

TEACHER PROFESSIONALISM AMONG PAKISTANI UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

The current research question examined the level of teacher professionalism among university teachers in Pakistan and assessed whether it differs across institutional and demographic variables. The research design used was quantitative descriptive research design in a positivist paradigm. A sample of 96 teachers (out of 6 universities in Lahore, three of which are state-owned and the remaining three are privately owned) was sampled to collect data. The Teacher Professionalism Questionnaire, which has 51 Likert-scale items, showed high reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .963). The data were analyzed with the aid of descriptive statistics, independent samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA.

The results showed that the perceived professionalism was high on all dimensions, including the character, commitment towards improvement, pedagogical knowledge, and professional obligations of teachers. There were no statistically significant differences in terms of the type of university, the faculty, teaching experience, academic qualification, or income. These results are indicative of the fact that the nature of teacher professionalism in Pakistani universities is, more or less, stable and affected more by common institutional practice norms than by individual or structural differences. The research indicates the significance of the continuous professional development (CPD) and institutional support systems, which would be able to maintain and improve professionalism in higher education. This paper contributes empirical evidence on teacher professionalism in higher education in Pakistan by demonstrating its consistency across institutional and demographic variables while highlighting the primacy of institutional norms over individual traits in shaping professional practice.

Keywords: Teacher Professionalism, Higher Education, Pakistani Universities, Teaching Quality, Professional Development

INTRODUCTION

Education is recognised as one of the cornerstones of personal and societal development, which contributes to increased intellectual capacity, acquisition of skills and socio-economic development. In the era of knowledge, universities have been given more responsibilities to produce graduates who are able to provide responses to complex problems in the world, innovate and contribute to national and international development (Arifin & Yaqin, 2022). This is a changing job which requires more attention to the nature and performance of higher education systems.

A system is centered around teachers, whose job is much more than just passing on subject information. They play a key role in developing critical thinking, analytical skills, and intellectual development among students. Professionalism of teachers, therefore, is an important element of educational quality and is influenced by the professional competencies and skills of teachers, as well as their attitude, ethical values and commitment to self-improvement (Hargreaves, 2000).

The concept of teacher professionalism in higher education has a multi-faceted nature, covering content knowledge, pedagogical skills, ethical practice, research participation, and lifelong learning (Darling-Hammond, 2000). In addition, the contribution of the academic staff to research productivity has been added to their academic governance and their role in the development of the educational institution. These expanded boundaries indicate that professionalism is more than a matter of personal skills, it is also influenced by institutional conditions like policies and organizational culture and resources (Shulman, 1987).

In Pakistan higher education system is integrated with public, private universities, with distinct governance and funding model and accountability systems. Institutional differences could affect the growth and manifestation of teacher professionalism (Jamil & Saeed, 2019). Evidence of such differences, however, is still sparse, especially within and between institutions and across academic disciplines. In order to address this, the present study examines teacher professionalism in Pakistani universities with a comparative perspective to gain a better understanding of the process of professionalism in the institution and the discipline (Evetts, 2011).

The present study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To examine the level of teacher professionalism among Pakistani university teachers.
2. To identify the effect of university type, teacher qualification, teacher experience, and teacher income on teacher professionalism.

This research is important because it offers comparative knowledge in terms of teacher professionalism in both public and private universities and the impacts of institutional contexts on the practices of professionalism. The implications of the findings can be of use to higher education institutions and policymakers in formulating strategies and policies to improve the quality and professionalism of teaching.

Also, the analysis of the major aspects of teacher professionalism facilitates the development of specific professional development programs through the study. It is also the reason why it has helped to fill the gap in the empirical literature on teacher professionalism within the Pakistani higher education setting and forms the foundation of future studies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teacher professionalism has become a key construct in modern-day research on higher education because of its high linkage to the quality of teaching, institutional performance, and student achievement. At a time when the world is becoming globalized, universities are becoming knowledge based, and accountability is mounting, it is anticipated that universities will graduate students that are well endowed with advanced cognitive skills, critical thinking skills and professional skills. In this scenario, the role of university teachers goes beyond the imparting of disciplinary knowledge to encompass mentoring, moral duty, pedagogical innovativeness, and ongoing professional growth (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

The concept of teacher professionalism has been extensively interpreted as a multidimensional concept, which encompasses the knowledge of the subject matter, the ability to teach (pedagogical competence), ethical behavior, and adherence to the duties of the institution. Darling-Hammond (2000) and Arifin & Yaqin (2022) also underline that being an effective teacher does not just require one to be an expert in the field, but also to be knowledgeable in using proper instructional strategies that would help the students better comprehend and engage in the learning process. Moreover, the concept of professionalism in higher education is growing in terms of research participation, academic leadership, and involvement in institutional governance, making it an intricate and dynamic phenomenon.

