



A Critical Review of Significant Components of Professionalism in Education: A Study of Selected Documents and Teachers' Perceptions in a Rapidly Changing World

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Abstract

This study examines professionalism in education by combining insights from scholarly literature with teachers' perceptions collected through a questionnaire. A qualitative-dominant exploratory design was used, including document analysis and descriptive analysis of Likert-scale and open-ended responses. The findings indicate that professionalism is a multidimensional construct comprising professional knowledge and competence, ethical responsibility, professional values, and contextual responsiveness. Teachers strongly emphasized instructional competence and ethical conduct, while contextual responsiveness emerged as an important but developing dimension. The study contributes to a clearer understanding of professionalism in contemporary education and highlights the importance of supporting teachers in rapidly changing educational contexts.

Keywords: *Teacher Professionalism, Professional Competence, Ethical Responsibility, Professional Values, Contextual Responsiveness, Teacher Perceptions*

1. Introduction

Professionalism in education has long been recognized as a central component of effective teaching and educational quality. Traditionally, professionalism has been associated with teachers' subject knowledge, pedagogical competence, and adherence to institutional rules and standards. Within this view, teachers were primarily regarded as implementers of curriculum and policy, and professionalism was largely defined in terms of technical expertise and compliance.

However, the concept of professionalism in education has evolved significantly in response to globalization, technological advancement, and increasing accountability demands. Teachers are now expected not only to deliver subject content effectively but also to act ethically, respond to diverse learner needs, integrate digital technologies into teaching, and prepare students for participation in complex and rapidly changing societies. These shifts have expanded the scope of professionalism beyond technical competence to include moral responsibility, professional values, and contextual responsiveness.

Recent educational research suggests that teacher professionalism is increasingly influenced by global educational reforms, digital transformation, and expectations of lifelong professional development (Sachs, 2016; OECD, 2020). Teachers are therefore required to balance instructional expertise with ethical responsibility, collaboration, and adaptability in dynamic educational environments.

Despite extensive scholarly discussion, tensions remain between traditional and contemporary understandings of professionalism. Accountability-driven reforms often emphasize measurable outcomes and performance indicators, which may constrain professional autonomy and ethical judgment (Ball, 2003). At the same time, expectations related to digital professionalism, professional identity, and responsiveness to global educational change are not always clearly defined or consistently supported in practice.

Therefore, a clearer understanding of the components of professionalism in education is necessary. This study addresses this need by examining both scholarly perspectives and teachers' perceptions of professionalism. By combining document analysis with questionnaire data from practicing teachers, the study aims to develop a comprehensive understanding of professionalism in contemporary educational contexts.



2. Research Foundation

2.1 Objectives

The objectives of this study are to examine professionalism in education as a multidimensional construct within contemporary educational contexts. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Examine key scholarly definitions and theoretical perspectives on professionalism in education;
2. Analyze how globalization, technological advancement, and accountability pressures influence teachers' professional roles and responsibilities;
3. Develop a conceptual framework that integrates major components of professionalism in education;
4. Explore practicing teachers' perceptions of professionalism through questionnaire data;
5. Compare teachers' perceptions with insights derived from document-based research.

2.2 Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How is professionalism in education defined in scholarly literature?
2. What major components of professionalism emerge from existing theoretical and research-based studies?
3. How do contemporary educational changes, including globalization and technological advancement, shape expectations of teacher professionalism?
4. How do practicing teachers perceive professionalism in education based on their professional experiences?
5. To what extent do teachers' perceptions align with the conceptual components identified from the literature?

2.3 Conceptual Framework

This study adopts a conceptual framework derived from the synthesis of scholarly literature on professionalism in education. The framework conceptualizes professionalism as a multidimensional construct composed of four interrelated components:

- Professional knowledge and competence
- Ethical responsibility
- Professional values
- Contextual responsiveness

Professional knowledge and competence represent the foundational dimension of professionalism, encompassing subject expertise, pedagogical skills, and the ability to support student learning effectively. Ethical responsibility reflects teachers' moral obligations toward students, colleagues, and society, including fairness, respect, and professional integrity. Professional values relate to teachers' commitment to care, collaboration, lifelong learning, and professional identity. Contextual responsiveness refers to the capacity to adapt teaching practice in response to globalization, technological change, accountability pressures, and diverse learner needs.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Literature Review

This section reviews key scholarly perspectives on professionalism in education to establish the theoretical foundation of the study. The review focuses on how the concept of professionalism has evolved from traditional competence-based definitions toward broader interpretations that incorporate ethics, professional identity, and responsiveness to contemporary educational change. The purpose of this section is to identify core components of professionalism that inform the conceptual framework and guide the analysis of teachers' perceptions.

