EDU WORLD 2022
Edu World International Conference Education Facing Contemporary World Issues

SOCIAL PERCEPTION REGARDING TEACHER'S PROFESSION AND IMPLICATION FOR CARRIER

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Abstract

There are many factors that could influence the teacher's professional development. Among these, social perception must play a significant and encourage the teacher. Using quantitative and qualitative methods we will try to identify social perceptions only regarding teachers' status and behaviour and how they could influence professional development. Self-esteem and self-report are internal assessments and could increase knowledge and skills following different activities to improve themselves. Might also be an external assessment of requirements and expectations from society and it could be an incentive factor for professional development. The congruence of internal and external evaluation could be the instrument to put together school and social expectations. We've presumed that the social point of view regarding the teacher's profession is very important and counts for performance and relation between school and community but in this research, conducted with a small sample in a study case, we found that social perception has a moderate implication in teacher professional development and carrier.

Keywords: Professional development, social perception, teacher perception

1. Introduction

The internal assessments show that there are multiple factors to improve teachers' carrier and have a great impact on professional development. It could be the support of colleagues and the principal or financial aspects. There are also many important activities for teacher professional development that can include: an orientation session, periods for collaboration with faculty, supervisor's meetings, workshops for their development, some reduction in their workload, and mentoring (Badri et al., 2016).

According to European Commission Eurydice Report "The Teaching Profession in Europe: Practices, Perceptions, and Policies", there are different forms to accomplish improvement of teaching in different countries during times. In Romania, there are changes in the perception of a community determined by social changes. For example, in education, there are some conflicts regarding curriculum and its applicability (European Commission [EC] Eurydice, 2015). So, people who decide to choose this valuable profession or to remain on this path must collect points of view regarding this profession, some of them from the community.

If this image of teacher status is positive it could have a later impact in the classroom and on an entire carrier. In this approach, we will focus only on the impact of social perception regarding teacher behaviour using some questionnaires and free discussions.

Currently, there are only a few research studies about the relationship between internal perception, and social perceptions. It is needed awareness in Romania and we can quote some works by example Gheorghe (2017) from Romania or Bezede (2019) from Moldavia. However, there are few studies focusing on this topic. Owing to this research gap, this study was focused on the interaction between these two components internal perception and external social perception.

In the literature of the field, internal perception regarding the perception of professional development is well known. According to some authors is important to provide opportunities for professional development to improve the quality of teachers (Barrera-Pedemonte, 2016; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Opfer, 2016; Santos & Miguel 2019; Solomon & Al Abbassi, 2021).

Regarding possible factors that can influence teachers' behaviour, status, and attitude, including pursuing a carrier there are some articles focused on the well-being of teachers (Suhair & Solomon, 2019), or on the role of beliefs (Waters & White, 2015).

Teachers' beliefs are therefore defined as personal constructs that can provide understandings, judgments, and evaluations of teaching practices (Santos & Miguel, 2019). Well-being and beliefs are based on self-evaluation but also on social evaluation. The specific internal aspects must be taken into consideration, but we can include external aspects provided by the community that can improve the behaviour and attitude of the teacher or makes them follow different courses in order to improve their carrier. This constructed image of Self-Esteem and Self-Profession includes beliefs, stereotypes, and judgments based on the perception of colleagues. Meanwhile, outsiders such as parents, municipality staff, medical staff, and possible church, can have something to say about the teaching profession.

By external perception, we understand perception provided by social context. Through professional development, we understand the improvement of teachers' carrier. Professional development not only helps individuals to get new skills on how to create a positive work environment within schools,

but it also makes them responsible citizens and helps them in learning under peer pressure from their social environment (Merchie et al., 2018).

The image of the profession could be an incentive factor for carriers. Is this image of the teachers' profession and their developing carrier substantially influenced by social perception?

2. Statement of the Study

The scientific problem of the study is to correlate internal perception and external perception in order to be awesome teachers.

We understand *social perception* as an external expectation as an evaluation of what the community thinks about some issues: responsibility, involvement, positive and negative aspects regarding teachers' behaviour, and what they believe about the difficulty of this profession. If they are differences between an image made by themselves (internal perception) and possible interaction social environment (external perception), they must be resolved.