The concept of professionalism itself has been widely debated in academic literature. According to Freidson (2001), professionalism is a system that is founded on specialized knowledge and independent control over work practices, and according to Hoyle (2001), it is a promise of service quality enhancement and not just an occupational status gain. On the same note, Evetts (2011) emphasizes that professionalism is influenced by organizational expectations and occupational values, especially in an institutional context where accountability mechanisms affect professional conduct. This means that teacher professionalism in higher education is not merely a personal quality, but also a creation of institutional culture and policy regimes.

One of the most important aspects of teacher professionalism is regarded as pedagogical competence. Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) is a concept created by Shulman, (1987) to create a connection between the subject matter knowledge and the instructional or teaching methodology that would allow the teacher to be able to explain or introduce complex concepts in a way that is easy to understand and meaningful to the student. According to research, highly pedagogically competent teachers are crucial in improving student performance and learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Ethical behavior is another critical element of professionalism, along with pedagogical skills. Teachers should be able to teach with fairness, integrity, respect, and accountability towards students and their colleagues, which will promote trust and a good academic climate. Another important role in maintaining teacher professionalism is continuous professional development (CPD) (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011). Desimone and Garet (2015) indicated that effective professional development is continuous, collaborative, and contextual, and through this, the educators can continually improve their teaching practices. CPD not only improves the quality of instruction but also promotes reflective practice and flexibility to meet changing educational needs. Moreover, professional effectiveness in higher education settings is also enhanced by relational competence manifested in the capacity to establish supportive relationships with the students.

Theoretical views contribute to the understanding of the essence of teacher professionalism. According to the Reflective Practitioner Model of Schoen (1983), professional development is achieved through the ongoing reflection of the teaching experience and subsequent adjustments in the practice. On the same note, the model by Shulman (1987) emphasizes the incorporation of knowledge and pedagogy as a basis of effective teaching. The professional development model by Desimone (2009) attributes the importance of structured learning opportunities, such as training, collaboration, and feedback, to the efficacy of teaching. All these frameworks indicate that professionalism is dynamic and changing, and influenced by both cognitive and institutional factors.

The institutional context is an important factor in the development and expression of teacher professionalism. There is a great difference in the way public and private universities are run in terms of governance systems, availability of resources, accountability, and culture of the organization. Large class sizes, bureaucratic pressures, and a lack of resources often define public universities as limiting individualized teaching and professional development. Nonetheless, they usually offer more academic freedom and employment security, which can facilitate sustained scholarly activity (Terenzini et al., 2019).

Contrarily, the private universities tend to have fewer classes, superior allocation of resources, and more organized systems of performance evaluation. The conditions tend to bring about greater teacher-student interaction and are more inclined to more innovative and responsive teaching practices. Consequently, educators in private schools can be characterized by a rather higher degree of teaching efficiency and accountability (Jamil & Saeed, 2019). Empirical research within the Pakistani setting indicates that, although teaching quality and student satisfaction is common in the private university, the Pakistani public university is more focused on research which means that professionalism may be reflected differently in institutional types.

Empirical studies have continually shown that teacher professionalism is a key factor in enhancing education. Research indicates that professional educators can help enhance student engagement, academic performance, and institutional performance (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Furthermore, professional development programs of a long-term and properly designed nature have proven to have a great impact on instructional practices, but short-term training programs do not tend to lead to long-lasting effects (Desimone & Garet, 2015). Comparative

studies also indicate that institutional differences affect teaching practices, but the magnitude of these differences differs according to policy settings and teacher commitment.

Although numerous studies have been done on teacher professionalism, the literature still contains some gaps. Much work that has been done has addressed individual aspects of professionalism without sufficient regard to institutional contexts that influence professional behavior. Moreover, there are still fewer comparative analyses of public and private universities, especially in developing nations, like Pakistan. It is also necessary to have more context-sensitive studies that could explore the effects of organizational structures, resources, and academic cultures on the development and manifestation of professionalism in higher education.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The positivist paradigm was applied in this study as it focuses on objective measurement and statistical analysis to test and establish correlations between variables. The study used a quantitative research design, focusing on descriptive research, to examine the variations in teacher professionalism between the public and the private universities and some demographic variables.

