time, completely destroying all the experience they gained over the years. The amount of reporting and teacher accountability has risen several times, thus leading to significant issues such as depreciating teacher professionalism and forcing teachers to blindly implement government-initiated reforms without understanding the rationale

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behind these reforms (Fimyar & Kurakbayev, 2016). The teachers are no longer the classroom managers; they are accountable for several decisions and policies that are not prepared by them but by the government. In most cases, proactive teachers also act as the messengers by educating their peers and colleagues on what has been taught and presented to them during official training and seminars. This trend when the teacher cannot fully define and explain the new projects but educate the others negatively affects the Government initiatives that were undertaken in order to fully educate the teaching staff of the country on new reforms. This once again demonstrated in the research of Day and Gu (2007) who claimed that teachers' professional level is closely related to any of the educational changes (policies, reforms). These can either motivate teacher or diminish their professional well-being through poor management or complete ignorance of teacher needs. Failures related to the implementation of a newly designed curriculum are also related to graduation examinations. Although the country has proposed a brand-new curriculum, middle school graduates still pass Unified National Test that was designed on an old curriculum. As a result, teachers have to teach students in an old manner in order to guarantee them free of charge places at universities. This also affects teacher professionalism, as by following the old curriculum, the teacher does not have the opportunity to experience a new curriculum.

When discussing teacher professionalism, we cannot fully ignore teacher appraisal and attestation that serve to measure the above-proposed notion. McKenzie (2005) stated that appraisal and attestation are aimed at improving teaching quality and later in 2012, she proposed two main purposes of attestation – accountability and professional development that is an integral part of professionalism. OECD report designed in 2009 confirmed this idea by stating that attestation is an instrument, designed to improve teacher's practice by defining strong and weak areas for further development, it also serves as an indicator for the quality preparation of the students. Following a new school reform, the country has proposed a new set of requirements for the attestation. Based on this the teachers have to demonstrate the knowledge of methodology and their subject, prepare students for Olympiads and competitions, participate in oblast, republic

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projects, prepare methodological booklets and guides, upload videos of their lessons and classroom events to You tube channel etc. Each new level in attestation is marked by an additional payment added to the salary of the teacher. Whilst middle school teachers do not agree with these requirements, which seem quite much, many of them admit that they rather prepare for all of the stages and ignore preparing qualitative lessons. This proves that country needs to undertake actions to let the teachers to perform their professional duties without biases and opposing sentiments.

Another reason for teachers acting as non-professionals lies that the state is not concerned about the conditions of initial teacher education in the country. A country that ignores the level of preparation for a professional career will not further be interested in upgrading the professionalism of the proposed specialists (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Different countries have been trying other models and modes of teaching to maintain the best practices. The study held by the Alberta Teachers Association in June of 2020, with a random stratification of 2500 teachers and administrators, has identified several significant issues that the teachers have been struggling with during the pandemic. Seventy six per cent of the teachers found a strong need for the emotional reward they used to gain from their students in usual conditions. Over 60% of the respondents stated the problem with technology access, whereas 70% of these teachers claimed they were exhausted by the end of the working day. Based on the above said, the following suggestions are presented by Hargreaves and Fullan (2020):

- Reforms in the teacher training curriculums of the universities and colleges;
- Building the consistency between school curriculum and teacher training programs;
- Using the results of distance learning surveys to make recommendations and adjust the learning process
- Preparation of methodological guides and booklets regarding teacher professionalism

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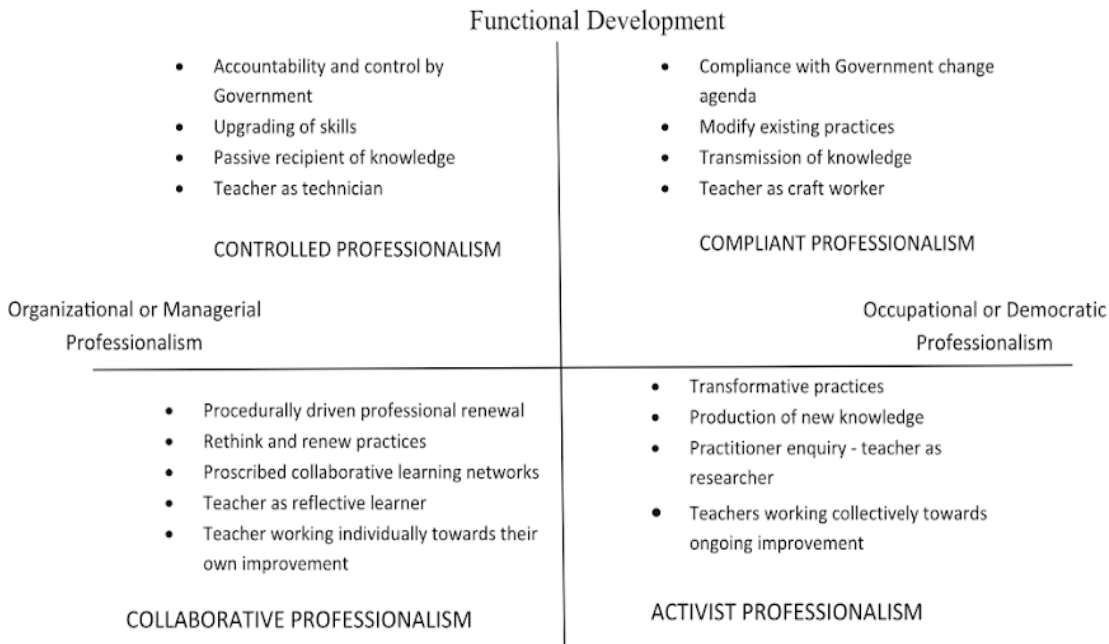
- Change of the requirements of the teacher attestation system
- Evolution of the format of graduate school and university entrance examinations

Although these suggestions appear urgent, each factor requires thorough and detailed research as modern scientific literature in Kazakhstan does not have any significant findings on the above-stated issues. Thus, these are considered a knowledge gap that could help the notion of “teacher professionalism” prosper and improve.

Theoretical framework

To explore teachers’ perceptions and practices of professionalism and the factors that shape professionalism in one of the Kazakhstani schools, I used Sachs’s (2016) characteristics of teacher’s professionalism theory. Thus, according to the figure 1 below, there are four types of professionalism and sets of characteristics that shape teacher professionalism and that can be demonstrated in practice.

Figure 1: *Types of teacher professionalism.* Source: (Sachs, 2016)



This framework guided my research methodology and interpretation of the findings. During my data collection process, I looked for evidence to see which type of professionalism is more prominent than others in the school studied. I also investigated during the interviews if teachers

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are aware of these different types of professionalism and the factors that influence these different types of professionalism in schools.

Summary

This chapter provided information regarding the nature of teacher professionalism. Different definitions made by researchers were presented. Although the term “teacher professionalism” is very broad and has many aspects, several main characteristics can be drawn out:

1. Teachers need to be knowledgeable
2. Teachers need to be life-long learners and continuously upgrade their professional levels.
3. Teachers need to possess the best moral and professional qualities
4. Teachers need to be autonomous.

Although we point out that teachers need autonomy it does not allow us to conclude that each teacher needs to work on their own. Rather it means that teachers need to continuously share their professional judgements and conclusions with their peers so that they could discuss matters together and come to one solution. I have tried to find a universal characteristic of a notion “teacher professionalism”, however my findings did not suspect any specific definition. Thus, this study will contribute to an existing knowledge gap on teacher professionalism characteristics in Kazakhstan. The following chapter will introduce the methodological approach of my research. Data collection and data analysis will also be described in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter provides details about the research design and methodology engaged in this study. It also discusses the rationale and justifications for choosing a case study, sampling strategy, and data collection methods. Finally, the chapter ends with a description of ethical considerations throughout this study.

Research design

Since I aimed to understand teachers' professionalism and how teachers establish it in their practices, I decided to adopt a qualitative research method to collect data in response to the research questions. This method helped me look deeper into the central phenomenon and discover new concepts and individuals' views. According to Creswell (2014), the qualitative research method helps to learn the central phenomenon from participants based on the stated research questions. This study investigated the "professionalism" of teachers with different years of experience, teaching qualifications, and gender through interview questions. The interview questions focused on teachers' perceptions and their experiences in demonstrating "professionalism." This approach of the study is perceived to be effective as it (a) investigates individuals' views and develops detailed information on a central phenomenon, (b) states the purpose and research questions in general and depicts the participants' experiences, (c) collects data based on words from a small number of individuals so that the participants' views are obtained (Creswell 2014, p.31).

A case study method was used to conduct this study. Zainal (2007) described the case study method as allowing a researcher to investigate the data within a real-life situation. This study is a case of teacher professionalism in one private school (bounded system) in Kazakhstan and the unit of analysis is teachers' perceptions and practices of professionalism. Therefore data were collected via semi-structured interviews in a face-to-face mode. Although the face-to-face

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interview method is considered the most time-consuming, this type of interview is perfectly fit for interviewing participants who can freely share their ideas (Creswell, 2014). I used open-ended questions to obtain teachers' perceptions, beliefs and thoughts and gave the respondents the freedom and space to express their perspectives on the research topic. I did not have any problems with getting permission to record the interview. Approved consent forms were collected from the participants.

