



Early childhood teachers' perception of the attitudes and behaviors of a professional teacher

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Article History

Submitted: 21 January 2024

Accepted: 12 July 2024

Published: 7 August 2024

DOI:

10.26555/jecce.v7i2.9893

Published by:

Universitas Ahmad Dahlan

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Abstract

Teachers' perceptions regarding their professional identity affect their teaching efficacy, their professional development, their propensity to stay in the teaching profession, and their ability and willingness to enhance their teaching performance and cope with educational change. This study aims to explore the perceptions of Early Childhood Teachers related to the attitudes and behaviors of a Professional Teacher. Quantitative and qualitative approach were used. Data were collected through open-questionnaires and interviews. The subject in this study consists of 100 Early Childhood teachers in Jember who are now teaching in Aisiyiah Kindergarten. All the 100 teachers filled out the questionnaire, but only some were willing to be interviewed. The data were analyzed using Descriptive Statistics. The results of the study revealed that according to teachers' perceptions, professional attitudes and behaviors include expertise, social ability, self-integrity and productive behavior. The study also found that most teachers rated themselves significantly low in terms of professionalism. Only those with more experience rated themselves high.

Keywords: attitudes; behaviors; professional teachers; teachers' perceptions

INTRODUCTION

The current development of science, technology, and information is causing transformations in every aspect of life, including career. These changes become inevitable so that in adjusting to those demands, everyone with a profession needs to improve his quality of work. The demands of work professionalism cannot be halted anymore, especially for professionals. Professionals are expected to fulfill the best quality of work in accordance with the standard of professional practice. In other words, in adjusting to the demands, every-one needs to improve the quality of work. To do this, one needs to do an update by enhancing life skills through professional development (Fahriani et al., 2020).

Teachers' role as a profession and resource is very important in the educational sector. Currently, as one of the professions under the spotlight, it is impossible for teachers not to meet that expectation. Teachers are expected to perform their duties

professionally. They play a significant role in students' growth and psychological development; even though they are key to determining quality education. Therefore, professionally, the task of the teacher is not only related to intellectual ability but also social and moral ones (Carr, 2000; Dutelle & Taylor, 2011). With their profession, teachers are expected to perform their duties professionally. A person will be regarded as a professional if he is generally able to demonstrate expertise in the field of his profession. According to Kusmaryani et al. (2018), "a person will be regarded as a professional if he is generally able to demonstrate expertise by the field of his profession." For teachers, there are certain responsibilities professional teachers have to fulfill. They are personal, social, intellectual, moral, and spiritual responsibilities (Kusmaryani et al., 2016).

The personal responsibility of teachers is demonstrated by their ability to understand, manage, and improve themselves (Savira et al., 2018). Social responsibility is demonstrated by their ability to build a good relationship with at least students, parents, and school stakeholders. The intellectual responsibility is demonstrated by their ability to gain and use knowledge wisely. Moral responsibility is their ability to conform to moral values that apply in society. Meanwhile, spiritual responsibility is manifested in their behavior as spiritual beings. However, despite their importance, many teachers take them for granted. Therefore, teachers' professionalism is still in question.

Several studies have shown that teachers' professionalism, especially Indonesian teachers, is very low (Ahmad et al., 2013; Sagala, 2012; Syahrul, 2016). They either apply only some of their major responsibilities or apply none of them. For instance, some teachers were focusing only on their classroom teaching activity knowing nothing about other responsibilities like moral and spiritual values (Yeom & Ginsburg, 2007). Another example is that some teachers do not really build a good relationship with parents, which is a part of their social responsibility (Townsend & Bates, 2017).

The fact that teachers' professionalism needs attention has brought many researchers to study variables connected to teachers' professionalism, one of which is teachers' perception of professionalism (Ahmad et al., 2013; Syahrul, 2016). This is because teachers' personal perceptions regarding their professional identity affect their teaching efficacy, professional development, propensity to stay in the teaching profession, and ability and willingness to enhance their teaching performance and cope with educational change (Fahriani et al., 2020; Ifanti & Fotopoulou, 2011; Tanang &

Abu, 2014; Taniredja & Abduh, 2016).

The lack of professionalism of teachers is also coupled with the findings of some violations of professional ethics. Suhardjono (2006), with his experience as a member of a team of reviewers of scientific papers of teachers and supervisors, finds that not a few scientific papers that the teacher submits are the work of others or generally taken (plagiarized) from a thesis or research report. This can provide an illustration of teachers' behavior, which is still not in accordance with norms. Meanwhile, professionalism in teaching is inseparable from the ethical function as a moral reference in providing practice services (Carr, 2000).

Another study was conducted by Ujang Fahmi from Yogyakarta Education Research Network (JP2KY) in early 2010, who reviewed Portrait of Yogyakarta Teacher Professionalism in Learning Activities. The result shows that 75% of the participants were not using teaching media in teaching. This fact shows that some teachers in Yogyakarta have not been able to demonstrate professionalism, especially in terms of expertise. Teachers are expected to be able to manage problems in the classroom that require solutions in the use of technology and appropriate learning methods. However, the reality is still far from it. The phenomena described above show that there are some problems in the efforts needed to become a professional. Teachers have not been able to meet the expected professional standards. This, of course, provides consequences on the quality of teacher resources.