3.1.1 Definitions of Professionalism in Education

Early discussions of professionalism in education emphasized technical competence, subject expertise, and adherence to institutional regulations. Within this traditional view, teachers were regarded as trained



specialists whose professional status depended on qualifications, instructional effectiveness, and compliance with established standards. Professionalism was therefore closely associated with skill, certification, and performance within structured educational systems.

However, later research expanded this perspective by emphasizing the importance of professional knowledge and reflective practice in teaching. Schön (1983) highlighted the role of reflective practice, arguing that professionals continuously reflect on their actions in order to improve their decision-making and teaching practices. Similarly, Shulman (1987) introduced the concept of pedagogical content knowledge, suggesting that effective teachers must integrate subject knowledge with appropriate teaching methods. In addition, Freidson (2001) argued that professional work is characterized by specialized knowledge and professional autonomy, while Hoyle (2001) described teacher professionalism as a combination of expertise, autonomy, and ethical responsibility beyond purely technical skills.

3.1.2 Professionalism, Ethics, and Accountability

A major theme in the literature concerns the ethical dimension of professionalism. Teaching is widely described as a moral practice in which educators hold responsibilities toward learners, colleagues, institutions, and society. Ethical professionalism includes fairness, respect, safeguarding, integrity, and the maintenance of appropriate professional boundaries. Research also highlights the relationship between professionalism and accountability in education systems. Ball (2003) examined how performativity and accountability policies influence teachers' professional work, suggesting that excessive emphasis on measurable outcomes may reduce professionalism to compliance with external standards. At the same time, ethical responsibility remains central to the teaching profession. Campbell (2008) emphasized that teaching is fundamentally a moral profession that requires teachers to demonstrate fairness, integrity, and care toward students. These perspectives illustrate that professionalism involves both accountability and ethical commitment within educational practice.

3.1.3 Professionalism in a Globalized and Digital Context

Globalization and technological advancement have significantly expanded expectations of teacher professionalism. Teachers are increasingly required to prepare students for participation in global, multicultural, and digitally connected societies. As a result, professionalism now includes intercultural competence, digital literacy, adaptability, and responsiveness to diverse learner needs.

Recent literature also highlights the importance of collaboration and professional development in strengthening teacher professionalism. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) introduced the concept of professional capital, which integrates human capital (teacher knowledge and skills), social capital (collaboration among teachers), and decisional capital (professional judgment in complex situations). Furthermore, Sachs (2016) argued that teacher professionalism is shaped by teacher identity, agency, and policy environments.

International organizations have also emphasized the expanding role of teachers in global education systems. UNESCO (2017) highlighted the responsibility of teachers to support global citizenship, sustainability, and inclusive education. Similarly, OECD (2020) recognized teachers as valued professionals who must engage in lifelong learning, collaboration, and adaptability in response to changing educational contexts.

The key studies discussed in this literature review are summarized in Table 1 to provide an overview of major scholarly contributions to the concept of professionalism in education.

3.1.4 Synthesis of Reviewed Literature

A synthesis of the reviewed literature indicates a clear shift from narrow, competence-based definitions of professionalism toward multidimensional interpretations. Across studies, professionalism is increasingly described as an integration of:

- Professional knowledge and competence
- Ethical responsibility
- Professional values and professional identity
- Responsiveness to changing educational contexts



This multidimensional perspective reflects the reality that professionalism is enacted through both instructional expertise and moral practice, supported by continuous learning and adaptation to societal change. The literature also suggests that professionalism cannot be fully understood through policy or theory alone; it must be examined through teachers' lived experiences and perceptions.

These insights informed the development of the conceptual framework used in this study and guided the construction of the questionnaire for collecting empirical data from practicing teachers. The literature therefore serves as the theoretical foundation linking scholarly perspectives with the investigation of teachers' perceptions presented in later sections.

