

PERCEPTION OF TEACHER'S PROFESSION: LOOKING BACK AND AHEAD

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Abstract: All over the world, there is a new meaning of education that reflects the change in teachers' profession. Grounded on this, the research aim of this paper is to understand the change taking place in teacher profession perception.

Narrative as a qualitative research approach was used within the frame of this study. A focus group discussion was conducted with 105 participants in 15 randomly selected schools in the Shirak region in Armenia. Content analysis as a research tool has been used to analyze the collected data.

Results of the study indicate that the teacher's profession needs to be rehabilitated, and within this scope, new approaches on the state level need to be taken. At the same time, teacher education should be renewed, and new demanded qualities must be included in the features, prerequisites, and outcomes of the profession. Reform is a key subject at the state and national level – specialists in the field of education, as well as in the related fields with interest in education, should rethink the meaning of education for today and enable the creation of a new teacher personality.

Keywords: teacher profession, teacher education, the meaning of education, change in education, the transformation of teacher's role.

Introduction

When the world is changing rapidly, reality seems to be transformed, and within the changing reality, the educational system requires a new vision, perception and concept. In this regard, innovative aspirations, global integration, and pedagogical and socio-cultural qualitative change of attitude towards the role of education and the role of teachers seem to be a must.

Therefore, in this context, the development of the logic of the teacher's profession is visible with participatory and collaborative guidelines where the participation paradigm includes efforts aimed at forming a new culture in the educational system, as well as in society-school dimensions, and the cooperative component includes a relevant professional anchored in interests related to professional establishment. As a result, the completeness of those steps at the final stage

contributes to the formation of the community. The ideology of new magnitudes in education directly emphasizes autonomous, self-evaluating, self-analyzing, and self-improving educational domains where educational consciousness will get its clear definition in the new culture of education. And this new culture of education, as well as global digitalization in all areas of people's life, make one think and create a new model of a teacher's personality and fundamentally changes the role of the teacher. Teacher in the past and teacher of the future. Who are they? What makes them similar, and what are their main differences?

Literature Review

The uniqueness of the teacher's profession lies in the well-known paradox: on the one hand, it belongs to the mass, high-demand professions, and on the other hand, it is characterized by an incredibly high volume of demands on the teacher's personality and professional qualities. Already today, in the information society, this profession ceases to be a unique source of cognitive information. And the point is not that the teacher has serious competitors: powerful information websites, portable information carriers, and the Internet, but also that the nature and purpose of education are changing, where the functions of orientation, development, and individual formation come to the fore.

Thus, the students have already changed, the learning process has changed, and expectations have changed. The system underwent transformation; the role of the teacher also requires transformation. Educational change depends on what teachers do and think – it's as simple as complex as that. Classrooms and schools become effective when quality people are recruited to teach, and the workplace is organized to energize teachers and reward accomplishment (Fullan, 2016, p. 97). So two basic points are outlined by Fullan as basic prerequisites of the change: personal abilities, capabilities of the teacher and environment. It is obvious that effective educational change in practice cannot occur without improvements in the teacher's work life. And if the teacher plays a central role in educational change and school improvement, then it is important to consider the working conditions as the main de-

terminant of the change process (Vandenberghe, 1984).

Nowadays, the fact that teachers are valued less by society remains indisputable. The teacher as the most important profession worthy of deep respect seems not so relevant today. It is remarkable that, due to the socio-economic crisis, withdrawal to the arena of new specialities, as well as changes in values during the last decades, fewer youngsters go to the teacher training college. Currently, teacher stress and alienation from the profession seem to be at an all-time high. The same situation was described by Vandenberghe more than three decades ago, but then again, society is facing the same challenges. Also, the fact that a lot of teachers want to leave the profession is a clear indication of the alienation phenomenon (Vandenberghe, 1984).

At the same time, it is important to reflect on the changes in the role of teachers due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which was an unexpected challenge to all humanity. The pandemic has highlighted the need for flexibility and more time for student-teacher interactions. It has recalibrated how teachers divide their time between teaching, engaging with students, and administrative tasks (Barron, Cobo, Munoz-Najar, & Ciarrusta, 2021). It is very crucial to focus on what is pedagogically effective and provide socio-emotional support for teachers. The pandemic and the extended school closures have changed the role of teachers, and most of them were not prepared for such change; a comprehensive strategy is required for socio-emotional monitoring and psychosocial support to ensure teacher wellbeing and avoid burnout (Barron et al., 2021). At the same time, this strategy needs to concentrate on the concepts supporting raising the rating of the profession and gaining social respect from a holistic perspective.