The study population included teachers in both the public and private universities in Lahore, Pakistan. A multi-stage cluster sampling method was used to select six universities (three public and three private) to make sure that both sectors are represented. In the second stage, each university chose four faculties: Sciences, Arts and Social Sciences, Business and Economics, and Biological Sciences. A purposely selected department in each faculty (Chemistry, English, Economics, and Zoology) was then selected to ensure the comparison across institutions. The last stage involved the selection of teachers as clusters. The sample size was 96 teachers from public and private universities.

Through a standardized Teacher Professionalism Questionnaire, which is an adaptation of Tichenor & Tichenor (2009) Hasan (2015), and is founded on the framework by Sockett (1993), data was collected. The instrument was a 51-item Likert scale, which is measured on a 5-point scale (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree), and it evaluated four dimensions: the character of the teachers, their commitment to the change and continuous improvement, subject and pedagogical knowledge, and tasks and working relationships outside the classroom. The instrument had a good internal consistency with an overall Cronbach's alpha of 0.963.

Formal consent to the university authorities was sought before the collection of data. Participants were told about the purpose of the study, and informed consent was obtained. During the research process, the privacy and anonymity of the answers were ensured.

The data collected were analyzed in SPSS. The levels of teacher professionalism were summarized using descriptive statistics such as means and standard deviations. To conduct an inferential test, teacher professionalism was compared using independent samples t-tests to compare the results between the public and the private universities. Also, t -tests and one-way ANOVA were applied to analyze the divergence by discipline. A significance level of $p = .05$ was used to determine statistical significance.

On the whole, the methodological approach allowed a strict and clear comparison of teacher professionalism in the context of institutions in higher education.

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATIONS

The collected information about teachers of both the public and the private university was tabulated, summarized and analyzed with the help of the relevant statistical methods. descriptive (Mean and Standard Deviation) and inferential (Independent samples t-test and One-way ANOVA) statistics were used to analyze the differences in teacher professionalism in terms of institutional and demographic factors.

Table 1:
Comprehensive table of all demographics

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
University type	Public	48	50
	Private	48	50
University	Public University 1	18	18.8
	Public University 2	16	16.7
	Public University 3	14	14.6
	Private University 1	18	18.8
	Private University 2	14	14.6
	Private University 3	16	16.7
	Private University 3	16	16.7
Faculty	Sciences	26	27.1
	Arts & Social	23	24
	Economics & Business	25	26
	Biological Sciences	22	22.9
	Chemistry	26	27.1
Department	English	23	24
	Economics	25	26
	Zoology	22	22.9
	Zoology	22	22.9
Experience	1 to 5 years	30	31.3
	6 to 10 years	25	26
	11 to 15 years	23	24
	16 to onwards	18	18.8
Education	Masters	26	27.1
	M.Phil.	28	29.2
	Ph.D.	30	31.3
	Post Doctorate	12	12.5
Income	1 lac	30	31.3
	2-3 lac	36	37.5
	More than 3 lac	30	31.3
Total		96	100

Table 2
Teacher professionalism among university teachers

Factors	M	SD
Teachers' Character	4.02	0.58
Commitment to Change & Improvement	4.01	0.62
Subject & Pedagogical Knowledge	3.99	0.55
Obligations & Working Relationships	4.05	0.60
Overall Professionalism	4.03	0.57

The descriptive findings suggest high perceived teacher professionalism across the four dimensions by the respondents. The high mean scores (3.99 to 4.05), show teachers' positive self-perception of their professional character, commitment to change and improvement, subject and pedagogical knowledge, and professional obligations.

The highest mean score is in the dimension of Obligations and Working Relationships ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 0.60$), indicating that teachers see themselves as engaged in institutional obligations and collaboration with colleagues in their work. This might be due to high self-reported engagement in university professional and organizational activities.

Likewise, Teachers' Character ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 0.58$) and Commitment to Change and Improvement ($M = 4.01$, $SD = 0.62$) suggest respondents believe themselves to be ethically responsible and committed to professional development.