The researches have clearly portrayed how teachers' perception of professionalism affects their teaching. However, those researchers explored mostly high school teachers' perceptions. None of them has discussed Early Childhood Teachers' perception, which, in fact, also needs attention. Early school teachers have the same responsibility as higher-level school teachers. They have the same duty to work professionally as teachers. This study, therefore, explores the perceptions of Early Childhood Teachers related to the attitudes and behaviors of Professional Teachers.

While professionalism generally includes five criteria: (a) providing public services; (b) involves expertise both theoretically and practically; (c) has an ethical dimension; (d) requires management and regulation for the purpose of direction and order; (e) as for professional practitioners, it requires high autonomy, especially in decision-making related to practice (Carr, 2000). With autonomy, the teacher can make decisions and choices about the best behavior in providing practice services.

Professionalism is closely related to the use of the term 'professional'. The term

professional can be divided into two meanings: 'being a professional' or 'behaving professionally' (Frelin, 2013). Being a professional refers to a person who has a membership in a particular profession and has the ability to meet professionalism while behaving professionally is to succeed in performing a job that requires skill, although sometimes one possesses no membership in that particular profession. In this case, having a certain profession does not guarantee that a person will be able to finish the job professionally. Otherwise, someone who does not have that profession is likely to show success in completing the work professionally. This is in line with the opinion of Kanen (2011) that professionalism refers to the quality of professional work. The statement can be interpreted as fulfilling the standard of professionalism, and one will be judged to have quality professional work. The teacher's professionalism will be seen in his performing duties to distinguish himself from the non-professional.

These three terms are very closely related to the world of education, especially the quality of teacher's work. Associated with the existence of teachers as a profession, being professional is an appropriate term that meets the demands of current professionalism of teachers, those who have a profession as teachers and are able to meet the criteria of teacher professionalism. Being professional, it is assumed that the responsibility of providing professional services in preparing students as human beings to develop, both physiologically and psychologically.

Given the fact that teacher is the key in determining the quality of education, it is essential to do research concerning the professionalism of teachers. In this regard, it is necessary to conduct research to explore how teachers' perceptions of professionalism as criteria need to be met in order to fulfill professional service practice standards. The existing research, as mentioned above, focused solely on higher education. This research, therefore, investigated professionalism in the world of "childhood," that is, early childhood teachers. This strengthens that it is not only higher education teachers' responsibility to provide good quality education, but it is the duty of all teachers, including early childhood teachers.

METHOD

This research uses quantitative and qualitative approaches. The qualitative approach was portrayed from the interview process, while the quantitative approach was from the questionnaire. The types of research include descriptive research, which

aims to obtain data on the results of the exploration of early childhood teachers' perceptions of professionalism. The study involved as many as 100 (a Hundred) Early Childhood Teachers in Jember including all private kindergarten teachers of Aisyiyah at Jember. Data collection was conducted through open-ended questionnaire and interview. Respondents were asked to answer questions about teachers' perceptions related to the criterion of professionalism. Based on the questionnaire results data, the process of coding was performed. Data were tabulated through identification and grouping by specific category. The categories can be described according to the research variables. They are Professional Teachers' Attitudes and Behaviors, Expertise, Productive Behavior, Social Ability, and Self-Integrity. Furthermore, the data were analyzed by quantitative analysis of descriptive technique percentage. Meanwhile, interview data was used to confirm the questionnaire data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Teachers' perception of professionalism was studied through an open-ended questionnaire. Based on the open-questionnaire responses, the following four criteria are presented as follows (See Table 1.):

Table 1. Teachers' perception of professionalism

No	Professional Criterion	Percentage
1	Expertise	39%
2	Productive Behavior	22%
3	Social Ability	20%
4	Self-Integrity	19%
		100%

The table illustrates that there are four criteria related to teachers' perception of professionalism. They are expertise, productive behavior, social ability, and self-integrity. This is in accordance with the concept of professionalism (Kusmaryani et al., 2016). The percentage shows the teachers' awareness of each criterion.

The biggest percentage is expertise, 39%. This means most teachers agree that in order to be professional teachers, they need to consider their "expertise" to improve. Expertise can be defined as teachers' mastery of knowledge and pedagogy (Kusmaryani et al., 2018; Masoumpanah & Zarei, 2014; Miles et al., 2014). This includes their ability to design materials, carry out learning activities, manage classes, and so forth. A teacher's capacity in the form of expertise, which Carr (2000) also classifies as one of the criteria of professionalism, is significant to be possessed by a professional. This

criterion includes both theoretical and practical skills. Expertise that should be owned by teachers related to the comprehension of the material related to the process of implementation of learning, and the subject that is being taught. This criterion becomes principal in conducting professional practice services. Therefore, this criterion is considered the most important one by the teachers we interviewed and portrayed in their responses to the questionnaire.

