

Finding Connections: The Nexus between Teacher Professional Identity and Some Aspects of Teacher Quality in Republic of Serbia

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Abstract: *This study was designed to assess the correlation between teachers professional identity and some aspects of teachers quality in Republic of Serbia. The research goal was to determine the structure of professional identity of teachers and connection with indicators of the teacher quality (N=221). The obtained results show statistically significant correlation between the elements of professional identity of teachers and the indicators of the quality of teachers. The research results confirmed the general hypothesis of our research: it is possible to determine the interpretable and plausible factorial structure of professional identity and teacher quality and there is a statistical significant and positive correlation between professional identity of teachers and teacher quality.*

Keywords: *professional identity of teacher, teachers quality, correlation, professionalization.*

I. Introduction

The interest in analyzing teaching quality and professional identity of teachers is not a new field of research, but it is still very present in research works (Danielson, 1996; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Fullan, 2000; Benham Tye and O'Brien, 2002; Nelson, 2002; Stronge, 2002; Invargson & Rowe, 2007).

A good teacher should have a strong sense of professionalism and professional identity (Sachs, 1999; Fullan, 2000; Darling Hammond, 1997; Hooley, 2005). "Teachers' identities are deeply implicated in their teaching" (Nieto 2003:16) and therefore it should to be acknowledged and nurtured. The development of professional identity refers to the process of individual maturation within the initial professional education. These processes can be considered as the experience which helps the practitioners in connecting theory with practice.

The interconnectedness of professional identity and teachers quality is proved in the research works which use the identical structural elements (teacher as a subject matter expert, didactical expert and pedagogical expert) for identifying professional identity and teachers quality (Ingvarson and Rowe, 2007; Beijaard, 2000). This three-factor model is established by Beijaard and is inspired by Bromme's research on teachers identity (Bromme, 1991), but also by different research works and meta-theoretical analysis of the importance of self-assessment for professional expertise (Bennet and Carre, 1993; Shulman, 1987; Calderhead, 1996; Hoyle and John, 1995), of the importance of a teacher as educator *in loco parentis* (Fenstermacher, 1992; Oser, 1992; Beijaard, 1995) and the importance of teachers didactical skills and competences in making students take control (Zeichner, 1983; Bennett and Carre, 1993; McIntyre et al., 1996).

II. Method

This research is focused on the analysis of the existing model of assessing teaching quality and the basic elements (structure factors) of professional identity of teachers. By using linear correlation analysis we intended to determine the statistical connection between factors of professional identity and indicators of teacher quality.

The research goal is to determine the structure of professional identity of teachers and connection with indicators of the teacher quality. The general hypothesis is the following: It is possible to identify interpretable factor structure of teacher professional identity and the quality of teaching. There is a statistically significant and positive correlation between self-assessed professional identity obtained through a self-assessment and the indicators of teacher quality.

We examined professional identity of teachers using the characteristics of professional identity defined in research by Beijaard (Beijaard, 2000): *teacher as a subject matter expert, the teacher as a didactical expert and the teacher as a pedagogical expert*. In the above mentioned research, teachers expressed their opinion on these three elements for the development of the professional identity (a total of 100 points divided on to the three elements, and a five-level rating scale with the following rating: 1 - very important and 5 - not important at all).

In order to collect the data about teachers quality, we used *Teachers Quality Scale (TQS)*, designed for the purpose of this research and based on the recommendations of the 30th Annual Conference of Association for Teacher Education in Europe (Amsterdam, 2005). The scale consists of six subscales representing the following indicators of quality: *reflection, professional development, autonomy, responsibility, creativity and teachers cooperation*. The scale has a relatively high level of reliability (Cronbach's alpha $\alpha= 0.67$). The six subscales also meet the criteria of reliability.

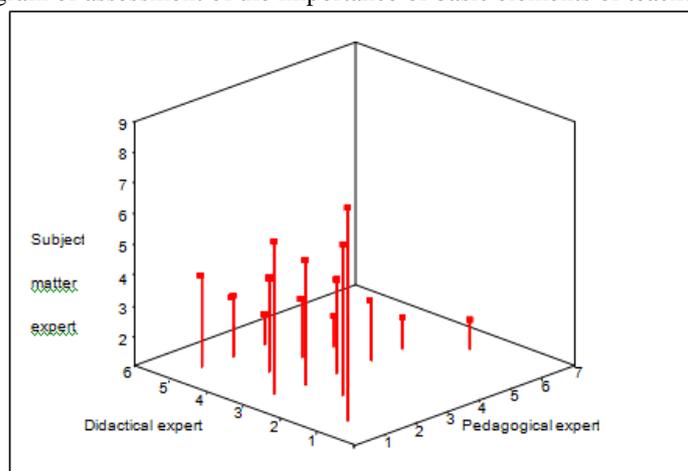
The research is conducted on two occasions, in May-June and September-October 2010, on the territory of the Jagodina and Batočina municipalities in Republic of Serbia. The sample consisted of 221 teachers, in 5 city schools and 2 suburban schools. The schools were selected using simple random sampling.

