

**A COMPARATIVE QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF  
TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY IN MALAYSIA  
AND BANGLADESH: IMPLICATIONS FOR  
EDUCATIONAL REFORMS AND DEVELOPMENT**

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**ABSTRACT**

The interplay between teachers' professional identities and their contextual factors in Malaysia and Bangladesh were compared in the study. The study employed the use of a qualitative approach through structured interviews and discussion with novice teachers in the two regions in Asia. A purposive sampling procedure was used in the selection of schools and teachers to be interviewed. The uniqueness of schools selected was of paramount important as selection was purposively done to private, public and semi-private schools from where novice teachers with less than three (3) years experiences were selected. Novice teachers of different cultural backgrounds in the selected schools within each of Malaysia and Bangladesh context were used in the study. Analysis and findings obtained from interviews and discussion with novice teachers on their identities based on the sub-identities and contextual factors of personal, school, challenge, language, training, and teachers' status revealed that the professional identities of

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teachers in both countries were not too different from each other. Findings revealed that Malaysia and Bangladesh teachers go into the teaching profession because they feel it is a noble profession as well as derive fulfillment and satisfaction therein even though to some, teaching was due to economic pressure. Besides, finding also revealed among others that the negative school context perspective of teachers as well as their training development and teachers' status occasioned by low salary level destabilizes teachers' identity in Malaysia and Bangladesh in like manner. Implications, conclusion and recommendations such as provision of improved working condition totally void of excess workloads, salary and training, other associated social benefits as enhancement to teachers' status and image in Malaysia and Bangladesh for repositioning teacher identity within the various context were made.

**Keywords:** Novice teachers, Professional identity, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Education reforms

### Introduction

Teachers' professional identity is an emerging field of research that currently attracts research attention at an increasing level (Akkeman & Meijer, 2011). Teachers' Professional identity according to Ibara (1991) in Zivkovic (2013) is a continuous, ongoing integration of teachers' personnel, beliefs, values, motives, traits, professional roles and experiences with which teachers work roles and careers are described. Tickle (2000) observed that teachers' professional identity refers to teachers' consideration of what is vital for their life and professional work based on their own professional background and that it does not only refer to the impact of other people's expectations or conceptualization. Zivkovic (2013) observed that professional teachers' identity cannot be defined as a fixed or unique content because it is not a stable entity.

Teachers' sense of professional identity is a key variable in their commitment to change and their motivation (Day, 2002). Van Veen, Slegers and Van de Van (2005), observed that teachers' identity is affected by external structures. According to Namaghi (2009), teachers' identity evolve in activities that are responsive to students' need, so that professional identity of teachers is seen as a tension between the personal collective and subjective areas of teachings. Professional teachers' identity has been defined by Vandeyar, Vandeyar and Elufisan (2014), as

perceptions teachers hold about themselves, what perceptions other hold about teachers and what factors do contribute to these perceptions. Identity according to Zivkovic (2013), is associated with self- image and consciousness of teachers. Also, observed that professional identity of teachers is not a stable entity but rather a dynamic and complex equilibrium with a variety of teachers' roles.

Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop (2004), professional identity refers to the different ways in how teachers perceive themselves as teachers based on their own interpretations of interaction with their context in a continuing basis. In order words, teachers' professional identity in line with the observation of Kelchtermans (2009) is shaped by the interaction between the teacher and his own context. The interaction is usually revealed in teachers' behaviour via teachers' level of motivation, job satisfaction, self - efficacy and commitment to occupational practices (Day, 2002). In order words, the main indicators for teachers' sense of professional identity remains as job satisfaction of teachers' change in level of motivation occupational commitment and self - efficacy.

Teachers' professionalism is a dynamic, complex and contextual construct (Tateo, 2012). According to him, teacher professional identity is an autonomous theoretical construct so that the image of the teacher actually emerges from the tension between the mainstream social representations and everyday experience of the teacher, between established professional practices and innovation between different perceptions of teachers' professional identity. In other words, there is a tension between the 'ideal' expected level of teachers' profession and the actual level of their competence. The regularly observable changes in the society and education nevertheless poses a strong challenge in a regular basis on the teaching profession and teachers' identity.

Wenger (2000) defines identity as what we know and what is alien, how we know it and of course what we wish to know. Teachers' professional identity according to (Beijaard, 2006), therefore implies a sociological and cognitive psychological perspective in which teachers' identity is revealed in their interaction with other people (sociological perspective and their

professional identity in their perceptions of who they are and who they desire to become as a consequence of such interaction (cognitive psychological perspective).