Productive behavior refers to constructive and imaginative teacher behavior. It includes teachers' ability to adapt to the environment and self-development (Kusmaryani et al., 2016). Productive behavior becomes a characteristic of a teacher's professionalism. With this criterion, teachers can develop themselves and the environment to produce innovations that support their profession as a teacher. Therefore, teachers actively participate in professional development activities, even encouraged to make changes to improve the quality of work and profession. One criteria Carr (2000) which are not found in this research is the need for organization, regulation, and autonomy. The need for organization and regulation is a technical criterion aimed at direction and order. This is more relevant to professionalism criterion in the formal level of professional organizations and irrelevant as the psychological capacity that teachers need to have. The autonomous criterion is considered irrelevant as one of the criteria of professionalism based on the teacher's experience in the field. The lack of relevance and the absence of some of these criteria do not mean that the particular criterion is not there whatsoever in the teaching profession, but it is understood that teachers appear in certain criteria as a result of environmental influence. Professionalism is seen as a social construction and as a matter of cultural and geographical differences in its interpretation (Townsend & Bates, 2017). In that view, teachers' understanding of professionalism is psychologically strongly influenced by the environment in which the profession is located, so teachers interpret the professional characteristics in accordance with the surrounding environment. Environmental stimulation will determine how teachers understand the criterion of teacher professionalism.

Productive Behavior is the second highest percentage among the four criteria, which means the teachers believe that productive behavior is important to take into account regarding professionalism. Some teachers in the interview further mentioned several productive behaviors, such as conducting research, participating in a seminar or

workshop, developing learning aids, etc. Since they are Early Childhood Teachers, their productive behaviors are likely those related with kids, such as participating in a seminar whose theme is about child education. This is normally supported by the school. Therefore, they believe that school has a big role in their professional development.

The next criterion is social ability, which means teachers' ability to build a good relationship with the environment (Ahmad et al., 2013). They are expected to make a good relationship with at least students, parents, and school stakeholders. The social ability criterion, in the definition of Carr, has much to do with the public service criterion. In accordance with professional elements, public services are performed by teachers to meet the needs of others whose orientation is satisfaction. In the practical field, the services of teachers cannot be separated from social interaction by educating, teaching, guiding, directing, training, assessing, and evaluating students. Associated with the service to the students, as the person who is responsible for them, the teacher also serves as a parent. This work is also applied to fellow teachers. Therefore, social skills are vital in professional services. The teachers responded quite well regarding their good relationship with school members and parents. The teachers build good communication with parents via WhatsApp Groups and meetings. Indeed, the social ability of teachers refers to their public service (Frelin, 2013; Hartung & Subich, 2010; Kanes, 2011), providing the needs of others.

The last criterion is self-integrity. It includes some behaviors like maintaining consistency, responsibility and upholding the values of rules (Sagala, 2012; Townsend & Bates, 2017). This criterion is closely related to moral behavior. The integrity of the teacher, which in Carr (2000) concept is close to the codes of ethics criterion, is a criterion of a teacher's moral behavior. Ethics is associated with the standard of ethics where ethics itself affects one's behavior. As a professional, a teacher can fulfill the true, good, and beneficial traits such as being responsible, honest, disciplined, obedient to the rules, wise, and trustworthy, which psychologically portrays the integrity of a teacher.

The lack of relevance and the absence of some other criteria do not mean that the particular criterion is not there whatsoever in the teaching profession, but it is understood that teachers appear in certain criteria as a result of environmental influence. Professionalism is seen as a social construction and as a matter of cultural and geographical differences in its interpretation (Syahrul, 2016). In that view, teachers' understanding of professionalism is psychologically strongly influenced by the environment in which the profession is located, so teachers interpret the professional

characteristics by the surrounding environment. Environmental stimulation will determine how teachers perceive and understand the criterion of teacher professionalism.

CONCLUSION

Early childhood teachers' perception of professionalism is represented by four criteria to fulfill. They are expertise, productive behavior, social ability, and self-integrity. Of the four criteria, expertise and behavior are considered high, which means they are believed to be very important to fulfill and develop in terms of professionalism. Personal factors, involving motivation and occupational commitment, play an important role in teachers' professional development, especially in coping with high and demanding workload conditions. Meanwhile, school is an environmental factor that greatly influences professional development, especially by providing opportunities and facilities for professional development programs.

Suggestions for future researchers are related to some concepts of professionalism. Two concepts of professionalism are well known in today's world of professionalism, they are top-down professionalism and bottom-up professionalism. The two concepts ensure that the term professionalism can mean very broad, which has not yet been discussed in this research. Bottom-up professionalism is also called Independent or Transformative Professionalism. Top-down Professionalism is another term for managerial or prescribed professionalism. The idea of society, culture, and the school where they work can also be discussed to further discuss the two concepts.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors would like to thank Universitas Muhammadiyah Jember which provides the research funding through LPPM. We would also like to thank all teachers of Aisyiyah schools who willingly participated in this research.

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