Content and Pedagogical Knowledge ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 0.55$) is somewhat lower than other dimensions, but it still indicates university teachers' perceived high subject content knowledge and pedagogic skills. The lower standard deviations (0.55-0.62) indicate a low variability/variance, reflecting that teachers generally hold similar views of their professional attributes and there is little variation between teachers.

In summary, the results indicate that university teachers report high professionalism on all dimensions, suggesting a high perceived professionalism. The low variability also suggests that teachers from different universities perceive their professional roles and responsibilities similarly.

Table 3

Teacher professionalism among teachers of public and private universities

University		N	M	SD	df	t	p
Professionalism	Type						
	Public	48	204.73	9.75	94	-.306	.760
	Private	48	205.29	8.19			

To assess differences in teacher professionalism between public and private university teachers, an independent samples t-test was conducted, focusing on overall professionalism. The results showed no statistically significant differences in the four dimensions; therefore, they are not reported in the table on professionalism. Overall, there were no significant differences in teacher professionalism between public ($M = 204.73$, $SD = 9.75$) and private university teachers ($M = 205.29$, $SD = 8.19$), $t(94) = -0.306$, $p = .760$.

This implies that teacher professionalism is consistent across different types of institutions, perhaps driven by common professional norms, preparation, and practices rather than institutional status (public vs. private).

Table 4
Teacher professionalism among different Demographic Variables

		Sum Squares	of Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Professionalism based on University type	Between Groups	225.985	5	45.197	.550	.738
	Within Groups	7397.005	90	82.189		
	Total	7622.990	95			
Professionalism based on the Faculty	Between Groups	243.677	3	81.226	1.013	.391
	Within Groups	7379.312	92	80.210		
	Total	7622.990	95			
Professionalism based on Experience	Between Groups	467.928	4	116.982	1.488	.212
	Within Groups	7155.061	91	78.627		
	Total	7622.990	95			
Professionalism based on Education	Between Groups	250.287	3	83.429	1.041	.378
	Within Groups	7372.703	92	80.138		
	Total	7622.990	95			
Professionalism Based on Income	Between Groups	3.401	2	1.700	.021	.979
	Within Groups	7619.589	93	81.931		
	Total	7622.990	95			

The findings made in the table show that teacher professionalism is not significantly different across the demographic variables of the sample, such as the type of university attended, the faculty, experience, level of education, and income.

In the case of university type, the ANOVA results indicate that the difference in teacher professionalism is not significant ($F = 0.550, p = .738$), indicating that the teacher professionalism is relatively similar across the various universities that are included in the study. It means that institutional variations at the university level do not significantly affect the general professionalism.

On the same note, the results show no statistically significant difference ($F = 1.013, p = .391$) in the case of faculty. This implies that teachers in various fields of study (e.g., Sciences, Arts, Business, Biological Sciences) have similar levels of professionalism. The uniformity between faculties implies that there is a possibility that professional standards and expectations can be uniformly applied across disciplines.

Regarding the teaching experience, the results of ANOVA ($F = 1.488, p = .212$) show that there is no significant difference in the professionalism of teachers with the various years of experience. This implies that professionalism does not necessarily depend on the number of years of teaching experience, but it may be affected by other factors, including institutional culture or individual commitment.

Similarly, there was no significant effect on teacher professionalism with educational qualification ($F = 1.041, p = .378$). This finding implies that increased academic qualifications do not necessarily translate into increased perceived professionalism, which supports the notion that professionalism is a multidimensional construct that goes beyond formal education.

Lastly, the income level also fails to have a significant impact on teacher professionalism ($F = 0.021, p = .979$), which also implies a high degree of reliability among the different groups of salaries. This implies that the financial factors do not provide a strong determinant of professional behavior among university teachers.

On the whole, the findings show that there is a high level of homogeneity in teacher professionalism as an independent variable of demographic variables, which means that the issue of professionalism in higher education is relatively stable, and the variables of demographic characteristics do not have a significant influence. This could be indicative of standardized professional requirements, common institutional norms, and so forth across the population sampled.

DISCUSSION

This study was conducted to find out the professionalism level of the teachers and to identify the difference between institutional and demographic variables in Pakistani Universities. The results offer empirical as well as theoretical information on professionalism in Higher Education in Pakistan.