### **Importance of Teachers' Professional Identity**

Day (2002), observed that not much attention has been paid to teachers' professional identity in worldwide educational reforms. However, this according to him poses a professionalism challenge among teachers. According to Mockler (2011), for a critical understanding of the fulcrum of modern schooling, understanding teachers' professional identity is vital. According to him, teachers' professional identity can serve as practical and political tool for fostering 'common sense' understanding of teachers' professional practice while countering current orthodox practices. Mockler (2011), further asserts that the concept of teachers' professional identity does offer a framework for teachers to think through the interaction between theory and practice and to possibly implement those broad vision represented. Articulating, teachers' professional identity will enhance teachers' development to their own personal philosophy of the teaching profession such as develops and of who they are, what they believe, where they have been in the professional ladder. It will also open up to each teachers whatever scale is appropriate in the context.

Study on the formation of teachers' professional identity is fundamental to teachers' educators and mentors in schools in a bid to enhance better understanding and conceptualization of the support student teachers need (Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004). According to them, such research on teachers' professional identity will also enhance the understanding and acknowledgement of what it means or feels to becoming a teacher in our contemporary schools in a dynamic world and how to cope with the changes around. Besides, research of this type on teachers' professional identity will help to identify conflicting issues with what teachers personally desire and experience since such conflicts can result to friction especially in cases where the 'personal' and 'professional' of teachers have a wide gap existing from each other (Beijaard et al, 2004).

### **Objective of the Study**

The study's objective is to investigate the professional identities of teachers in Malaysia and Bangladesh and consequently compare internationally the professional identities of novice teachers with a bid to viewing, analyzing and critiquing the different discourses of professionalism and professionalization in a both countries thereby inferring on the implication of such discourse on educational reforms..

### **Methodology**

The study uses a qualitative approach through the use of structured interviews and discussion with novice teachers in the two regional settings of Malaysia and Bangladesh in the Asia continent. Study employed a purposive sampling technique in the selection of schools and teachers to be interviewed. Ten (10) novice teachers whose with less than three (3) years of experiences were selected from ten (10) different private, public and semi-public schools in each of Malaysia and Bangladesh context given a total of twenty(20) novice teachers in all. In Malaysia, teachers selected were of Malay, Indian and Chinese background being a mixed socio-cultural setting. The same applies to Bangladesh with novice teachers interviewed from different cultural backgrounds. Interview for the novice teachers meant to elicit responses from them on their perspective as reflection as well as their own sense of teacher professional identity was carried out within thirty (30) to forty (40) minutes for each of the selected participant under the context of personal, school, training, challenge, language and teachers' status.

### **Result and Findings**

In line with the observation of Mockler (2011) that teachers' professional practice and work is constituted across some major domains of their personal experience, professional context, and the external political environment within and by which significant aspects of their work is constituted, findings obtained from interviews carried out on novice teacher, in Malaysia and Bangladesh are hereby presented in the following dimensions:

### **Personal Context**

On the personal context which according to Mockler (2011), represents all the teachers personal experience domain , personal lives, class frame, gender or race outside the realm of his

professional practices, questions and their corresponding answers from teachers are given below in the two countries for comparison.

### **What reason(s) make people nowadays decide going into the teaching profession?**

In Malaysia, respondents responded by saying:

- ‘People decide for the teaching profession just because it is a noble profession’.
- ‘Some desire teaching because it gives them a sense of satisfaction from the profession’.
- ‘They have fulfillment in the profession’.
- ‘It is a rewarding job’.

Similarly, in Bangladesh respondents opined as follows:

- ‘Going into the teaching profession is for survival’.
- ‘Due to circumstances that could not be controlled’.
- ‘Couldn’t get well paid or better government job’.
- ‘People go into teaching because they want to be locally empowered’.
- ‘To enable them build their own capacity’.
- ‘They desire joy and satisfaction working with children’.

The findings from the two countries were not too similar but nevertheless points out that some teachers go into teaching as a result of prevailing needs or economic conditions while some others because of the satisfaction derived from teaching. This is in consonant with the observation of Day (2002) that conceptualization of the teacher’s professional identity is dependent on personal factors as the factors are indicators and constructs for teachers’ understanding of their sense of professional identity. It also significantly correlates with Mockler (2011) assertion that the teachers professional identity is solidly built up within the three major domains of personal experience, external political situation and the professional context.