The relevance of this research is the possible awareness of teachers what the social expectations expressed as a point of view, requirements, appreciation, or disagreements. This is important for teachers' carrier but also for any organization that can provide courses to develop teaching skills. We analysed the responses of subjects, and make some interpretations in order to find the real image of the status of the teacher or if it is necessary to make new improvements.

The practical component of this research is to identify the two images, assumed by teachers as practitioners in schools and by outsiders and compare them.

3. Questions of Research

Is it relevant community's perception regarding the status of teachers? Is the improvement of the professional development, and carrier of teachers correlated with social acceptance and appreciation?

Can this improve motivation to follow courses to increase the abilities and competencies? Our study tries to identify some representations as social perception and observes if teachers are affected by them or not. How did they think about this profession, if these images were based on positive values and appreciation? The hypothesis is that if we learn how society accepts and praises the status of teachers (external evaluation), we can adjust our self-image and professional development in order to get more competencies.

In order to settle which is more important for the professional development of teachers the internal or external assessment, we enclosed in questionaries some relevant aspects of teachers' behaviour. What do they believe about teachers' status and behaviour? How do they think about it or if it must be improved? Discussions and interpretation can reveal also the limitation of the study or the points that must stress in other possible extended studies.

First of all, we claimed that the Self-Esteem of teachers is linked to professional development. Personality and subjective perception can stop or improve carrier. A high score can lead to following new courses, new forms of professional development provided by the organization, and the ministry to improve themselves. We presumed that a low score of self-esteem could be a barrier to development.

How members of the profession think about themselves could become mobile for improvement. Nevertheless, results showed differently (see Table 1 and Figure 1)

So, the results were that teachers have moderate-low (33.5%) and low (60%) scores on the test. Comparing the scores of the Self-Esteem Test with the questionary regarding professional development and carrier, we found that, in this school, teachers agreed that professional development is important for them (see Figure 1)

Teachers express their opinion regarding professional development by choosing from 5 variables. We get 67% for the variable "very important" and 22% for "important".

It was an unexpected result when we correlated the scores on the Self-Esteem Test with the second questionary regarding professional development and we found that its score is high, approximately, with a reverse total percentage of 89%.

Therefore, we can assume that moderate low and low scores on the Self-Esteem test (93.5%) as personal internal perceptions led to pursuing new forms of courses to improve their professional skills. It means that teacher believes that is important to improve their skills, and we can assume that they are open to new challenges and opportunities. A new question has arisen. People who have low and moderate low scores on the Self-Esteem test (what the teacher thinks about himself/herself) consider that is important professional development because only of internal assessment, compared with other colleagues and principals' pressure?

An external assessment, as a social perception might be also involved. But it still remains the question of why they should have this low self-esteem? To see how society praises the profession of teachers we found some positive and negative aspects regarding teachers' behaviour. Negative aspects of the teacher profession perception were rated by the community as in Figure 2. So, community balm as negative aspects of teachers' behaviour: lack of implication (34%) and incompetence (32%) more than other possible behaviours. Regarding the question of what they appreciate as positive behaviour, the members of the community respond as in the table (see Table 2). As we could see, the most appreciated were two variables as good behaviour: Responsibility (66%) and Communication (20%).

In the free discussion of focus groups, when we ask what they mean by this, they said they do not care about degrees or diplomas teachers have got but what they are doing and achieving in the class with their children. Also, in focus groups, they said that they appreciate it very much if the teacher can create a well-being environment for learning. What is important for the teachers regarding their behaviour profession? To the same question teachers' responses have been as in Table 3.

Table 1. Self-Esteem score of teachers

Scores	Percentage %
High	0 %
Moderate high	6,5 %
Moderate low	33,5%
Low	60%

Nota. The sentences from the Self-Esteem Test were selected as valuable for his/her behaviour and chosen by teachers.