Participants of the study

Ten participants (primary and secondary school teachers) participated in this study. Out of these, four were male, and six were female teachers. The school has more female teachers than male. As the research site and participants were selected intentionally, the purposeful sampling strategy was used to obtain a detailed understanding of the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). I used the maximal variation sampling method to ensure optimal heterogeneity regarding teaching qualifications, gender, and years of experience when selecting the participants (Creswell, 2014). The main criteria in selecting participants included teachers from different subject areas, primary and secondary teachers, age and years of experience. This selection method allowed me to collect data from different perspectives. All the teachers who took part in the qualitative study were from the same school. (See Appendix 1 for the invitation letter).

Research site

The chosen school is a private school in central Kazakhstan that runs a flexible curriculum relying upon the national standard curriculum. Since my research is about teacher professionalism, I found it reasonable to have teachers from a school that has been providing value-based education for over 30 years. A distinctive feature of this school is that it has two sectors: an elementary school that serves grades 1-6, the language of instruction is Kazakh. There is also an in-depth study of the English language. Grades 7 to 11 is served by the high school sector. All science subjects are taught in English. As I have worked at this school, I knew that it places huge emphasis on teachers' professionalism and promotion of values such as

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autonomy, integrity, justice, fairness, ethical and moral disposition, excellence, and high standards for professional pursuits. Therefore I decided to select this school as my research site (see Appendix 2 for permission letter).

Data collection Procedure and Tools

A face-to-face interview method was used with every participant to gather an in-depth understanding of how the participants perceive, embrace and demonstrate teacher professionalism. As many as 10 in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted and each interview lasted for 30-40 minutes.

All the interviews were conducted in the school premise mentioned above. After getting approval from the NUGSE Ethical Review Committee, I contacted the principals. I sent them emails explaining the aim, procedures, and how the school and teachers would benefit from the study results. Additionally, I met face to face with the vice-principal and explained to her the number of teachers I needed for the study. The principals agreed and allowed me to conduct the study at the school. After that, I sent an informed consent form with a description of the study to the teachers and invited them to participate in the study. Once the participants agreed to participate in the study, I scheduled the interviews at a mutually convenient time.

The interview took place in a separate room where no other staff could see or hear who was being interviewed. Before starting the interview, I introduced myself. I spent a few minutes getting to know the participants, telling them about myself, what I do and why I was sitting in front of them. I explained the purpose of my study and how our conversation with them would contribute to the research. I also told them about all the benefits and risks and offered to sign the consent forms. I asked each participant to record the interview and explained why I was doing it. I asked participants' permission to use a Dictaphone to record the interview. All participants had no objections to being recorded.

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The interviews were conducted in Kazakh, Russian and English languages depending on the participants' choice and comfort. The questions followed the interview protocol approved by the Ethics Review Committee (see Appendix 3 for interview protocol).

Data Analysis

Analyzing data is essential to develop an understanding of gathered information in order to construct answers to the research questions (Creswell, 2014). The purpose of the data analysis was to disclose how teachers perceive teacher professionalism, find out to what extent they can demonstrate their professionalism in the context of their school, and explore the factors that contribute to as well as hinder teacher professionalism.

After all the interviews had been audio-recorded, I collected the audio files into a separate folder on the computer. First, I used a Microsoft audio transcribing tool to transcribe all the Kazakh, Russian, and English audio recordings. This enabled me to obtain a text version of the interview in getting a general idea of the responses. The next step was coding and categorising data by themes.. (Tesch, 1990 as cited in Creswell, 2012). As half of the interviews were conducted in Russian and Kazakh, it was time-consuming to translate all of the answers into English. As a result, I coded the data using the original language of the interviews and only translated the sections related to the themes and patterns in the literature review analysis. Eventually, the findings of the study were analysed and reported in relation to the research questions. Finally, the results were presented and discussed using the theoretical framework presented in the literature review.

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Ethical issues

The study was undertaken according to NU GSE Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research. Before data collection procedures commenced, oral and written permission was obtained from each school. All participants were selected voluntarily, and each of them was first acquainted with the research purpose and procedures. They were also informed about the potential risks and benefits and their right to withdraw from the study. The principals and teachers were emailed the information/invitation letters and consent forms beforehand.

Potential risks in this study are minimal. One possible risk for participants could be discomfort in sharing their responses. However, this study did not have any negative implications for the participants such as employment and relationships in the school. The participants were told that in case they may feel uncomfortable or inconvenienced to talk about their perceptions and experiences of teacher professionalism and associated challenges, they could leave or stop the interview without giving any explanation. The participants were reassured that their responses would not be judged or criticized, and their identity will be ensured. The potential risks were avoided by using pseudonyms instead of the real name for both the school and participants and their locations. The interviews were held in places selected by the participants themselves to avoid unnecessary interruption and nervousness. The data were stored in my personal computer under a password-protected folder. Any hard copy of data was kept in a locked cabinet in my office and only I had the keys to the cabinet. The interviews audio files and transcripts will be discarded three years after the completion of the study.

The participants of this study benefited from the opportunity to self-reflect on their role in the educational system and express their opinions about teacher professionalism. This study may offer insights into how teachers perceive and what are the factors that support as well as hinder teacher professionalism. Through asking critical questions, participants will be engaged in discussion and reflect on what teacher professionalism is and may be encouraged to improve their professionalism. After identifying elements of teacher professionalism, the school may

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formulate essential attributes, skills, and tendencies necessary for the teaching profession.

Findings will be shared with school administrators and reflect on how professionalism is understood and practised at the school.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of this study and aims to reveal how teachers perceive and practice teacher professionalism in one of the private schools in central Kazakhstan. The following research questions were used to summarize the key findings: a) What are the teachers' perceptions about teacher professionalism? b) To what extent do teachers' perceptions about professionalism influence their practices at the school? c) What factors shape, support, or hinder teacher professionalism?

Ten participants were interviewed, representing various age groups and areas of specialization. The data was manually transcribed and analyzed using codes that helped organize the data into particular themes and sub-themes. The findings are reported according to the designed themes after analyzing the information. The structure of this chapter is as follows: first, the characteristics of the school and participants. The demographic data of the participants will be represented in Table 1. Next, I introduced the interview analysis. The interview analysis follows themes representing the research questions. Each theme is then divided into sub-themes where appropriate. The themes and subthemes are summarised in Table 2. A discussion of the findings follows in Chapter 5.

Characteristics of school

A private secondary school located in central Kazakhstan was selected for the study. The school has more than 938 students and 130 teachers. The school provides education based on national standards and it follows the state curriculum with more emphasis on English, Science subjects, and extracurricular activities. The school exercises a certain degree of academic autonomy. The students of all grades are admitted on merit basis. Due to ethical concerns, the school's name will not be revealed.

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Characteristics of the participants

A total of ten participants took part in this research. The participants were selected via the maximum variation sample involving gender, age, years of experience, and current position held at the school. The age of participants varied from 23 to 59 years old. Table 1 illustrates the respondents' demographic data, representing statistical data such as age, years of experience, and current position at school. Interviews were conducted in Kazakh, Russian, and English languages. All the interviews were conducted in the language of the participants' preferences. Each participant was given an alphanumeric code to keep their identities confidential.

Table 1: Demographic data

Participant code	age	Year of experience	Position
P1	30	9	English teacher
P2	38	13	Chemistry teacher
P3	59	24	Primary school teacher
P4	48	22	Russian language teacher
P5	37	15	English teacher
P6	23	3	English teacher
P7	37	7	English teacher
P8	50	30	Primary school teacher
P9	25	5	Math teacher
P10	37	11	English teacher

Since age and year experience may impact how teachers view and practice teacher professionalism, I attempted to include teachers of various subjects and educational backgrounds from both primary and secondary schools. Therefore, according to Table 1, two participants are teachers from primary school. Four participants teach a range of subjects, mainly English and

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Russian, in secondary school. Four participants are the teachers of Science and Mathematics disciplines from upper secondary school. Three out of ten participants are beginner teachers with three to seven years of experience. Four teachers from nine to 15 years of experience. Three teachers are considered to be experienced teachers with 22 to 30 years experience participated in this study.

Interview analysis

After all interviews had been recorded, I collected them into a separate folder and transcribed them into words using the Microsoft transcription feature. I used this application as it is easy to identify speakers and the transcription is accurate. After transcription I started the process of coding. Coding is a method that involves mapping data to create a coherent image of different data that helps the researcher to make sense of it in connection to the research questions (Elliott, 2018). Since the interview was semi-structured, the questions appeared during the interview were around the research topic. After coding the interview, I arranged the sections into topics. As long as a half of the interviews were in Kazakh and Russian languages, I translated only the coded data in order to use them in my report.

Table 2: Themes

1. Teachers' perceptions of professionalism	2. Teachers' practices of professionalism	3. Factors that support or hinder teacher professionalism
1. Key characteristics		1. Factors that support teacher professionalism. 2. Factors that hinder teacher professionalism.