Besides, teachers are facing a rush of frequently disconnected calls to reform, to do things differently. The pressure to change practice may come from many sources at the same time. The lookouts of numerous educational "experts" about teaching, learning, and classroom practice are often inconsistent or even contradictory (Finlay, 2000). All this makes the teaching profession not so tempting for the younger generation and exhausting, consuming and requiring extra effort for in-service teachers.

In this sense, the preparation of teachers for a

modern, innovative, rapidly developing society requires serious changes in the education philosophy globally and in the pedagogical education system particularly. At the same time, it is obvious that pedagogical education is experiencing a systemic crisis because it is a part of the social system, which is in a deep and lasting crisis. On the other hand, what does the crisis of pedagogy mean? The low quality of training of education specialists, lack of skills or the lack of desire to work in schools? The first one is determined by the educational standards on the one hand and by the individual potential of the teacher training university on the other hand.

Based on the above mentioned, the research aim is to understand the change taking place in teacher profession perception and the research question is formulated as follows: *How do youngsters perceive the teacher profession and do they see themselves as teachers?*

Methodology

Within the framework of this study, the narrative as a qualitative approach was used (Clandinin, 2000) to discover the perception of the teaching profession among 13-16 years old youngsters in the Shirak region in the Republic of Armenia. Narrative research looks for ways to understand and then present real-life experiences and perceptions through the stories of the research participants (Creswell, 2005). The narrative tactic allows for a detailed description of the perception and understanding of children and the study of the senses that the participants of the study derive from their own experiences.

Participants. A simple random sampling method was used to select the schools in the Shirak region. Both urban and rural areas were included in the sampling. All school numbers were put in a drum, and then 15 numbers were pulled out. In any selected school, the principals were given informed consent clarifying the aim of the study and its confidentiality. After that, again, the random selection method was used while selecting students for focus group discussion. In this regard, every seventh child took part in a focus group discussion (names were listed in the attendance journal). By drawing a random sample from a larger population, the goal is that the sample will be representative of the larger group and less likely to be subject to bias (Cherry,

2020). The participants' age range was 13-16 years old. From each selected school, seven students participated in the study, and in total, there were 105 participants.

Data collection. A focus group discussion, as a form of qualitative research where questions are asked about participants' perceptions, beliefs, opinions or ideas about the teaching profession, has been used (Morgan, 1996). It involved group interviewing in which a small group of 7 students participated. The whole process was led by the moderator (researcher), and two main questions were given: *Who is a teacher for you?* and *Do you see yourself as a teacher in future?*

The focus group discussions were organized in schools, and the duration of each focus group discussion was 30-40 minutes. The focus group discussions were audio recorded and then transcribed.

Data analysis. Content analysis as a research tool has been used to determine the presence of certain words, themes, or concepts within the collected data (Elo et al., 2014). The content analysis helped to analyze the collected data and make implications about the messages within the texts.

Results

The process of reporting results within the current study helped to understand the problem from the inside, break it down into small parts and understand the research problem from different points of view. The full results of the paper include data generated from the research. Youngsters were quite active while explaining their thoughts and ideas, ready to justify and clarify any idea presented.

In formulating their thoughts, understandings, experiences and ideas about teacher profession, study participants were quite open and expressed their thoughts in different ways. However, despite this, the main message was categorized in many common themes. Through content analysis, the following categories were developed based on the questions discussed (Table 1).

Each of the category mentioned have been developed from a logical chain of codes that were developed based on quotes from the students who participated in the study.

Table 1.

Categories

<i>Who is teacher for you?</i>	<i>Do you see yourself as a teacher in future?</i>
Friend - Teacher should be friend and psychologist.	Poor salary - The teaching profession is not attractive, neither financially nor in terms of the activities performed.
Guide - Teacher is not a source of knowledge, but must be a guide between implementation of knowledge into daily life and practice.	Negative image - Teachers are not respected by the society, neither by the students.
Equality preserver - The teacher should treat everyone in the class equally, regardless of whether the student is a loser or an excellent student.	Not competitive - Teacher profession is not actual; it is not modern.
Student centered - Teacher should respect the child, and not evaluate the child based on his knowledge.	Autonomy absence - Teachers are not creative, they are not proactive, they need to follow the plan and standards approved by the Ministry always.
Having feelings of humor - Teacher should discover the teachable moments and practice humor to explain main ideas.	