4. Methodology

This section describes the research design, setting, participants, sampling procedures, research instrument, data collection process, and data analysis methods employed in this study. The methodology was developed to ensure alignment between the research objectives, conceptual framework, and empirical data collected from practicing teachers.

4.1 Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative-dominant exploratory research design supported by descriptive quantitative data. The design was selected to investigate professionalism in education as a multidimensional and perception-based construct rather than as a variable suitable for experimental or inferential statistical testing.

4.2 Research Setting

The study was conducted within contemporary educational contexts where teachers operate under conditions shaped by globalization, technological advancement, and accountability pressures. Participants represented practicing teachers working in diverse educational environments, including schools and teaching contexts influenced by international curricula and modern instructional practices.

4.3 Research Participants

Participants in this study were practicing teachers selected for their direct involvement in professional teaching contexts. The inclusion criterion required participants to have active teaching responsibilities and relevant professional experience.

4.4 Research Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling was used to select participants who could provide meaningful insights into teacher professionalism. This approach ensured that respondents were directly engaged in professional teaching practice and capable of reflecting on professional expectations, responsibilities, and challenges.

4.5 Research Instrument

The primary research instrument was a structured teacher questionnaire developed based on themes identified in the literature review and conceptual framework.

The questionnaire consisted of two parts:

Part 1: Likert-Scale Statements

Twenty-eight statements measured teachers' perceptions of professionalism across four dimensions:

- Professional knowledge and competence
- Ethical responsibility
- Professional values
- Contextual responsiveness

Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Part 2: Open-Ended Questions



Respondents were asked to identify the statements they considered most important and explain their reasons. This section was designed to capture deeper insights into teachers' beliefs, priorities, and interpretations of professionalism.

Each item in the questionnaire was aligned with one component of the conceptual framework to ensure content validity.

4.6 Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed electronically to practicing teachers. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed of the purpose of the study before completing the questionnaire.

To ensure ethical compliance:

- No personal identifiers were collected
- Responses were recorded anonymously
- Data were used solely for academic purposes

Participants completed both Likert-scale and open-ended items based on their professional experiences.

4.7 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using both descriptive quantitative and thematic qualitative procedures to ensure alignment with the exploratory nature of the study.

4.7.1 Quantitative Data Analysis

Responses from the Likert-scale items were compiled and organized into an Excel dataset (stat12Rating5 Teacher Professionalism). Each response was converted into numerical values based on the five-point Likert scale to allow systematic examination of response patterns.

Table 1 Likert Scale Conversion Used for Data Coding

Response Category	Numerical Value
Strongly Disagree	1
Disagree	2
Neutral	3
Agree	4
Strongly Agree	5

The dataset was reviewed for completeness and consistency before analysis. Descriptive analysis was then conducted to identify overall trends in teachers' perceptions across the four dimensions of professionalism.

Table 2 Quantitative Data Organization by Professionalism Dimensions

Dimension	Number of Items	Data Source	Analysis Approach
Professional Knowledge & Competence	Likert items	Questionnaire dataset	Descriptive pattern analysis
Ethical Responsibility	Likert items	Questionnaire dataset	Agreement trend analysis
Professional Values	Likert items	Questionnaire dataset	Comparative response review
Contextual Responsiveness	Likert items	Questionnaire dataset	Variation and trend identification

Findings were categorized into general response tendencies, including strong agreement, moderate agreement, and varied responses, to provide a clear overview of how professionalism was perceived by participants.

4.7.2 Qualitative Data Analysis

Open-ended responses from the questionnaire were analyzed thematically. Responses were reviewed, coded, and grouped according to recurring ideas and professional priorities expressed by teachers.

**Table 3** Qualitative Theme Coding Framework

Theme	Description
Instructional Competence	Subject knowledge, teaching effectiveness
Ethical Responsibility	Fairness, integrity, safeguarding
Professional Values	Care, collaboration, commitment
Professional Development	Lifelong learning, reflection
Contextual Responsiveness	Technology adaptation, global awareness

5. Results

This section presents the findings derived from the questionnaire responses collected from practicing teachers. The results are reported descriptively and organized into quantitative findings from the Likert-scale items and qualitative findings from the open-ended responses. Interpretation and linkage to literature are reserved for the discussion section.