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As seen in the table, the first theme, "perceptions of teacher professionalism," reflects research question one and investigates teachers' perspectives and beliefs on what teacher professionalism is. According to participants' reflections, teachers define the notion of 'teacher professionalism'.

The second theme focuses on the examples of how teachers demonstrate their professionalism in their daily practices at the school. In other words, teachers share their experiences in terms of professionalism in action. And finally, the third theme addresses question three and shows the factors that contribute to or inhibit teacher professionalism. Here participants expressed their opinions about the aspects which may overcome numerous problems to achieve an acceptable level of professionalism.

Results

Theme 1: Teacher perceptions of teacher professionalism

To explore how teachers understand teacher professionalism, the participants were asked to describe key characteristics that professional teachers must possess in their opinion. As interviews have revealed, teacher professionalism emphasizes professional teacher qualifications, which include 'being best at their profession,' 'meeting the highest requirements,' and 'achieving excellence in education. Besides, almost all of the participants expressed that the topic of teacher professionalism is quite broad and cannot be described in one word. Despite that, after analyzing participants' responses regarding the perceptions of 'teacher professionalism,' I identified six significant characteristics of professionalism for teachers. All six aspects are listed below and organized in the order they were mentioned:

- Subject knowledge
- Emotional intelligence
- Strong communication skills
- Life-long learning
- Teacher autonomy

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- Teacher rights

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Key characteristics

Subject knowledge

The interview revealed that the first attribute that describes teacher professionalism is subject knowledge. Almost all ten teachers reported that being good at subject knowledge is one of the key characteristics effective educators must possess:

For me, a teacher professional is someone who has good subject knowledge. For example, if you're a teacher of English, you must have good English vocabulary, grammar knowledge, and know about different up-to-date techniques to deliver materials. (P7)

A good teacher needs to stay up to date with the latest methods and trends in the teaching field. Regularly take part in professional development courses and so on. (P8)

In my opinion, teacher professionalism means taking your role seriously. A professional teacher must meet specific standards in terms of subject knowledge, attitude, and behavior with your students. (P10)

First and foremost, a good teacher must have a specific degree of education and be well-versed in the subject. It doesn't matter if you're a high school teacher or a primary school teacher. An excellent subject knowledge teacher can straightforwardly provide the subject content and create an environment where everyone can succeed. (P6)

P2 explains that teachers who have good subject knowledge are the ideal teachers who have in-depth knowledge of their subjects. They know how to design a lesson for the learners, so everyone takes an active part. These teachers are interested in all spheres of life. They can speak not only about their subject but also can support topics of youth.

A few participants mentioned that professional teachers should possess excellent computer skills alongside knowledge of their subject. For example, using word processing and any other software programs helps to share documents with colleagues and students. Moreover, according to participant P5, computer skills have become a "must-have" for today's educators. The participant also added that good teachers should be computer literate to deliver a 21st-century lesson. Participant 2 explains the benefits of using IT technologies in the following way:

Digital literacy skills are one of the core skills every teacher should possess. In addition, IT skills are an effective teaching and learning method that enhances job effectiveness,

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such as engaging learners in the learning process through software programs, especially in senior classes. (P2)

Contrary to this opinion, a primary school teacher expressed another interesting finding. She pointed out that she doesn't consider digital literacy as one of the key characteristics that describe a good teacher:

I don't think that not knowing about using computers or any specific software programs is crucial. Even if you are not very good at using the latest technology, you can be a good teacher. No doubt it helps because nowadays with the help of technology you can make your lessons much more enjoyable. (P3)

Emotional intelligence

Another important finding was that, no matter how knowledgeable a teacher is, teachers must read and understand learners' reactions, emotions, what they say and what is happening in the class to assess and predict different issues. Most of the participants stated that emotionally intelligent teachers demonstrate respect for their students, establish and regulate a positive atmosphere in the classroom that encourages student learning and develop skills to become more successful:

Teachers don't have to exercise something called favoritism in their lessons. They have to treat everyone equally. Regardless of students' qualities or their parents' status, you have to address all students equally. If they are always treated equally, this will pass from the teacher to the students. (P5)

Patience is also essential while working with primary school students. A younger group of children may be more challenging to handle, and the correct strategy to deal with the problem is to exercise patience and friendliness. (P8)

Participants also added that qualities such as patience, empathy, justice, and honesty are elements of an emotionally intelligent teacher.

Strong communication skills

Another element of teacher professionalism is the ability to express thoughts and ideas. As two participants shared, teachers demonstrate their professionalism through the types of communications they have with the people they work with and whom they do their work for. A

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teacher's job places them in very different relationships with students, their parents, and colleagues. Thus, knowing how to act in each of them demonstrates genuine professionalism.

Teachers have lots of paperwork such as writing reports and designing assignments for students. They also communicate via emails and messages. They participate in educational conferences. I think it is important for teachers to express their thoughts and ideas coherently. (P9)

Ninety percent of a teacher's working time is spent communicating with other people, so it is critical to express your thoughts clearly and accurately and convey your point of view to the person. (P10)

More experienced teachers stated that teachers are constantly faced with the responsibility of informing parents that their children require extra assistance with their homework. For example, a student may be misbehaving, and this information must be sent to the parents. Delivering this information clearly and constructively is essential to being a good communicator.

While analyzing the answers regarding the teacher's communication skills, three types of communication were identified that the participants would like to see from a professional teacher. The first one is 'speech culture'. P3 specified that speech culture is one of the main aspects that a good teacher should possess: "this is important as the teacher's speech makes the lesson touching and interesting. Any speech aims to attract the audience's attention".

The next one is didactic speech. According to the literature, this type of communication is involved in the teaching process while adaptively delivering learning materials and creating a positive rapport.

... there are children of different levels in the class who need more explanation. The ability of a teacher to make complex materials - accessible, incomprehensible - understandable is the sign that the teacher is more than an educator. (P1)

The third type of communication is teacher-student communication was identified as friendliness.

When I was in school, the relationship between students and teachers was limited. Sometimes it was scary to ask something. In this school, I see that friendly relations are being built between the teacher and the student. Which, of course, influences students' academic performance and wellbeing. (P9)

The best teachers are the ones who are open, friendly, and approachable. If the teacher isn't approachable and rude, students will have unanswered questions. (P9)

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Life-long learner

Seven out of ten participants reported that continuous professional development (CPD) is one of a good teacher's key characteristics. According to P4 and P6, CPD is important as it ensures that teachers can enhance their professional skills, motivation, and confidence in teaching.

Having more than 20 years of work experience as a teacher, I still try to attend professional courses as much as possible. It allows me to meet with colleagues from other schools. I can hear their ideas and share mine. There are lots of new teaching methods which are presented in those training. It gives me more confidence in my work (P4)

From my perspective, when teachers participate in educational courses, webinars, seminars, and conferences related to education, it allows educators to learn about the trends in the academic sphere that enhance teacher competency in their profession. (P6)

Another exciting finding expressed by one of the participants was that alongside professional development, self-development also could be one of the factors that describe a great teacher's job:

The most important personal quality any teacher should possess is the eagerness for self-development. Continuous self-development has always been an indispensable part of a teacher's job. Even though teachers might have immense experience, there's always something you can learn. (P5)

To be a teacher means never stop learning. Knowledge will never be superfluous, so a successful teacher is a lifelong learner. (P1)

A professional teacher is ready to change, brings changes in pursuit of knowledge, and is information literate. (P7)

... as it seems, reformers are those who can do research a lot. A teacher can be professional at twenty years old as at fifty. The main criteria are to do research nonstop and develop in every sense of the word. (P2)

Teacher autonomy

The most interesting finding was when two participants shared their perceptions about teacher professionalism as teachers who act autonomously. Consistent with the literature, teacher autonomy can be related to the professional independence of teachers. When asked about elements of teacher autonomy, P9 gave an example as "being autonomous in classroom environment" referred to teachers who can arrange classroom by theme, 'curriculum flexibility'

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when teachers can adapt programs to learners' needs, they also have the opportunity to select coursebooks, 'flexibility in assessment' teachers may select assessment style on the interest of the class. Thus, participant 1 described teacher flexibility as listening to students' perspectives and incorporating them into teaching practice. "It is important to adapt lessons according to the student's needs rather than following papers."

A teacher can demonstrate their professionalism when planned activities aren't working, so the teacher can change the mode by adopting other activities (P5)

Some teachers take risks on their own and make decisions in the interests of the school or students. And those teachers, in my opinion, are professionals. (P9)

These results can help us to understand that the professionalism of teachers lies in the freedom of action and freedom of word in the context of pedagogical ethics and allows teachers to be independent in classes and school to be effective educators.