The findings are that in general a high level of perceived Professionalism of the teachers is found both in teachers' character, commitment to lifelong learning, pedagogical competence and their professional responsibilities. The results are consistent with the multi-dimensional notion of professionalism presented by Darling-Hammond (2000) and Hargreaves & Fullan (2012). But these high ratings must be used with caution as they could be a reflection of the "social desirability" bias and therefore indicate perceived rather than actual professional practices.

Professional obligations and working relationships were rated highest, suggesting a high level of involvement in institutional duties and collegial working. This validates the notion that collaborative professional cultures play an important role in instructional improvement (Desimone & Garet, 2015). Subject and pedagogical knowledge, however, had slightly lower scores, and this can indicate a need for ongoing pedagogical growth, especially when dealing with new pedagogical technologies and/or pedagogical practices (Shulman, 1987).

One of the main conclusions of the study is that there are no significant differences between the professionalism of public and private universities on the statistical level. This challenges the common assumptions that institutional inputs and accountability mechanisms will impact on teaching quality. Rather, the findings indicate that there is convergence in professional standards that can be understood within the framework of organizational professionalism (Evetts, 2011), which refers to the fact that norms and regulations across institutions shape professional behaviour. This homogenisation could be partly due to the role of Higher Education Commission (HEC) in the implementation of uniform policies.

Likewise, there were no significant differences between faculty, years of teaching, academic qualifications or income. The results support the idea that professionalism is not just the result of individual and demographic factors, but that it is part of a collective institutional culture and expectation. Notably, there was little difference between disciplines, indicating that professionalism could be considered a higher order intervening variable that could be exercised across disciplines in a tight regulation environment.

This lack of distinction by experience and by qualifications also suggests that reflective practice, institutional culture and constant professional development can be more important in a professional's growth than formal qualifications (Schön, 2017). Moreover, through the emphasis on the insubstantiality of income, the importance of other salient aspects of professionalism, including professional identity, professional ethics and professional commitment, comes to the fore as indicated by Freidson (2001).

In conclusion, the results indicate that teacher professionalism in Pakistan's higher education is stable, uniform, and entrenched within the institution. This uniformity demonstrates good professional norms, but it could also signify a lack of variation and innovation in teaching methods. This poses key questions regarding current systems' ability to be supportive of transformative and changing pedagogies.

CONCLUSION

The study was designed to investigate the nature and spread of teacher professionalism in Pakistani Universities and to focus on institutional type and demographic factors. Results suggest that teacher professionalism is not only high on average, but also highly uniformed over all public and private schools, disciplines and teacher features (experience, qualifications, income). In contravention of the widely held view that institutional differences have a significant impact on professional practices. The findings indicate, however, that shared professional norms, institutional cultures, and rules and regulations, particularly set by the centralized entities such as the Higher Education Commission (HEC), have more impact in the creation of professionalism. The results confirm that professionalism is an institutionalized and socially constructed phenomenon and are not a single attribute.

The overall high levels of perceived professionalism are encouraging, while the relative lack of focus on pedagogical and instructional expertise suggests opportunities for further development in the use of innovative and responsive teaching, as well as an increased focus on the wider context of teaching and learning. Furthermore, the use of self-reported data points to the need to take the results with a grain of salt, as they might depict perception of practice, not actual practice. The study highlights the need to shift from the maintenance of standards, to the professional growth of the dynamic, reflective and innovative sort. This calls for consistent investment in context-specific continuous professional development (CPD), as well as institutional cultures that facilitate collaboration, reflection, and research-based professional learning. Finally, the demand of higher education for Pakistan is not uniformity but making teachers' professionalism more deep, adaptive and transformative to meet changing educational needs.

While this study has established valuable conclusions, there are some aspects of it that need to be noted. The findings are not generalizable to the broader context of higher education in Pakistan given the small sample size ($N = 96$) and the fact that it is limited to universities in Lahore. Further, the use of self-reported Likert-scale responses can also lead to social desirability bias which can result in responses that may not necessarily represent actual professional practices. The cross-sectional design also limits the capacity to make causal inferences and to explore change over time like professionalism. Future research could overcome these limitations by using greater numbers and a wider range of participants from varying populations, through incorporating a range of mixed-methods techniques like observations and interviews to gain deeper insights, and by incorporating longitudinal designs to facilitate an understanding of the dynamic nature of professionalism. Furthermore, a discussion of key issues such as institutional leadership, organizational culture, and professional development, as well as comparative studies across nations, would add to the theories and policy relevance.

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