Moreover, teachers also responded to the question:

### **How do you feel being a teacher?**

In Malaysia,

- ‘I just feel honoured’
- ‘Feel confident’

- 'I feel satisfied'
- 'Of course, I feel challenged'.

In Bangladesh, teachers' responses are:

- 'I feel satisfied being in the teaching job'
- 'I feel honoured'

The responses obtained on what teachers feel being a teacher in Malaysia is not too different from that obtained for responses in Bangladesh region.

### **Where do you see yourselves in the next ten years?**

In Malaysia, teachers responded by saying:

- 'In the next ten years, I do hope to become lecturer'
- 'I still want to be a teacher'

In Bangladesh, the responses is similar to the above mentioned except that respondents responded by saying they are:

- 'Want an enhanced salary'
- 'To overcome frustration in teaching'.
- 'Desires to be better dedicated'

The data obtained in Malaysia and Bangladesh on where the teachers would want to be in the next ten years are completely different from one another as teachers in Malaysia desired to remain being teachers while those in Bangladesh desired to overcome frustrations experienced in teaching perhaps through an enhanced salary payment .

### **Context of the School**

School context according to Yamin-Ali and Pooma (2012) has a potent impact on teachers' sense of professional identity. According to them, school context has the capacity to construct teachers' identity in a positive or a negative way, by either nurturing the teacher's professional identity or eroding it. Teachers' passion for the teaching profession can be constantly eroded by very unstable school context. School context can determine teachers' sense of professional identity. Therefore findings obtained on the school context Vis-a- Vis the following interview questions and responses

### **Do you feel equipped to teach learners from various cultures in the classroom?**

In Malaysia, responses obtained are:

- ‘Yes, I am fully equipped’

In Bangladesh, the teachers’ response was not too different from what obtained in Malaysia as:

- ‘Equipped and comfortable for teaching learners from different cultural background’.

Still on the context of school,

### **Tell me about the school where you are teaching**

In Malaysia respondents answers were as follows:

- ‘Impressive’
- ‘It is an old school’
- ‘No instructional materials’
- ‘Experience heavy workloads’
- ‘No Information and Communication Technology (ICT)’
- ‘We mostly have obsolete equipment’
- ‘My school has a comfortable environment’

In Bangladesh, respondent opinion on the satisfaction of their school as follows:

- Fearless learning environment

### **How would you describe the support from school management and department of education?**

In Malaysia, responses obtained are:

- ‘Well, they give financial support’
- ‘They give some moral support’
- ‘Give some Infrastructural supports’
- ‘But no parental support’

On the Bangladesh report, findings revealed that teachers opined that:

- ‘Very active support from school management’
- ‘Support for sanitation by the school management’



### **What constitute positive and negative aspect of teaching?**

In Malaysia, responses includes:

- ‘To me the bright future of the learners is a positive aspect of teaching’
- ‘When my student are bored to learn is viewed to me as negative’.
- ‘Students lack of passion is a negative side of teaching for me’
- ‘Students not willing to listen or learn (negative)

In Bangladesh, teacher’s perceptions on what constitute positive and negative aspect of teaching includes:

- ‘One positive aspect of teaching I like is group discussion’
- ‘Consultation with veteran teachers’
- ‘Supervision for teachers is a positive side of teaching to me ‘.
- ‘A positive aspect I like is the support with necessary material by the school management committee ‘

### **How can the school offer support in your becoming a better teacher?**

In Malaysia responses are:

- Schools can make reduction of administrative assignments which hampers daily teaching or classroom activities
- Schools can provide internet services and ICT.

In Bangladesh, responses are:

- Support by schools can be in provision of adequate facilities

Findings on the school context in the two countries are not exactly the same from the teachers’ responses although slightly similar. Findings obtained from the two countries of Malaysia and Bangladesh depicts the observation of Beijaard et al (2004) that professional identity is an unstable concept, shifting over time and subject to continual renewal so that the formation of professional identity is different on responses of teachers to “who they are at a given moments and who they want to become” In line with the observation of Flores and Day (2006) that the influence of the school and personal context of teachers are significant variables to be taken into consideration in the assessment of teachers’ experiences and professional identity. According to them the perception of school context affects ways in which teachers develops and are identified.

Findings is in line with Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) who asserts that teachers' experiences in different contexts and what relationship exists in these contexts and of course how they consequently develop sub-identities that invariably influence the main or overall professional identity of the teachers.