Teacher rights and ethical responsibilities

While most of the participants expressed their perceptions of teacher professionalism in moral, ethical, and professional dimensions, two participants referred to teacher awareness of teachers' rights as one of the main aspects of teacher professionalism. Participants claimed that being competent in all spheres of a teacher's profession corresponds to a teacher's professionalism. It is also noted that the situations teachers face and suffer because of not knowing the teacher and child's rights, as a rule, represents the highest level of unprofessionalism:

We observe various unpleasant circumstances that the teacher faces. For example, teachers are filmed during the lesson, then that video is spread over the internet. Teachers are offended by students and parents. This happened because teachers were not aware of their rights. (P3)

I want to add that students can also suffer from the teacher due to pedagogical unprofessionalism. This happens when the teacher violates the student's rights due to ignorance of the child's rights. (P10)

Finally, both respondents emphasized that being aware of the child's rights also plays a role in the teacher's competence. Thus, claiming that a teacher is an individual with knowledge of pedagogy principles and life experience.

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Theme 2: Teachers' practices of professionalism

R2: To extent to which teachers' perceptions about professionalism influence their practices at the school?

The purpose of question two was to reveal how teachers demonstrate professional characteristics in their day-to-day activities. Participants shared their opinions on how an experienced teacher acts in everyday practice in their school context. As a result, the following factors were identified as indicators of demonstrating professionalism in daily routine in the current school.

Teacher autonomy

Three out of ten participants pointed out that they enjoyed the freedom to select any teaching methods and conduct extracurricular activities in their school. Moreover, some teachers emphasized that they can teach lessons in different locations such as school corridors, school libraries, ICT rooms, and even outside. According to participants' answers, proposing alternatives in selecting teaching approaches and unusual methods allows teachers to be more motivated and gain excellence in their profession:

It is welcomed when teachers use different classrooms and venues to conduct lessons. For example, we study the topic of sports in English these days. The only thing I need is to book the gym. This kind of approach increases pupils' interest in the lesson, which motivates me. (P6)

[extracurricular activities] teachers can implement their projects. For example, a viral Q&A project was one of the initiatives that an English teacher brought. After the proposal, the school's administration supported it with pleasure, and for many years, this project has been a great success among students. (P10)

[changing approach] It happens you design a lesson, but it does not work. The reason might be that the class is not in the mood to study. Usually, it occurs in the first or the last lesson. So you can immediately change the approach and theme, and the headteacher does not condemn this. (P3)

According to the teachers' opinions, a certain amount of autonomy motivates them to individualise teachers' approaches which undoubtedly impacts their job performance.

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Keeping confidentiality

Two participants said that one of the elements of professionalism is keeping all the data they have secure and trusted. Teachers in their school are responsible for keeping each student's information private. This is essential under a wide range of circumstances in their school. They also mentioned that confidentiality is one of the core topics in their school and that training for protecting confidential information is taken place regularly:

Many parents consider our school to be safe not just for their children's lives but also for the information they share. For example, workplace, home address, and phone numbers. It is important not to spread this information and keep it confidential. At the beginning of the academic year, we also have training on keeping students' data safe. (P7)

Often parents share their child's health or psychological problems that need to be considered in the learning process. It is very important to warn teachers to avoid unpleasant situations that a child may encounter. (P1)

Lesson preparation and organizational skills

All ten participants said that a teacher would fail in a class unless they had a well-designed lesson plan. One of the most critical characteristics of teacher professionalism, according to the respondents, is meeting the students' needs. Throughout interviews, these teachers stated that they spend a significant amount of time planning classes and locating appropriate materials for their students' needs. P3 shared a teacher she considers an exemplary teacher who spends countless hours outside of the classroom planning, designing lessons, and brainstorming new and creative methods to reach out to their students. Two participants (P2, P6) also noted that excellent organizational skills and professional attitude increase productivity and effectiveness of a teacher.

[organizational skills] ... that includes preparing well for your lessons, being on time for your lessons, and at least five minutes before the start of the lesson. Just make sure that your class equipment works. (P6)

Professional attitude towards teaching consciousness, like being on time for your classes, being well prepared for your lessons, just in case trying to anticipate what kind of questions the students might have. (P3)

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Develop strong relationships with students

Another finding that teachers reported regarding demonstrating teacher professionalism at their school was developing a strong student-teacher relationship. This study revealed that in the current school, a very trusting relationship is built between teachers and students. Participant also mentioned extracurricular activities they have and how it affects student academic performance and wellbeing:

Every week we have so-called tea time. Students share their interesting stories they had during a week. We arrange different entertaining challenges initiated by students. This kind of activity fosters a trusting relationship. (P8)

We organize thematic trips to the cinema and to the museum. Going to exhibitions and then discussing it together with them. Usually, our thematic trips are related to the subject topics. (P1)

It is very important to be in trend with the student to keep up with the times; teachers will follow with joy to such a teacher. The teacher must be "in trend" – otherwise, it is difficult to build a warm and trusting relationship with the audience. (P8)

Interestingly enough, one participant with three years of experience shared that one of the reasons for choosing the profession of a teacher was her personal experience. The teacher, being a student, felt a great distance from the teacher at her school. She could not always ask what she wanted because of fear. Whereas, in the current school, a young teacher noticed a trusting relationship with students as a part of the school culture. Thus, the data shows that teachers who can create a positive rapport with students have an impact on students' lives as a part of the action of a professional teacher.

Self-presentation

During the interview, participants pointed out that teacher professionalism can be demonstrated through personal appearance. Six out of ten participants reflected on this matter. An interesting fact has occurred that this topic appears to be controversial. Four female teachers stated that dress code plays a vital role in conveying professionalism for teachers:

The teacher must inspire respect and trust. Therefore, the dress code of the teacher carries a significant psychological role. On the one hand, a neatly, cleanly, and stylish dressed teacher instills the same qualities in their students. (P10)

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In our school, there are no strict rules on the appearance of a teacher. Mainly, it should be comfortable and acceptable. I know a teacher whose students just imitate the way he dresses. For me, this is an indicator of the great respect the students have for the teacher. (P6)

I think a teacher's appearance is essential. Teachers are role models. Therefore, the image of the teacher must be impeccable in all respects. (P3)

Whereas the rest of the respondents all males, do not place teacher appearance as something important while demonstrating teacher professionalism:

In my opinion, clothing should be comfortable and should not contradict generally accepted standards of decency. The dress code for a teacher should be the one that helps students focus on mastering the learning materials but not studying the details of clothing. (P9)

A teacher's appearance is important, but I do not consider it an indicator of professionalism. (P5)

I can not deny that a teacher's appearance has no impact on their professionalism. The way a teacher looks is what is inside of that person. Most likely, this is their attitude towards their job. (P2)

Network with colleagues

Most of the participants specified that professionalism is demonstrated when teachers collaborate. Participants 4 and 7 expressed that they can create a better experience and explore new approaches in their profession when they work together, which positively influences students' academic achievements. When asked about how often and how teachers collaborate, participants mentioned that school departments organize the so-called 'teacher association hour' twice a month, where they meet and discuss various problems of teachers. One of the study participants (P8) shared that cooperating with colleagues is especially helpful for teachers who have just joined their school and novice teachers. According to her words, seasoned teachers are assigned as a mentor and lead the new teacher throughout the year. This is beneficial for both mentees and mentors. One participant (P7) said that during the pandemic, collaborating with colleagues allowed her to improve as a teacher: "every day we designed online lessons and presented them to each other via Zoom. After that, we reflected on what to improve or what

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worked well". As a consequence, Participant 7 stated that having the ability to share experience and support colleagues may increase success in teaching practice and improve communication among educators.

A young teacher with two years of experience also tells about the significant impact on teachers' improvement:

As a beginner teacher, classroom management was the most challenging part for me. Especially in primary classes. It is good that every department has their teacher hour once a week. We can bring the problems we face and get the solutions from experienced teachers. I think these kinds of activities inspire and help teachers be more effective. (P6)

Participant 2 and participant 10 also reflected that those teachers who are actively involved in teacher collaboration work have opportunities to learn from each other and help reach professional goals.