**Table 2.** Community member's perception regarding teacher's positive behaviour

Teacher's behaviour	Percentage %
Responsibility	66 %
Strictness	2 %
To get the degree (diplomas, certificates)	2 %
Communication skills	30 %

Nota. The percentage represents a preferred teacher's behaviour by members of the community.
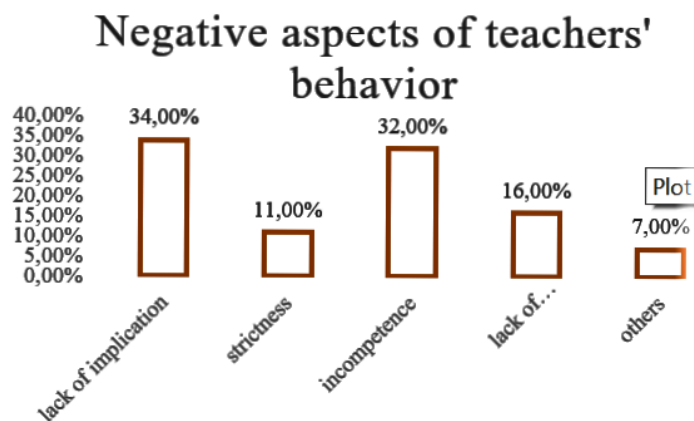
Table 3. Teacher's perception regarding teachers' behaviour

Teacher's behaviour	Percentage %
Responsibility	62%
Strictness	1,5 %
Degree (diplomas, certificates)	13,5 %
Communication skills	23 %

Nota. The percentage represents the desirable behaviour of teachers from the teacher's point of view.
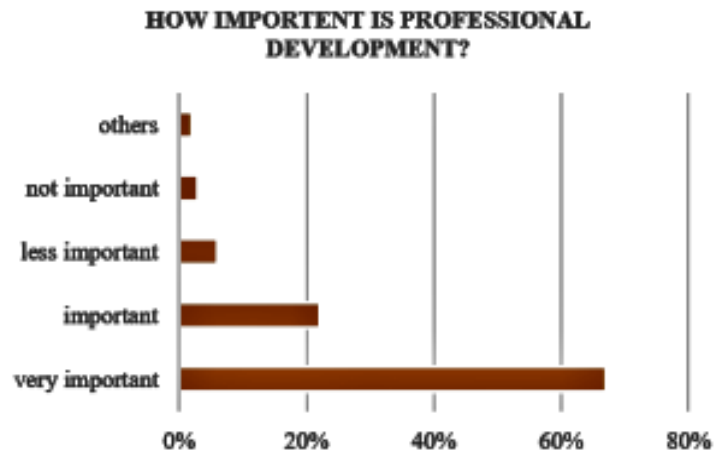
Figure 1. The percentage represents the variable chosen by teachers

Figure 2. The negative aspects that were chosen by the community

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to conduct a comprehensive assessment of image as internal professional perception and external social perception regarding teacher status and professional development.

This goal implies the delivery of the following tasks:

i. Identification of some appreciative aspects of the teacher's behaviour and expectations;

ii. Analysis of preliminary results as interaction process of both kinds of perception (internal and external).

iii. Some possible interpretations of implications for the teachers' carrier.

5. Research Methods

This approach is based on the literature in the field regarding professional development and on the use of the Self-Esteem Test (Sorensen, 2006), and the Interpersonal Confidence Questionnaire, (ICQ) (Novák, 2017/2020). The Self-Esteem Test is designed to determine the subjective personal image of a person. We create and use also two questionaries' regarding the professional status and the professional development of teachers. The demographic sample is a small community and related to a school from Bucharest with its social environment as a framework with positive and negative aspects expressed here as opinions and vision of collaborators. The Self-Esteem Test and the first questionary have been addressed to 46 teachers. The second questionary was addressed to the other 55 members of the community as parents, medical staff, and some municipality staff.

Self-Esteem Test and questionnaires regarding professional development have been applied in order to determine the correlation between personal image and professional development. The quantitative data was done in the form of numbers of choice of sentences made by subjects and statistical representations. Meanwhile, the validity and reliability of answers to questionnaires were corroborated by free discussions (focus groups). The qualitative method was to collect and debate opinions based on and guided by the ICQ which has 8 variables: Performance confidence, Flexibility, Listening skills, Tolerance for failure, Collaboration, Trust, Status behaviour, and Presence. We have selected as relevant for this research Performance confidence, Collaboration, and add more as Responsibility, Empathy, Well-being, and Income. The researcher asked representatives of the community to rate some statements that were considered relevant for research: The responsibility of teachers, Strictness, Degrees of teachers, and Communication as positive or negative aspects of relation teacher-community. In focus groups they have been asked to express their opinion regarding this profession: hard to accomplish, humble, respectable, easy to get a diploma, not for everybody. Diagnostic data analysis was one step further from statistical data. We've made some interpretations of the results and found possible research limitations. We accept that both self-reported professional views and out-professional views rely heavily upon the honesty of respondents.