III. Results

The factor analysis of the *Teachers Quality Scale (TQS)* determined the initial one-factor dimension for all subscales, except for the subscale measuring professional development. Within the last mentioned subscale, we determined two factors, *intrinsic* and *extrinsic development* (internal and external motivation for professional development).

The trihedral allocation of the elements of professional identity of teachers, based on the obtained mean values, shows the following tendency: when assessing the importance of the elements of their own professional identity, teachers mostly give higher ratings to subject-matter and didactical expertise and lower ratings to pedagogical expert qualities (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Scatter-diagram of assessment of the importance of basic elements of teacher professional identity.



Linear correlation analysis of the factors of quality of teachers and professional identity shows the following results:

□ □ **ble I** Correlation between teachers professional identity and quality dimensions.

TPI/TQS	SME	DE	PE
REFLECTIVITY	.134**	.022	.144**
EXTRINSIC DEVELOPMENT	.227**	.154*	.152*
INTRINSIC DEVELOPMENT	.122	.122	.052
AUTONOMY	.201**	.042	.273**
RESPONSIBILITY	.090	.099	.032
CREATIVITY	.025	.194**	.120
COOPERATION	.224**	.145*	.156*

** Correlation significance level of 0.01. *Correlation significance level of 0.05. **Legend:** *SME*-subject matter expert; *DE*-didactical expert; *PE*-pedagogical expert.

Statistically significant correlations were obtained for all the factors as follows:

Subject matter expert. Statistically significant correlations were obtained for all the factors except for the factors Intrinsic Development, Responsibility and Creativity. The highest correlation is obtained for the factors Extrinsic Development ($r=.227$) and Cooperation ($r=.224$).

Didactical expert. Statistically significant correlations were obtained for the following factors: Creativity ($r=.194$), Extrinsic Development ($r=.154$) and Cooperation ($r=.145$).

Pedagogical expert. Statistically significant correlations were obtained for all the factors except for the following: Intrinsic Development, Responsibility and Creativity. The highest correlations were obtained for the factors Autonomy ($r=.273$) and Cooperation ($r=.156$).

IV. Discussion

The obtained results show statistically significant correlation between the elements of professional identity of teachers and the indicators of the quality of teachers. The factor structure of the scale of the teacher quality results in two factors dimension of professional development: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for professional development. This is consistent with the results obtained in the research on professional development of teachers in the Republic of Serbia (Beara and Okanović, 2010), as well as in a research on motivation for professional development as a factor of professional development of teachers (Bastick, 2000).

At the beginning of their teaching carrier usually overestimate the importance of expertise in their field of work as a factor of development of their professional identity. It is reasonable to assume that those teachers give socially desirable answers, which is proved in Beijaard's research conducted with high school teachers (Beijaard, 2000).

Extrinsic development and willingness to cooperate significantly correlate with all the elements of the structure of professional identity. Similar research results were obtained by Canrinus (Canrinus, 2011). The most significant correlation in this research was obtained for the factors of satisfaction with salary and satisfaction with cooperation ($r= 0.62$). It seems that teachers prefer to prove themselves professionally in an environment where they feel comfortable (work environment as a stable comfort zone) and where there is a good cooperation. It is also important for them to be adequately awarded for their work.

It is important to point out that the obtained correlations between intrinsic development and responsibility on one side and professional development on the other are not statistically significant. The results correspond to a general teachers orientation towards teaching context (where professional identity is formed and proved) rather than towards personal context (i.e. teaching experience and biography of teachers) (Beijaard obtained similar results of all the elements of professional identity regarding teaching context, teaching experience and biography of teachers as important influencing factors) (Beijaard, 2000).

V. Conclusion

The research results confirmed the general hypothesis of our research: it is possible to determine the interpretable and plausible factorial structure of professional identity and teacher quality and there is a statistical significant and positive correlation between professional identity of teachers and teacher quality.

The mission of the initial teacher academic education and preparation is not only to educate good teachers, but also teachers with strong professional identity. It is important to start developing their professional identity as soon as possible. The development has to be based on real school life.

Teachers professional identity is deeply connected to teaching practice, therefore the initial teacher education should encourage the development of their professional identity.

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