Besides, Beijaard et al (2004) asserts that some of these sub-identities are connected with each other and consequently form the overall core or main professional identify so that it becomes pertinent for teachers to keep their sub-identities in balance and not enabling conflict between each of them. This is because situations according to Beijaard et al (2004) such as change in working condition or position can result to teachers in service to experience identity conflict.

Again, findings obtained are consistent with the observation of Beijaard et al (2004) that identity is co-structured by both personal and contextual factors and characteristics so that a teacher is not entirely unique but that the teachers image(s) of self generally influences the method he or she uses while teaching, attitudes towards students, developed approaches as well as educational changes they cause to happen. The context basically refers to the landscapes (both present and past) in which the teacher lives, works, learn, function, or interact with colleagues and his students.

### **Training Context**

Professional identity of teachers can be shaped through training programmes used to test teachers' attitudes, unexamined beliefs, and knowledge (Morris and Yamin-Ali, 2006). Responses obtained from novice teachers in the training context are as follows:

#### **Did your training sufficiently and adequately prepare you for your teaching profession?**

In Malaysia responses include:

- 'Our training not enough'
- 'Need workshop experiences'
- 'There is the need stress management trainings'.

Responses from teachers in Bangladesh includes:

- 'The training not sufficient'

- ‘ Definitely need ICT training’
- ‘Overseas training required’
- ‘Need continuous training for development’

### **Challenge Context**

Again in line with Morris and Yamin (2006) who rightly observed that teachers’ challenging experiences and tensions in their school professional delivery can result to the dynamic formation of their professional identity, therefore findings in the challenge context as reflected in the responses teachers to interview questions are as follows:

#### **What do you regard as your biggest challenges as a teacher and why?”**

The responses in Malaysia teachers are as follows:

- ‘Unstable educational system is a big challenge’
- ‘Chaotic educational system’

In Bangladesh, teachers’ responses to the same question under this context was reported as:

- There is an excess workload
- Poor salary
- Inadequate resources.

### **Language Context**

Teachers’ response on the question

#### **Are you confidence to teach in the language of instruction in your school?**

For Malaysia, the responses are as follows:

- ‘ Yes, very confident’
- ‘Imperfect language proficiency’.

In Bangladesh, responses are as follows:

- ‘Confident in the use of Bangladesh as the only means of communication in primary schools’.

### Teachers Status context

Findings revealed that teachers' status were observed in the responses to the questions as

#### How do you think your school and the community value the status of teachers?

In Malaysia, the responses were as follows:

To me, people look down on teachers'.

There is less respect for teachers'.

On the other hand, Bangladesh teachers' responses are as follows:

'Teachers are not respected'

'Teachers ranked low in the society'.

Teachers are faced with financial crises so that rating teachers is low'.

From the findings above, there seem to exist through the semi-structured interviews and questionnaires the important of structural and organizational characteristics factors of workplace if an effective learning cultures is to be enhanced in schools since there exist in line with Flores (2001) an interplay between teachers personal and context factors.

Although Beijaard et al (2004), observed that a shared sense or perception of professional identity is difficult to identify when studying teachers professional identity. However, findings obtained in the two countries are of comparable analysis on teachers' identity. Although further in accordance with Beijaard et al (2004), the two sides of professional identity in both countries seems to be evidently and strongly interwoven as are emphasized by teachers in the two countries. Study findings in consisted with the assertion of Tickle (2000) that professional identity refers not only to the impact or effect of teacher conceptions and expectations and widely acceptable images they project in the society but also what teachers perceive themselves or perhaps find significant in their daily professional work, life and practices in their professional experiences.

Findings under the various context is also consistent with the observation of Day, Kington, Stobart, & Sammons, (2006) that teachers' sense of professional identity enhances teachers motivation, self-efficacy, job commitment and satisfaction which is a key factor in

becoming an effective teacher. Findings also revealed that negative school context, training development, teacher status vis-à-vis salary of teachers in line with Flores and Day (2006) destabilizes teachers' identity in Malaysia and Bangladesh. Also in line with the observation of Yamin-Ali et al (2012) that clearly speaking, the contexts in which participants teach does influenced their professional identity.