6. Findings

After applying the questionaries', we found that on the top they appreciate Responsibility and Communication skills. Comparing the two tables we can see also behaviour as a variable "responsibility" is at the top with a percentage (66%) responses from society and (62%) responses from teachers. The difference is regarding teachers' degrees and strictness. Social perception has less appreciation for diplomas. In focus groups discussion they mention that is important to be involved and assist students to make progress. Also, teachers appreciate emotional intelligence, but community expectation is for strictness and support for students and families.

Using discussions in focus groups we found teachers believe confidence in the profession is very important but there think they must accomplish too many duties outside of the profession and that makes them not totally confident. Professional development is related to getting more certificates and getting an appreciation from colleagues and they think teachers' profession is not enough appreciated by society.

As we could see, even though opinions expressed in focus groups are subjective, questionary reveal some coincidences. But there is still a gap. Society and social perception ask about achievement and do not care about the professional development of teachers (because of lack of information or lack of vision), teachers as counterpart think that carrier is very important but they do not have enough support and appreciation to pursue it. Regarding responsibility, in the teachers' point of view means also the parent's responsibility to communicate with the school. Meanwhile, community members interpret it in a different way, as the responsibility of a teacher to solve all unexpected situations. This means that that percentage is more or less relevant, the significance of the word shows there is a different perspective.

In focus groups, we get more information as follows:

i. Regarding well-being, and how to be created in the classroom, teachers expressed their opinion as being related to professional development through courses (master's degrees, certificates). For the means of realizing this goal to improve carrier, they respond that it is possible by following the Regulations of the Education Ministry. The authority decides and the teachers follow and there is less autonomy in what they have to do in order to improve carrier. To the questions, if these teacher's activities are stressful, teachers, consider that they are not very stressful. They assume that they know a little about social expectations except from their parent's point of view and consider their profession is not very appreciated by the community because of their low incomes. Also, some of them are not very determined to learn about it and how to tack into consideration social perception for professional development.

ii. Community praises the achievements and selects the teachers they appreciate according to results in the classroom. They appreciate that the profession is respectable, not humble, not for everyone, and difficult to do. They are expecting teachers to have competencies and much involvement and responsibility.

Implications for the carrier that we found are:

i. First implication is the construct of self-image because they get low incomes, and has a stressful job. That construct can have real implications in pursuing a teaching carrier.

ii. We can observe that there is a partial congruence between social expectation and the image created by teachers about themselves. They choose responsibility and communication as more

important. Remain what kind of abilities are required by society and how could be improved by teachers.

iii. Teachers are communicating more with parents as part of the community and less with medical staff or politicians in order to get feedback regarding requirements from their profession. Is needed to learn also their perspective regarding teacher behaviour to be enlarged teacher vision in a social context.

iv. Teachers are not so much determining in an autonomous way to improve professional development by taking into consideration social needs. Actually, teachers have an accurate image of a lack of competencies to make well-being in school but they adjust behaviour, following mostly internal evaluation (professional context).

v. In this moment, we found that external perception (social context) has moderate implications for professional development.

This study has some limits. The sample was too small and it needs a more largely demographic sample for research. Society appreciates much responsibility in the classroom and does not care very much about their marks in university or other academic results. As counterpart teachers are not very satisfied with themselves. Might be an awareness of the necessity of long-life learning as a process.

7. Conclusion

At this very moment internal and external perception, according to our brief study, realized in one school and community-related, reveals that the two compounds are not totally congruent. Representations of social perception and internal perception regarding the teaching profession are partially the same. It seems that social perception is not so important to carriers because of different assumptions. A possible implication could be the low score of Self-Esteem of teachers might not be totally justified. It can have some implications as the decreasing number of students determined to follow this carrier or for teachers to give up. Qualitative methods reveal that teachers' thinking is important to have a good image in society, but they are not very accustomed to building it. Learning what are society's community thinking about teachers' status can have some positive consequences. Might be getting some new competencies, but here is not very clearly understood what could it be? It is possible to accept an external evaluation as well as an external evaluation and that could be a bridge between academic and social expectations. The development of technics of metacognition (to increase Self-Esteem) and more involvement in social activities are strongly required and recommended for all of us.

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