While reflecting to the question related the teachers' essence: "Who is teacher for you?" mostly the participants mention the qualifiers for the teacher they want to have, and did not describe their teachers as one would like to imagine. However, there were some answers like: *"Teacher for me is Ms. X, as she is first of all a psychologist for me, she understands the mood of every child and ready to spent a plenty of time to talk with us about life, about good and bad things we do or should avoid..."*. In this regard the students precisely described the teacher, his qualities, skills and relationships with children. Youngsters explained quite specifically what they value and what is important to them in a teacher and it is obvious that they want to make friendship with teacher.

Speaking of the teacher's role as a knowledge transfer, the participant in the majority of cases rebound internet sources and YouTube. They justify the idea that the teacher is no longer the one who holds the knowledge: *"Knowledge is everywhere, with different interpretations, if you want to read you can read, if you want to watch you can watch, if you want to learn with pictures you can always find a variety of pictures, and learn...but you need teacher to help you to connect this knowledge to your life, to feel, experience and understand where exactly this knowledge is applicable for you"*. In this regard, students see the role of teacher in guiding.

When talking about the role of the teacher as an advocate for equality, most of the participants mentioned that the teacher should not lead the class only with the good learners and ignore the weak or average students. *"In doing so, the teacher sows inequality and creates an unhealthy atmosphere in the classroom. This is very important, the teacher is for everyone in the class and everyone is equal, this approach cannot be violated."* Besides this, the participants reflect the point that teacher should be always available for student, and if needed put more effort to support. Unfortunately, they haven't the desirable model of teacher in their school in many cases, and some students can outline only unique examples, besides many of them even didn't have any. Within this context the participants reflect to the equality and see the teacher as an equality creator and preserver.

Another, quite fascinating point was highlighted by the participants: *"Teacher should be student centered and not subject centered. They see only their subject and think that whole world is concentrated around it, and they do not notice you as a human being. If you are good in this particular subject, you are an excellent student, if no, you are a loose..."*. In this context students call teachers to see them, their nature and being, they kind of try to separate their progress, knowledge, abilities from their personality. They want the teacher first of all recognize and respect

them as persons, and, yes, they want them to be student-centered.

It is also quite remarkable to hear the opinion that a sense of humor is a “must for a teacher” as it helps the student and the teacher to understand each other and be on the same level. *“Teacher can explain any topic with joke, making TIK-TOK comments and movements, that is super ... we see, we understand and we already want to learn this ... great teacher, he knows how to attract us, and free to make jokes, they are accepted...”*. The participants again reflect to the ideology of “speaking the same language” and “being on the same level”. In this case they outline humor as a strong point for teacher, which acts as a negotiator for knowledge and information transfer between teacher and student.

Regarding the second question: “Do you see yourself as a teacher in future?”, the situation is mildly speaking not very satisfying. Out of 150 participants of the study, only four youngsters confidently said that they want to become a teacher and are ready for it despite the difficulties. Many arguments were introduced in order to explain that the teacher's profession is not relevant, at least in Armenian reality and within the Armenian school system and education context. *“The salary is very low and there are many duties that should be performed by the teacher. This is not the think I want to see in my life. We see our teachers usually angry, not satisfied with anything, always complained about something. I think they are unhappy and I do not want to be like they are”*. This was quite strong argument that includes a large spectrum of factors, starting from social-economic state and ending with personal motives and life satisfaction.

Within this scope it was obvious that all participants have unique and at the same time very similar perceptions, beliefs, opinions and ideas about teacher profession, which was quite easy recognizable based on their quotes. While talking about model and image of the teacher, the majority of students think that: *“There is a lack of respect, and in families and in society, these or other actions of teachers are often discussed. In general, it is unpleasant, we are in school feel that respect towards this or that teacher is missing... in many questions, we may not be right, but we can't create this artificially. Still respect not only for the personality of the teacher, but for the profession must exist”*. Young students un-

derstand how important it is to respect both and personality of teacher and the profession, however they mention that negative image of the profession is constructed based on the respect absence from the society in global perspective and from students in local perspective. Also they highlight the importance of overcoming this position and bringing back the image of the teacher from the past: *“Before teacher was a standard that most children wanted to look like. They come to school, see their teacher, listen to her and fell in love ... but then everything has been changed, a huge amount of information destroyed the idea of one of the most important professions ... and teachers too, and society, and state have their share of mistakes in this situation”*.