5.1 Quantitative Results

The quantitative component of the study was based on responses to twenty-eight Likert-scale statements designed to capture teachers' perceptions of professionalism across four dimensions: professional knowledge and competence, ethical responsibility, professional values, and contextual responsiveness. Responses were compiled and examined descriptively using the dataset to identify overall patterns of agreement and variation.

Overall, the analysis revealed a high level of agreement across items related to professional competence and ethical responsibility, indicating that teachers strongly associate professionalism with instructional expertise, fairness, and professional integrity. Responses related to professional values also demonstrated consistent agreement, reflecting the importance of care, collaboration, and commitment to students' development. In contrast, items associated with contextual responsiveness showed moderate agreement and some variation, suggesting differing levels of experience, readiness, or institutional support regarding technology integration and adaptation to changing educational demands.

Table 4 Descriptive Summary of Teachers' Responses by Professionalism Dimension

Dimension of Professionalism	Response Trend	Level of Agreement	Interpretation
Professional Knowledge & Competence	High agreement across most items	Strong	Instructional expertise viewed as core element of professionalism
Ethical Responsibility	Consistently highest agreement	Very strong	Ethics, fairness, and integrity recognized as essential duties
Professional Values	Moderate to strong agreement	Strong	Care, collaboration, and commitment emphasized
Contextual Responsiveness	Mixed responses	Moderate	Variation in adaptation to technology and educational change

The dataset further revealed that most responses clustered within agreement categories for items related to teaching competence, safeguarding, and ethical conduct, while responses to items related to digital readiness and expression of personal values in teaching contexts were more varied.

Table 5 Pattern of Agreement Identified from Dataset Analysis

Agreement Category	Description	Observed Pattern
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Strong Agreement	Majority selected Agree or Strongly Agree	Ethics, competence, safeguarding responsibilities
Moderate Agreement	Balanced Agree and Neutral responses	Professional values, collaboration, continuous development
Varied Responses	Wide distribution across response categories	Technology integration, contextual adaptation, value expression

These quantitative findings provide a structured overview of teachers' perceptions and demonstrate that professionalism is primarily associated with competence and ethical conduct, while contextual responsiveness represents a developing dimension influenced by experience and professional environment.

5.2 Qualitative Results

The open-ended section invited teachers to identify the statements they considered most important and explain their reasons. Analysis of these responses revealed several recurring themes that reflect teachers' professional priorities and interpretations of professionalism.

A dominant theme across responses was professional knowledge and teaching competence. Teachers emphasized the importance of subject mastery, effective lesson delivery, and responsibility for student learning outcomes as key indicators of professionalism.

Ethical responsibility and professional conduct emerged as another central theme. Respondents frequently highlighted respect for students, fairness, safeguarding, and the importance of maintaining professional boundaries. These responses underscore the moral dimension of teaching as a professional practice.

Another recurring theme was lifelong learning and continuous professional development. Teachers expressed commitment to improving their knowledge and skills through training, reflection, and further study in order to remain effective in changing educational environments.

Teachers also emphasized care, support, and inclusiveness, particularly the responsibility to assist weaker students, treat learners equitably, and foster positive learning environments.

Finally, several respondents referred to adaptation to technological change and global educational developments. These responses highlighted the growing importance of digital competence, innovation, and preparation of students for future challenges.

5.3 Consolidated Summary of Results

Taken together, the quantitative and qualitative findings present a consistent picture of teachers' perceptions of professionalism in education. Across both forms of data, professionalism is viewed as a multidimensional construct that integrates professional competence, ethical responsibility, professional values, and responsiveness to contemporary educational contexts.

The quantitative findings provide a structured overview of general agreement patterns, while the qualitative responses offer deeper insight into how teachers interpret and prioritize different aspects of professionalism in practice.

Overall, the results indicate alignment between teachers' perceptions and the core components identified in the conceptual framework. At the same time, variation in responses—particularly regarding contextual responsiveness and personal value expression—suggests that professionalism is experienced and enacted differently across teaching contexts.

6. Discussion

This section interprets the findings presented in the results by linking teachers' perceptions with the theoretical perspectives discussed in the literature review and the conceptual framework developed for this study. The discussion highlights how professionalism in education is understood and practiced in contemporary teaching contexts and identifies areas of alignment between theory and teachers' lived professional experiences.