Theme 3: Factors that contribute as well as inhibit teacher professionalism

Factors that support teachers' professionalism

The purpose of this question was to identify what factors contribute to and inhibit teacher professionalism among teachers. All ten participants stated that continuing teacher professional development is one of the key factors influencing teacher professionalism at school. Participant 1 mentioned that taking professional development courses allows teachers to discover new experiences and knowledge, improving their competency and professionalism. Two English teachers emphasized that for them, professional courses are practical to enhance their English language knowledge and contribute to their development:

[Professional development] these kinds of courses are an opportunity for me to activate my English. As I teach primary classes, I mostly use the Kazakh language, and the vocabulary is very simple. Therefore, I feel I lose my English. I can meet my colleagues, discuss the issues I have, and exchange ideas. This, of course, motivates my colleagues and me. (P6)

When asked about how often teachers have professional courses, Participants 3 and 4 mentioned that in their school, senior leadership arranges pedagogical training for teachers during the term breaks, which is more effective. As a result, teachers can forget about daily

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routines leading to demotivation, and focus on strengthening their performance level. Another interesting finding revealed that experienced teachers prefer face-to-face courses 'I need to be a part of a team where I can interact with colleagues; online training is ineffective (P2). Whereas high school teachers pointed out that online training can save their time and expand their professional and personal growth:

Since the pandemic time, many educational websites have become available for teachers. Most teachers who aim to become better in their profession can join them. Teachers can apply for the courses not only on their subject but also can learn some leadership skills. (P3)

Six interview participants stated that a positively established school culture significantly impacts teacher professionalism. They also shared the elements that carry school culture, school atmosphere, relationship with colleagues, attitudes of leadership towards teachers, environment, values, and norms that can contribute to developing teachers' competencies. Three participants shared how school leadership attitude toward teachers might affect teacher professional growth:

If the school administration's senior leadership principal and vice-principal are supportive of the needs of teachers, they will be able to develop themselves professionally. (P6)

I am really lucky enough to be working at a school where I feel I'm carried. I feel I'm being appreciated in terms of support from the team. (P10)

I think there are times when teachers feel burned out, sometimes it happens, and they have to organize team-building activities. Some entertainment for their teachers to elevate their mood to elevate their spirit in teaching. (P3)

Although I did not ask participants to talk about the relationship between teachers and the school leadership team, almost all the participants highlighted a trusted and supportive attitude towards teachers' staff. Participants 1 and 5 believe that when teachers feel they are carried and supported by head teachers or school administration, they feel motivated and they know they are not alone. Of course, this support contributes to teachers' professional progress and development.

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In this light, it is essential to create an environment where all educators are confident and excited about their work.

Three participants of this study believe that a sufficient number of teaching resources and the regularity of their replenishment also affect being a professional teacher:

When I worked in the previous school, I constantly experienced a lack of resources. As a result, I could not get what I wanted for my children. This, of course, demotivated me to be more effective. Whereas, in this school, we can get all the resources that help teachers create engaging lessons. Having good teaching resources allows teachers to focus on helping learners and improving their professional experience. (P9)

The school has got quite a lot of resources. The library is quite extensive, and the school also signed up for a membership plan on a viral website. I use that website regularly to prepare for my classes which are very good. (P7)

I think all English teachers feel lucky as there are many resources for them. For example, we use a Learning A-Z website with more than ten thousand books of different levels in English. Teachers can assign books with activities and then check them online. There are also ready-made designs for projects, so we don't spend much time creating new ones. Our colleagues who teach Kazakh and Russian languages feel the lack of such resources. (P7)

The cites above revealed that teachers who have a considerable amount of teaching resources feel inspired and enthusiastic about obtaining more knowledge and methodological support from the school's opportunities. It also empowers teachers to boost their teaching practices, which leads to improved student learning.

During the interview, three participants of this study, one Russian language and two teachers of primary classes pointed out that one more factor that contributes to teacher professionalism is school-based courses. The workplace provides courses to improve language skills (Turkish and English). Such classes aim to enhance teachers' language competencies. Teachers say that they have non-Kazakh or Russian-speaking colleagues and English courses enable them to interact with international colleagues and exchange practices. They also mentioned that there are courses delivered by international companies. The language of instruction in such studies is English. Teachers can also attend clubs of their interests (Fitness clubs, basketball and volleyball clubs).

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School-based courses allow teachers not only to enhance their competency in different areas but also it will enable teachers to take a little break from routine work and professional burnout. (P4)

I attended English classes for two years. I can not say I know English very well as I don't use it constantly. Despite that, I feel more confident using the school e-journal as most of the instructions are in English. (P3)

I think this is an excellent opportunity for teachers. Being professional does not mean only being good at your subject. This term has a broad meaning, one of which is being a comprehensively developed person. (P8)

Factors that hinder teacher professionalism.

When asked about the factors that prevent teachers from being professional, most participants shared that the first sign of loss of professionalism is a low interest in their development. Two participants said that if educators aren't willing to keep improving, it might be an obstacle to teaching and learning. Thus, two teachers mentioned several examples of what the reluctance of educators to develop professionally may lead to:

When teachers experience a decrease in interest in professional development or stop looking for new approaches to teaching, it significantly affects the quality of the lesson. In addition, it is no secret that students reflect the mood of their teachers. Consequently, they are less motivated to continue their studies. (P7)

Even those teachers who were once role models for others may lose interest in their profession due to a lack of professional development. They have indifferent towards their work. The first ones to suffer from this are the learners. In my experience, teachers' knowledge and professionalism are essential for students, especially for high school students. Children enjoy engaging in dialogue with their teachers. Therefore, it is no secret that we cannot have great teachers without quality content. (P10)

Another participant stated that the emotional state also might result in low performance at work. Additionally, he shared how he experienced his emotional burnout at work and the factors that helped him to overcome it:

At the beginning of my career, I appeared very engaged in my work. I took all the courses that existed. I attended conferences despite my young age. I was able to implement new educational projects. I worked nonstop. But once, I lost that motivation. I didn't want to improve. It seemed to me that I had done my duties ahead. Luckily I had very supportive school administrators. No professional improvements interested me. After reflecting on my work, I realized that I worked nonstop. Sometimes teachers need to slow down instead of chasing the latest trends in our sphere. (P10)

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The following findings that lead to deprofessionalization are workload and not maintaining the status of a teacher. According to Participant 3, some school administrators tend to obligate teachers to do the work that is not in their duties:

Instead of undertaking teachers' obligations towards their profession, teachers must participate in the census, monitor the cafeterias, collect money for the subject olympiads run on a payment basis, and organize transport for field trips. I do not deny that those events are done for social and learners' benefit. In my opinion, teachers should focus more on improving academic performance and helping them to succeed.

The same participant also added that such work could be done by financial or logistic departments. Thus, all school stakeholders will be able to show their competency in their profession.

Another factor that inhibits teacher professionalism is the popularization of teacher favoritism. One of the study participants shared that it happens that school administration favors individual teachers. Only teachers in the so-called fan zone can participate in seminars and attend international conferences; only particular teachers are welcomed. Participants added that the reason for such approaches is a poor leadership style. Participant 1 emphasized that poor communication with peers also might affect teacher effectiveness:

Demotivation toward our profession might result from a lack of communication. As a result of poor communication, teachers may feel frustrated, including misunderstanding, lost opportunities, and the spread of disinformation. Teachers might feel isolated in this kind of atmosphere.

The statement above might be summarized as ineffective school culture, which explains teachers' deprofessionalization. Therefore, almost all participants highlighted that ignoring fundamental school values, generally accepted written and unwritten rules, and a toxic atmosphere could undoubtedly influence a teacher's effectiveness.

Six out of ten participants reported that teachers' workload also might affect teachers from producing better performance and improving their professionalism. Teachers can not focus on particular tasks because of the irrational assigned work. As a result, teachers feel frustrated and ineffective:

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I have a very tight schedule. I feel that I can't prepare properly for my classes, and then I don't feel good about myself and my classes, so I'd say that my schedule is too tight. Besides regular classes we have to work, for example, to support the weaker students. Currently, we're also preparing students for an event, sort of an Olympiad, so that means extra classes for the students as well, and sometimes I also have to go home, and instead of relaxing, I have to do stuff for work. (P7)

Teaching too many classes and having too many responsibilities can affect my professionalism. (P1)

The final findings have revealed that paper work is an unjustified form of responsibility that teachers must do. During the interview, the study participant pointed out that instead of working on improving students' needs, teachers should write the papers that no one cares about:

One thing that hinders teacher professionalism is something I could call red tape—lots of paperwork and bureaucracy. Instead of demonstrating their professionalism, the teachers have to do work that does not affect students' achievement. For example, sometimes we have to fill out the forms when everyone feels the idea that it's a useless piece of information, it's mandated by the ministry, and you have to do it. You don't have a choice, and flexibility in terms of teachers' opinions is not taken into account. This is the way that hinders teachers' professionalism. (P5)

Summary

This chapter presented the findings from the qualitative study. The first part of this chapter focused on teachers' perceptions of teacher professionalism, what they think professionalism is. In the second part teachers shared to what extent they can demonstrate their professionalism in the context of their school. In the third part teachers emphasized what are the factors that contribute to teacher professionalism and what factors might hinder it. The next chapter will discuss the findings its importance and relevance to my research.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

The previous chapter presented the findings obtained from the qualitative study of my research, which focused on investigating teacher professionalism through the perceptions of one private school in Central Kazakhstan. This chapter will present the key findings considering different definitions and viewpoints that occurred from the participants. This chapter also will discuss the findings with respect to the literature review, research questions, and theoretical framework.

Teachers' perceptions of teacher professionalism.

Finding 1: Notion of teacher professionalism

The data in this study revealed that the majority of the participants perceive teacher professionalism as a broad notion, and it is excessively complicated to provide a particular definition. This finding is backed by Cunningham's description of teacher professionalism. He stated that this notion is difficult to characterize due to various direct and indirect factors related to this phenomenon (2008). It also coincides with Amirova (2020) views that teacher professionalism is deemed as a complex of general and professional knowledge, such as practical skills and professionally significant personality traits. Nevertheless, participants clarified that teacher professionalism stands on three central notions: being the best at their profession, meeting the highest requirements, and achieving excellence in education. These are too broad answers that do not allow us to conclude teachers' understanding of the notion of "teacher professionalism." A small number of teachers were able to classify the characteristics of teacher professionalism. Thus, the current study found that teacher professionals have excellent subject knowledge, are emotionally intelligent, strong communicators, lifelong learners, autonomous, and know their rights. Comparing these elements with the classification by Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), there are many connection points. Therefore, both teachers and researchers

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consider subject knowledge, strong communication skills, lifelong learning, and autonomy as some of the characteristics of teacher professionals.