### **International Comparison of Teachers' Status in Malaysia and Bangladesh**

The status or image of teachers in one of the indicators reflecting the importance attached to education and the teaching profession in every culture. Fwu and Wang (2002), asserts that the social status of teachers is the position of standing of teaching in hierarchy of all other occupation as an occupation. This according to them is usually established by the prestige, authority enjoyed by professionals and wealth in comparison to other professions or occupations. Therefore, a comparison of social status of teaching in different countries like Malaysia and Bangladesh may reveal the importance attached to teaching and the level of respect accorded or reserved for teachers and the teaching profession in each country. This is in accordance to the observation of Biddle (1995) and Fwu et al (2002), that the inquiry into the social status of teacher is of utmost importance as it tends to provide an observable insight into the prestige and significance citizenry accorded to education and the teaching profession in each country.

Therefore, in line with the observation of Fwu et al (2002), that an international comparison of teaching status can be viewed from two perspectives namely as the occupational prestige accorded to teaching which measures an outsider's (public) perspective of the respect, prestige assigned to teaching as well as the work perception of the teachers (insiders) themselves, status from prestige for teaching profession.

From the comprehensive interviews analysis conducted among teachers in Malaysia and Bangladesh on status of teachers, an appreciable percentage of teachers surveyed expressed in their personal context in Malaysia that they have a sense of deep satisfaction, fulfilment, as teachers and that it is a noble profession, so that they still want to remain in the teaching profession especially as lecturers overtime. The contrast is however the case for teachers' personal context in Bangladesh whose perceptions revealed a discontent toward the profession.

They observed that their being in the teaching profession was circumstance being not highly paid, teachers being always faced with financial crisis and teachers not being respected in public decision making so that the occupational prestige of teaching is ranked low among other profession's status from work perception to teaching profession.

Comparative studies of teachers' professional identity in Malaysia and Bangladesh revealed that most teachers in Malaysia contexts were satisfied with the intrinsic factor of teaching such as helping children to acquire relevant knowledge, modifying their behaviours as well as the public image of the teaching professions as a honourable one but rather are dissatisfied with the nature of stressful workload, inadequate workshop and training as extrinsic factors on the other hand. Study revealed in Bangladesh that teaching status with regard to their job perception revealed that they are satisfied with the pupils' respect for them and comfortable with them but with extrinsic factors such as level of workload, inadequate teachers' resources and low respect for teachers in the public is a dissatisfaction. The implications of this comparisons and obtained relationship of professional identity in the two countries are important for the discussion of conceptualization of the professional identity of teachers and the implementation of professional development of teachers in schools in the countries in question.

### **Implications for Education Reform and National Development**

Day (2002) observed that not much attention has been paid to teachers' professional identity in worldwide educational reforms. Most often than not, the goals of educational reforms are usually presented with an overly ambitious, excessively broad and vague manner with its proposed innovations designed very poorly. The outcome is that, teachers are laden with excessive challenging tasks and difficulties of implementing the aims and innovations into concrete terms in the classroom. The priority of such reforms many times rather than being that of educational development are that of financial or school reorganization within a nationalistic framework so that the teacher does not have the sense of clarity or direction to appraise those reforms which they are expected to implement (Van den & Slegers, 1996; Van den & Slegers, 2009; Hageaves, 1996).

Therefore, since finding in the study revealed that teachers in Malaysia and Bangladesh are generally faced with challenges and training needs besides their low morale and status identity formations viable reforms should nevertheless accommodate initial teacher trainings as well as continual teacher training programs as fundamental change to support the reform process. Reform in the educational practices should cater for training novice teachers in the adopted language of the discourse community into which they found themselves so that they cautiously act, talk, think, feel, belief and value the ways of life of the people and consequently will be able to consciously use language to mediate their professional practice. Government and stakeholders therefore should make consultations with teachers over viable educational reform, associated pressures through the use of profitable mechanism for accountability of policy reform which though in time past had badly suppressed teachers' status, morale, confidence and teachers' overall self-identity (Van veen & Slegers, 2009).

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### Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

i. The study whose main purpose was to compare the professional identities of novice teachers in Malaysia and Bangladesh identified teachers identity through their daily interaction with their personal, school, training, language, and teachers status context. Generally findings revealed that the perspectives and reflections of novice teachers in Malaysia under each of the featured context were not different from the personal context to the teacher status context to the extent that novice teachers observed that the context of the school and training as well as low salary status culminating to low teachers status destabilizes their professional identity. Since professional development of teachers is a prerequisite to ensuring a sustainable high educational outputs and that the teachers' profession identity is vital to it (Wang, 2014), school management committee, educational department and communities in Malaysia and Bangladesh should set up a training opportunities for novice teachers and by implication to other teachers to improve the professional service delivery.

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