6.1 Professional Knowledge and Competence

The findings indicate that teachers place strong emphasis on professional knowledge and teaching competence as central components of professionalism. This observation is consistent with longstanding scholarly perspectives that identify subject expertise and pedagogical competence as foundational elements of professional teaching practice. Shulman (1987) emphasized the importance of pedagogical content knowledge, which integrates subject knowledge with appropriate instructional strategies to support effective learning. Similarly, Schön (1983) argued that professional competence requires reflective practice, where educators continuously evaluate and improve their instructional decisions.

Teachers' prioritization of instructional competence and responsibility for student learning reflects the continuing importance of these traditional elements of professionalism. Even in rapidly changing educational contexts, teachers still view effective instruction and subject mastery as the foundation upon which other professional responsibilities are built.

6.2 Ethical Responsibility and Professional Values

Ethical responsibility emerged as one of the most strongly emphasized dimensions of professionalism in both the quantitative and qualitative findings. Teachers consistently highlighted fairness, respect for students, safeguarding responsibilities, and the importance of maintaining appropriate professional boundaries.

These findings align with the view that teaching is fundamentally a moral profession. Campbell (2008) emphasized that educators hold ethical responsibilities toward students, colleagues, and society, and that professional integrity and fairness are essential characteristics of teacher professionalism. Similarly, Hoyle (2001) described professionalism as extending beyond technical competence to include ethical responsibility and professional commitment.

Professional values such as care, collaboration, and commitment to students' development were also strongly reflected in teachers' responses. These values demonstrate that professionalism is expressed not only through instructional performance but also through relational practices that support inclusive and supportive learning environments.

6.3 Contextual Responsiveness in Contemporary Education

Teachers' responses also indicate growing awareness of the need to adapt professional practice to contemporary educational challenges. Respondents acknowledged the importance of technological competence, adaptability, and preparation of students for participation in globalized societies.

However, compared with competence and ethics, responses in this area showed greater variation. This may reflect differences in access to technology, institutional support, and professional development opportunities across educational contexts. These findings support the argument that professionalism in modern education requires teachers to balance traditional instructional expertise with the ability to adapt to evolving educational environments.

Recent research highlights that teacher professionalism increasingly involves collaboration, lifelong learning, and responsiveness to educational change (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Sachs, 2016). The variation observed in this dimension suggests that contextual responsiveness is still developing as a recognized component of professionalism in many teaching contexts.

6.4 Alignment Between Literature and Teachers' Perceptions

Overall, the findings demonstrate substantial alignment between scholarly perspectives on professionalism and teachers' perceptions reported in this study. The multidimensional understanding reflected in the results corresponds closely with the conceptual framework developed from the literature, which integrates professional competence, ethical responsibility, professional values, and contextual responsiveness.

At the same time, teachers' responses emphasize the practical and relational aspects of professionalism more strongly than theoretical models alone. In everyday teaching practice, professionalism is expressed through



care for students, responsibility for learning outcomes, ethical conduct, and the ability to adapt to changing educational conditions.

These insights suggest that professionalism in education should be understood not only as a theoretical construct but also as a dynamic practice shaped by teachers' experiences, institutional contexts, and broader educational transformations.

7. Conclusion

This study examined professionalism in education by integrating insights from scholarly literature with teachers' perceptions drawn from questionnaire data. The findings indicate that professionalism is best understood as a multidimensional construct consisting of professional knowledge and competence, ethical responsibility, professional values, and contextual responsiveness.

Teachers placed strong emphasis on instructional competence and ethical conduct as the foundation of professionalism, highlighting subject mastery, responsibility for student learning, fairness, and professional integrity. Professional values such as care, collaboration, and commitment to students' development were also recognized as essential aspects of professional identity. Contextual responsiveness, particularly in relation to technological change and evolving educational expectations, emerged as an important but developing dimension, with some variation in teachers' readiness and experiences.

Overall, the findings align with the conceptual framework and demonstrate that professionalism is shaped not only by theoretical perspectives and policy expectations but also by teachers' everyday practices and professional experiences. The study contributes to a clearer understanding of professionalism in contemporary education and provides a basis for future research and professional development efforts aimed at supporting teachers in rapidly changing educational environments.

8. References

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