In contrast, only one respondent pointed out that teachers need to appeal for their rights. In Soviet times, teachers were perceived very seriously, although, after independence, this understanding changed due to different factors, teacher incompetence being one of the main reasons. This, in turn, lets the parents and the society stand against unprofessionalism; they express distrust towards teachers' actions and try to teach teachers. Sometimes society's actions become too direct and uncontrolled, and as a result, even good teachers suffer from that. That is why appealing to teachers' rights is essential. Some teachers connect teacher professionalism with appealing to students' rights. It is also crucial as it is necessary for the teachers to always construct both their teaching and upbringing in a way that would benefit the student's emotional, physical, and mental needs.

Finding 2: Emotional intelligence

However, when asked, the respondents indicated this as one of the main characteristics of professional teachers. This is a relatively new term in domestic pedagogy in Kazakhstan, and therefore the respondents associated it with teachers' behavior in class/and their reaction toward students' emotions, needs, and worries. Interestingly, one respondent raised an issue of "favoritism" towards certain students because of their parent's social status, family relationships, or students' academic capabilities. The participant is specific that equal treatment that every teacher sets in class will positively impact the atmosphere in class and students' academic success. Another respondent raised attention to teachers' patience, especially when working with primary school students. It is true that children of younger ages need more care and patience, although teachers of all school divisions must possess the above-listed qualities. This factor perfectly matches with Anari (2012), in his study he stated that there is a positive correlation between the emotional intelligence of a teacher and teacher job satisfaction. In addition, Nushur and Yusuf (2021) pointed out that possession of such qualities as emotional intelligence may

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undoubtedly impact teacher performance in the classroom. They also emphasized that this characteristic has an influence on learners' motivation. Consequently, learners' motivation is one of the significant factors that must be improved and cultivated since it will ultimately accomplish learning results.

Finding 3: Strong communication skills

According to the participants' responses, we can discuss this element of teacher professionalism in several directions. One study participant pointed out that solid communication skills are about speech culture that the teacher demonstrates in class. This contains a proper professional language (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012) in teaching the higher grades, and this is also about positive relationships when dealing with students and parents (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2005). Another participant believed that teacher professionalism is seen when an educator can explain the content at a language level that is easy and accessible to students. Most of the participants see teacher professionalism in building strong ties with students. This finding closely matches with the views of Danielson (2013), who stated that good teachers always communicate with the families of their students, thus constructing their professionalism in both school and family contexts. This current study concludes that teacher professionals have strong communication skills with their students, colleagues in and out of the school, and parents.

Finding 4: Life-long learners

Hargreaves (2000), argued that teachers start asking questions about the nature of their professions and seek new bonds to grow as a professional in the third professional development phase called collegial professionalism. Similarly, the following finding emerged when one teacher admitted that she likes attending professional development courses despite her retiring age. This allows her to meet new colleagues and share experiences and practices. This aligns with Miro's (1990) claim, who, in his 13-item Likert-type questionnaire, pointed out that "collaboration among members" is one of the indicators of professionalism. This also was noted

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by Hurst and Reding (2000), who insisted on building professional communities inside schools to raise teachers' professional levels.

In addition, according to respondents' views, life-long learners are professionals who continuously master their skills by attending different professional courses and putting much effort into self-development. Finally, this finding helps us understand that the critical criterion is never to stop gaining new knowledge and being ready to change.

Finding 5: Teacher autonomy

This finding is also in agreement with Imangaliyev (2019, p.14), who stated that “the actual range of autonomy and Kazakhstani teachers' perceptions of autonomy is different” due to limited understanding of the notion. Thus, when asked, participants reported about a strictly controlled system of teaching, creating curriculums and content choices for students.

Interestingly, participants pointed out that they understand the importance of teaching the students the knowledge they need for their future but not with the curriculum that was created in the past. Three out of 10 participants said they feel more effective in choosing teaching methods and different school settings related to the lesson topic. Although it is sad as the limitation of choice that before went against teachers' perception as professionals. Although this is a turning point to think back, we still need to remember that the number of teachers capable of creating competent curriculums is minimal. This goes in line with Brown (2007), who stated that designing relevant curricular need to be addressed when preparing teachers in teacher program. Thus, a government-controlled curriculum is the only solution to controlling equal and so-called qualitative teaching.

Finding 6: Teachers' rights and ethical responsibilities

This finding revealed that most respondents associate teacher professionalism with moral, ethical principles. One unanticipated result was that only a few of them indicate teachers' rights as one of the characteristics of professionals.

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This again indicates that teachers are generally highly responsible workers, but only a small amount can operate with their rights, which often brings emotional and professional burnout. Knowing and working with a child's rights is also essential as, in this case, the teacher cares about the well-being of the students, thus creating a supportive learning environment and safety. This finding supports the Law on Teacher Status, which specifies "the rights, social guarantees, duties, and restrictions of the teachers" (Law On the status of a Teacher, 2019), as well as Child's Rights, which determines each child's rights, the rights to life, personal freedom, personal integrity, self-esteem, and private life" (Law on the Rights of a Child in the Republic of Kazakhstan article 5, 2002).

To what extent do teachers' perceptions about professionalism influence their practices at the school?

This section discusses how teachers can demonstrate their professionalism in their day-to-day practice. During the interview, five factors were identified that describe professionalism in their school.

Finding 1: Keeping confidentiality

A small number of those interviewed suggested that teachers in their everyday work are expected to maintain specific jobs with papers, students' and their parents' data, study results, and everyday situations at school. Surprisingly, only 2 out of 10 respondents listed this quality as one of the professional teachers' characteristics. They claimed that it is vital for all teachers to keep confidential information they gain while being at school and working with students. Hopefully, the school administration supports teachers' views, and each year, teachers have professional development courses on this theme. Thus, teacher professionals are not only well-armed by methodology and content knowledge, but they also need to keep confidential information to be named as professionals. A similar finding was made by Hilton and Southgate (2007), in his study he pointed out that keeping confidentiality and building the trust with the

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students is the core factor that describes a professional teacher. Students who participated in his study shared that they expect teachers to be friendly, non-judgemental and capable of creating a safe space in which any topics can be discussed.

Finding 2: Lesson preparation and organizational skills

All participants were aware of coming prepared for the lessons, time-management, and organizational skills. This finding aligns with Demirkasimoglu (2010), which revealed that teacher professionalism is focused on such characteristics as “being good at the job,” “fulfilling the highest standards,” and “achieving excellence.”

Besides, it is also essential to spend much time planning the lessons, finding materials, trying new methods, and anticipating the questions that students may ask. The behaviors students can demonstrate towards specific tasks and materials would help the teacher grow as a reflexive thinker and modify his teaching style. This finding also matches John (2006) characteristics of a teacher's professionalism that can be demonstrated in practice. In his study about effective lesson planning, he emphasized that lesson preparation is a creative process that involves revision of a subject programme, examination of materials in coursebooks, capabilities of students and specific conditions. This kind of teacher, of course, will meet all students' needs and fulfill the highest standards of a teaching profession. Regarding the teachers' organizational skills, Creasy (2015), named “completing schedules, assignments, and other paperwork on time” as one of the factors that demonstrates professionalism of a teacher. He claimed that with the realization of before named characteristics teachers can formulate their own definition to meet the standards of an effective teacher.

Finding 4: Dress code

Over half of the teachers interviewed reported that dress code can be one element that demonstrates teacher professionalism. More precisely, 6 out of 10 respondents insisted that teacher professionalism also depends on teachers' appearance. Neat, gentle, and organized teachers undoubtedly inspire students, some may even follow teachers' dressing style, and most

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importantly, this teacher will motivate students to learn. When asked, 4 females out of 6 respondents demonstrated likeness towards a dress-code for teachers, whereas 2 males opposed this idea by saying that teacher professionalism cannot be measured by dress code. Literature reveals no direct links between teachers' dress codes, although Hargreaves and Fullan (2015, p.80) mentioned "self-regulation of conduct, discipline, and dismissals." Ideally, each of the schools decides themselves regarding the dress code. Hence, either following school policy or rejecting it lies within self-regulation of conduct and discipline. Accordingly, respect towards school policy will also indicate teacher professionalism..

Finding 5: Networking with colleagues

When asked about the networking system, the majority of the participants commented on the importance of sharing the experience with younger colleagues.

Young teachers often find it challenging to keep the class disciplined, teach specific topics or deal with sudden student emotions. In this regard, more experienced teachers can help with advice and unique methodology. In turn, experienced teachers can learn new approaches or new technologies with the help of their younger colleagues. Although it seems like an extra workload, this networking system is necessary for experienced and younger teachers. This finding closely matches one more characteristic described in Sachs's (2016) framework that I used to guide my research. According to the framework, networking with colleagues characterizes the type of activist professionalism demonstrated through "working collectively towards ongoing improvement" (p.23).