Changing world brings new horizons and young students adapt to that new shifts easily. Being quite flexible, they immediately choose the professions with high fees and avoid the professions requiring much effort and low income: *“I will create my carrier in the field of IT, that is the future of everything, but teachers' profession is up to dated ... it seems quite old and not attractive at all”*.

Another interesting point reflected the teacher's autonomy: *“We want our teacher to teach using creativity, fun, art, motivation, instead of books and notebooks, but they say that they have a plan and so-called standards, and Ministry doesn't allow other activities. We have smart teachers who love teaching and ready to spent hours to prepare the classes, but it is a pity, that they have no independence and they can't use their proactivity and creativity”*. This is how youngsters perceive the planning and standards existing in the school and making the similar job seem rather unattractive.

Discussion

It is obvious that younger generation strive for such professions that are modern, more attractive both in terms of the financial side and prestige. In the era of information technology and the Internet, the analytical thinking of adolescents is at a fairly high level. Speaking about a specific topic, they substantiate their ideas and bring a rather constructive and justified causal relationship. As a main message of the analyzed data and the

multi-valued answer to the research question can be considered as the following: perception of teacher profession and respectively the pedagogical education are experiencing a systemic crisis, because it is a part of the social system, which is in a deep crisis as well.

Fullan (2016) and Barron, Cobo, Munoz-Najar and Ciarrusta (2021) consider the change in education as the challenge of the time. In this sense, the preparation of teachers for a modern, innovative, rapidly developing society requires serious changes in the pedagogical education system. In order to overcome this, first of all the teacher profession need to be rehabilitated. It should appear differently and society needs to restore trust and respect. On the other hand, what does it mean the crisis of pedagogy? The low quality of teacher training or the lack of desire to work in schools?

The first one is determined by the educational standards on the one hand, and by the individual potential of the university on the other hand. Still, the change of the teaching circumstances requires new approaches, new methods, creation of new teacher personality. After reviewing the goal of education it becomes obvious that teacher of today has to have mastery of basic skills, intellectual development, career education, interpersonal understanding, enculturation, moral and ethical character development, emotional and physical wellbeing, creativity and aesthetic self-expression and self-realization (Fullan, 2016).

The second one is fully based on lack or absence of social guarantee. New generation will strive to become a teacher only when social guarantees are existing. At the same time, it is important to mention the absence of inner drive to go to pedagogical university and then to school is a fact. This motivation is very often connected with the attitude towards the profession of teachers themselves. In the past a teacher was born in the family of teachers, now teachers do not allow their children follow their professional path. Today, teacher in the class advice youngsters never become a teacher. This breaks the motivation and does not allow the new generation even to discuss the idea of a future profession in this respect.

For most teachers the daily demands crowd out serious sustained improvements (Fullan, 2016).

To solve this problem, a systematic and multi-

faceted approach is needed. Three most important directions are seen within this context: in-service teachers, teacher students, and coming generation – potential teacher students. Good developed policy can be first point in solving this problem. Still, while policy can influence the nature of the work of teaching and learning, teachers must construct their own understandings of the policy from personal, political, professional, and social standpoints (Finlay, 2000). Reforms in education and teacher training must be open first of all to make sense of new policies, ideas, programs, and new roles and responsibilities in the teacher's work.

Conclusion

There is no state without education, and of course, if there is no school, there is no society. Considerable work needs to be done in many different dimensions simultaneously: teacher education, in-service teachers' professional development, assessments, accountability, policy arrangement, community and parent participation in school life, new technology implementation. All this should enable the transformation of teacher's role in the school and the society. Teacher's profession should be rehabilitated, the respect toward the profession coming from centuries ago need to be restored. Within this scope the state attitude and establishment of tangible social guarantees are the must.

Mostly, all the listed activities are driven by an increasing consensus that school transformation needs to be focused on student learning and quality teaching. In this regard, creativity, innovation and critical thinking as well as all 21st century skills are called to support teacher to build his new sought-after image and act as a guide and friend for students in the school.

The pedagogical universities should provide theoretical justification, scientific-methodical support for innovations that determine the quality of education, development and support of regional educational projects; justification and implementation of educational systems management models that ensure the involvement of educators in innovative projects and social activities.

When all that is necessary is done, and the implemented actions results are visible, then probably younger generation will think about the

change and maybe think about career of a teacher in the future.

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