Factors shape, support, or hinder teacher professionalism

Interview participants listed different factors that can help and hinder teacher professionalism when posed a question.

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Factors that support teacher professionalism

Finding 1: Professional development courses organized based on the needs of the teachers help to navigate and correct the teaching and learning process. It is worth mentioning that one of the respondents proposed free online courses that could also help to grow as professionals.

Hargreaves and Cunningham (2015), have also stated that teachers have also stated that continuing education is one of the essential aspects of professionalism. This finding aligns with Hargreaves and Fullan's (2012) standard concepts. They claimed that commitment to continuous learning and professional upgrading would best suit professionalism.

Finding 2: Members of the school leadership team must always support the teachers. Teaching is an intensive and non-stop process where sometimes teachers feel burned out and need support from the management team. One respondent pointed out that in the schools where administration cares about staff's well-being, teachers feel motivated and work with great desire. Overall these findings are in accordance with findings reported by Carroll et al. (2000), it is stated that a good school management increases teachers' contribution to their work by helping them to understand how the school works, they give them an opportunity to bring their ideas, implement new projects, collaborate with other colleagues and learn from each other. The scholars also emphasized the importance of school management to teachers' professional practices and growth.

Finding 3: The third and vital issue raised was the sufficiency of teaching resources. The school must ensure that teachers have both paper-based and virtual resources that allow them to construct quantitative lessons. Otherwise, teachers would have to waste much time searching for help and feel ineffective and helpless. This would lessen teachers' motivation towards working. This finding was backed up by Tschannen-Moran (2015), in his research on the influence of resources and support on teacher's efficacy he reported that those teachers who have school administrations assistance and supported by considerable more teaching resources are more confident with their professional performance.

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Factors that hinder teacher professionalism

Teachers, while asked, mentioned too many duties that are maintained at schools not directly linked to their professional functions. As an example, teachers are often asked to collect money, organize different events, to become duties on various matters. Besides, this doubles teachers' responsibilities and keeps them apart from maintaining their professional responsibilities on time. As a result, teachers bring work home and cannot have enough rest, family time, and self-care. This leads to burnout and stress. A similar finding was identified in Hargreaves's (2000) work. He stated that teachers are forced to invest an incredible amount of time under the threat of being blamed for non-professionalism due to large loads of requirements that are not related to their professional duties.

One unexpected finding of my study was that "Teacher favoritism" is another term used to describe certain tendencies in national educational organizations. In line with the previous study Aydogan (2008) opened up favoritism as the tendency to promote a person or group based on a non-essential feature they possess rather than their abilities or their personal relationships. School administrators indeed favor some educators by ignoring or disadvantaging others. Consequently, it lessens motivation of the disadvantaged teachers to work and grow as professionals. Although there is no information about favoritism towards school teachers, Aydogan (2008) in his work highlights that respect for human, fairness, equality, loyalty, honesty and integrity are the ethical principles that promote teacher professionalism.

Teachers in current schools are overloaded with different types of reports, student agendas, and online databases for which they are held responsible. It again puts too much load on them and steals their preparation and rest time. This finding aligns with one of Terhart's (2011) theories, which states that teachers need to perform as professionals to accomplish their duties ultimately. However, another claim is that teachers will never become complete professionals since they serve universal goals rather than seeking individual career chances.

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Summary

To sum up, this chapter presented teachers' answers that contradict the research findings of other studies. These similarities show that teachers share common perceptions about teacher professionalism. Thus, the framework I used to guide my research matches the characteristics that shape teacher professionalism and how professionalism can be demonstrated in practice. Consequently, in accordance with Sachs's (2016) framework, teacher professionalism can be described in four types:

Controlled professionalism – this type of professionalism is dominated by school leadership. Teachers are provided with systematic professional development, as well as resource support.

Collaborative professionalism - teachers get better with expertise, and more motivated to stay in their profession.

Compliant professionalism refers to teachers' integrity, accountability, transparency, and respect in all actions and decisions.

Activist professionalism - refers to teachers who are willing to constantly develop, share knowledge, they can act autonomously and be the change agents.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and recommendations

This final chapter summarises the key findings, discusses implications, and suggests recommendations for policy, practice, and future research. The main goal of the current study was to investigate how secondary school teachers perceive and understand teacher professionalism and how their perceptions influence their practices of professionalism in a private secondary school in Central Kazakhstan. The following subsidiary questions were addressed to reach this goal and answer the main research question: 1) What are the teachers' perceptions about teacher professionalism? 2) How do teachers practice and demonstrate professionalism at the school? 3) What are the factors that shape, support, or hinder teacher professionalism? The limitations of this study also will be discussed in this section.

Revisiting the research questions

What are the teachers' perceptions about teacher professionalism?

The result of this research has shown that the topic of teacher professionalism is broad and can not be described in one word. Despite that, the teachers explained the notion of 'teacher professionalism' in the following way: Professional teachers have in-depth subject knowledge that allows them to inspire students for more effective learning. They are diplomatic, empathetic and patient. They are tolerant in relation to children and other people. Teacher professionalism also involves strong communication skills. Teachers who maintain good rapport with students, parents and colleagues are most likely to establish long-lasting, trustworthy relationship patterns. Professional teachers are constantly focused on professional development and self-improvement. These teachers are always in search of new ideas, challenges and experiences. They are self-directed and capable of taking control of their occupations. They listen to students' opinions and integrate them into the teaching process. Thus it can be concluded that 'teacher professionalism' is a combination of fundamental knowledge, personal and leadership traits, and they tend to

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ongoing development. Within the context of their profession, 'professional teachers' accomplish educational, caring, developing and psychological functions.

How do teachers practice and demonstrate professionalism at the school?

The participants of this study highlighted that the skill to keep all student information confidential exhibits professionalism in their school. The student information involves assessment results, grades, demographic data, personal data and observations. The teachers are responsible for keeping all that data secret and only sharing it with authorized people such as parents, teachers and school administrators.

Another characteristic that demonstrates a professional teacher's competence is systematic and practical lesson preparation. According to study participants, these factors are essential as well developed lessons are necessary for teachers and learners to be involved in effective and engaging learning. Engaging lessons also allow all teachers to meet students' needs by employing a differentiated approach. In addition to lesson preparation, staying organised is also essential in demonstrating teacher effectiveness. This quality will facilitate the teacher to manage his/her time effectively by delegating tasks, providing timely feedback to students, managing projects, and initiating and adhering to deadlines. Participants believe that possessing all the characteristics mentioned above demonstrates excellent teacher professionalism in their school. This has been perfectly outlined in the study conducted by Hargreaves and Fullan (2015), who found out that professionalism can be a powerful weapon to avoid unfavorable misconceptions in relation to teaching. It will safeguard teachers from unwanted consequences encountered throughout their journey as a teacher.

This study revealed that teacher appearance could be one element that demonstrates teacher professionalism. Neat and organised teachers undoubtedly inspire students, some may even follow teachers' dressing style, and most importantly, this teacher will motivate students to learn. This fact is disputed between male participants and female participants. Males do not consider the appearance of a teacher as a crucial indicator of professionalism.

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The teacher collaboration system in the school leads to an exchange of experiences with young teachers, contributes to social well-being and supports teachers in enhancing professional competence. Thus, the conclusion I draw here is successfully implemented school culture that promotes confidentiality of student data, rigorous planning for lessons and other tasks, demonstration of work ethics, and collaboration leads to teacher professionalism. The above-mentioned aspects of teacher professionalism perfectly resonate with Danielson's (2015) professional teaching practice framework. In his large-scale study, he emphasized that teachers could demonstrate their professionalism while interacting with colleagues and students. They constantly give feedback to students that move their learning. They demonstrate flexibility. They are resourceful. They plan and prepare setting the instructional outcomes of the lessons. Consequently, professional teachers exhibit their professionalism towards both teachers and learners at the highest level of performance.

What are the factors that shape, support or hinder teacher professionalism?

The study participants view the following factors that promote teacher professionalism in the context of their school. Systematic professional development based on the needs of the teachers helps to navigate and correct the teaching and learning process. Thus, professional upgrading would best suit teacher professionalism. Effective school leadership is one of the elements that contribute to teacher professionalism. Creating positive relationships with teachers, distributing leadership, and establishing a positive climate in school would undoubtedly shape a teacher's professionalism. As a justification, a study conducted by Hargreaves and Fullan (2015), stressed out the importance of shared standards of practice, teacher collaboration and teacher self-regulation as an important element of teacher professionalism.

Based on the current study, irrationally assigned workload and keeping teachers away from maintaining their professional responsibilities might lead to teacher burnout. Treating all teachers unequally affects teacher professionalism. As a result, it will lessen teachers' motivation to work and grow as professionals.

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Thus, the conclusion to be drawn here is that ongoing professional development and self-directed learning by teachers, democratic leadership, teacher leadership initiatives, collegial relationships amongst all stakeholder, especially teachers, collaboration and collegiality, discipline and accountability, and a non-threatening environment at school shape teacher professionalism.

Implications and Recommendations

This section presents recommendations based on this study's conclusions, which will be addressed to policymakers and school administration. Additionally, it will also suggest some implications for further research on the investigation of teacher professionalism in Kazakhstan.

To support teacher professionalism, school principals and administrators are recommended to promote teacher autonomy in their school, reconsider the workload of teachers, and create more opportunities for professional and personal development, especially for novice teachers. This aligns with Fullan and Hargreaves (2015), who claim that schools that promote continuous professional learning and provide opportunities where educators can be productive, motivate teachers to perform their job effectively day after day. What is more, as the available data show, teachers feel unprotected because of various factors, it is essential to raise public awareness of teacher rights. Moreover, based on these research findings, it is also recommended for school administrators to formulate essential attributes, skills, and tendencies necessary for upgrading a teacher's professionalism.

Recommendations for policymakers.

Policymakers are recommended to use the research results in the teacher education programs in the context of Kazakhstan. Since the teacher education programs prepare teachers, these key findings will help understand what skills, values, and ethical standards are needed to become an effective teacher. The distributed leadership style, which is successfully implemented in the current school, might also be spread among other schools. As the research revealed, school leadership plays a vital role in enhancing the performance of teachers. School-based courses

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such as learning languages or sports clubs that maintain teacher wellbeing can undoubtedly contribute to the professionalism of a teacher. Therefore, the elements listed above should be implemented and widespread among the schools in Kazakhstan.

Limitations and directions for further research

The first and foremost limitation of the study is the small number of participants. As the results of this research have shown that teacher professionalism appears to be vague, it wasn't easy to produce clear answers. Therefore, a more significant number of participants could be involved in future research in order to develop more ideas for understanding teachers' perceptions of 'teacher professionalism'.

Final reflection

To conclude, the current study enhanced my understanding of what professionalism is. It is critical to provide opportunities for teacher professional development and lifelong learning, especially when teachers are expected to be knowledgeable, proactive, and creative in the educational field. To maintain professionalism, all school participants, particularly school teachers, must place a strong focus on successful teaching and learning as part of their professional development.

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Appendix 1

**Teachers' perceptions and practices of professionalism: A case of a private secondary
school in Central Kazakhstan**

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Dear colleague _____

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by me, a M.Sc. in Educational Leadership 2-year student at Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education. The theme of the study **Teachers' perceptions and practices of professionalism: A case of a private secondary school in Central Kazakhstan**

Your participation in the research is very important for this study.

DESCRIPTION: The study aims at investigating how schoolteachers perceive and understand teacher professionalism and how their perceptions influence their practices of professionalism in a private secondary school. The study will explore teachers' views, beliefs and understanding of what teacher professionalism actually is in the context of their school and how they actually demonstrate professionalism in their day-to-day work at the school.

TIME INVOLVEMENT: Your participation in the interview will take approximately 60 minutes. The interview will be recorded and transcribed later.

RISKS AND BENEFITS: There are no known risks for you as your participation in the study will not have any impact or negative implications for your employment and relationships in the school. However, you may feel uncomfortable or inconvenient to talk about your perception of teacher professionalism, and your own experiences and challenges related to teacher professionalism during the interview. To eliminate this stress you will be reassured that your responses will not be judged or criticized and your personal identity will be ensured. The risks will be avoided by using pseudonyms instead of the real name and locations. The research site and your name will be coded.

The main benefit for you will be the opportunity to share your perception on teacher professionalism in your practice at school and how it can be improved. Thus, that reflection may be helpful for you in identifying various notions and standards of teacher professionalism and you may formulate essential attributes, skills, and tendencies necessary for your future work in this sphere. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your employment.

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS:

If you have read this form and have decided to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time. The alternative is not to participate. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. The results of this research study may be presented at scientific or professional meetings or published in scientific journals, but without disclosing your school and your own identity.

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CONTACT INFORMATION:

Questions: If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this research, its procedures, risks and benefits, contact the Master's Thesis Supervisor for this student work, Professor Mir Afzal Tajik, afzal.mir@nu.edu.kz, or the researcher, Rsaldy Kaidarova rsaldy.kaidarova@nu.edu.kz; + 7705 782 1434

Independent Contact: If you are not satisfied with how this study is being conducted, or if you have any concerns, complaints, or general questions about the research or your rights as a participant, please contact the NUGSE Research Committee at gse_researchcommittee@nu.edu.kz

Please sign this consent form if you agree to participate in this study.

- I have carefully read the information provided;
- I have been informed that the interview will be recorded and I give permission for the audio recording
- I have been given full information regarding the purpose and procedures of the study;
- I understand how the data collected will be used, and that any confidential information will be seen only by the researchers and will not be revealed to anyone else;
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason;
- With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

The extra copy of this signed and dated consent form is for you to keep.

Appendix 2

Interview protocol

Research project: Teachers' perceptions and practices of professionalism: A case of a private secondary school in Central Kazakhstan

Date:

Time of interview:

Length of interview: 45--60 minutes

Interviewee:

Position of interviewee:

Interviewer: Rsaldy Kaidarova

My name is Rsaldy Kaidarova, and I am a second-year MSc student at Nazarbayev University.

Thank you for the agreement to take part in the interview.

The topic of my research is "Teachers' perceptions and practices of professionalism: A case of a private secondary school in Central Kazakhstan" I would like to hear your opinion about teacher professionalism, how do you think teachers experience it, what are the patterns of being a professional teacher and how do you practice it in your teaching career.

Let me mention some essential items moments regarding the interview:

- Confidentiality is assured;
- You can choose between Kazakh, Russian and English languages to conduct the Interview;
- The interview will be audiotaped with your permission;
- The interview is voluntarily, and you can withdraw from it any time or skip any questions that you do not want to answer;

If you agree to participate in the study, please read the consent form and sign it. [Hand participant the consent form] As you read the consent form let me know if you have any questions concerning any parts of the form.

The following are sample questions to be asked from the participants:

General information:

1. How long have you been working as a teacher?
2. How long have you been working as a teacher in the current school?
3. What subject and grade level do you teach?

Perceptions:

1. What does it mean to be a teacher for you?
2. Why did you choose to become a teacher?
3. How would you describe a 'good' teacher?
4. What key characteristics would you like to see in a teacher?
5. What is your understanding about "teacher professionalism"?
6. What do you think are some of the personal qualities a professional teacher must possess and why?
7. What do you think are the moral and ethical qualities/standards a professional teacher should possess? Why these?
8. What do you think are the professional qualities a teacher professional should possess? Why these?

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES OF PROFESSIONALISM

9. What factors affect teacher professionalism?

Practice:

1. In your opinion, how do teachers demonstrate their professionalism in their day-to-day practice?
2. To what extent are you able to demonstrate your personal, professional and moral beliefs in your daily work at the school?
3. What are the factors that support as well as hinder practicing professionalism in the school?
4. How students benefit from having teacher professionals?
5. How school benefit from having teacher professionals?
6. What are the factors that distract teachers from being professional?
7. What do you think are some of the ways in which teacher professionalism can be improved?

Appendix 3

Permission Letter to Conduct Research Study

Date:

To: School principal

Dear (name of the Principal),

My name is Rsaldy Kaidarova, and I am a Master student in the M.Sc. in Educational Leadership Program at Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education (NUGSE). As part of my studies at NUGSE, I am conducting a research study on "Teachers' perceptions and practices of professionalism in Kazakhstan". The purpose of this study is to investigate how schoolteachers perceive and understand teacher professionalism and how their perceptions influence their practices of professionalism in a private secondary school in Kazakhstan. This research will be conducted under the supervision of Associate Professor Mir Afzal Tajik. I am writing to you to request for your permission to conduct my research study at your school.

If you allow me to conduct this study at your school, I will need to select 12 teachers including both male and female, local and international, experienced and novice teachers with different academic qualifications from the primary and secondary sections of the school. The selected teachers will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview regarding their understanding, experiences, and challenges of teacher professionalism at the school. The interviews will take about 45-60 minutes each and be audio taped and the recording will be transcribed into a written text. The recordings and transcripts will not be shared with anybody else. I assure you that the name of your school and teachers as well as the data collected from them will be kept highly confidential. Furthermore, there are no known risks for your school and teachers in participating in this study.

Teachers who volunteer to participate in the study will be given a consent form containing full information about the study including participants' rights and voluntary consent that they can withdraw anytime if they feel uncomfortable in participating in the study.

A copy of interview questions, consent form, and ethics approval from NUGSE is enclosed for your reference.

Upon completion of the study, I undertake to provide you with a copy of the research report. If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me at rsaldy.kaidarova@nu.edu.kz or +7 7057821434 Should you have any question or need any clarification, please contact my supervisor, Dr. Mir Afzal Tajik, at afzal.mir@nu.edu.kz.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Yours sincerely,
Rsaldy Kaidarova

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES OF PROFESSIONALISM