

Research on the Impact of Reality Shock on the Professional Identity of Junior Teachers

Ming Gao^{1,a,*}

¹*University of York, York, YO10 5DD, United Kingdom*

a. Freyagm@163.com

**corresponding author*

Abstract: The reality shock creates complexity and uncertainty for junior teachers, which in turn affects their sense of professional identity. The relationship between reality shock and junior teachers' professional identity is described in detail through a literature review. It is found that reality shock can cause some junior teachers to question their profession and thus reduce their sense of professional identity. To reduce the impact of reality shock on junior teachers' professional identity, it is necessary for junior teachers to share teaching resources with other colleagues and provide each other with tools and emotional support.

Keywords: reality shock, junior teachers, professional identity, emotional support

1. Introduction

With the global expansion of higher education, the demand for teachers has gradually increased. Still, according to data from the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, it can be seen that teacher attrition is growing faster than the supply of teachers [1]. In particular, teacher attrition rates among junior teachers have received much attention from the profession. The attrition rate of junior instructors in the United States is demonstrated by the fact that 14% of junior teachers quit after their first year, 33% quit after three years, and the remaining 50% quit after five years [2]. Not only in the United States, but also in other nations throughout the world, junior teachers are leaving the profession at an alarming pace. Australia, for example, has a teacher shortage, England has a steady vacancy rate, and junior teacher attrition rates are increasing in China [3]. The reason for this phenomenon is likely to be that junior teachers realized that the work content and environment were more demanding than they expected in actual work. As a result, junior teachers are beginning to express concerns about the numerous problems they will encounter in their future careers, and these concerns will influence and determine whether they will remain in the field.

Junior teachers' identification with their professional identity is essential to understanding their careers and professional decisions. However, the complexity and uncertainty caused by reality shock to junior teachers also affect their professional identity. This effect can be divided into positive and negative effects. The positives include increased contact between junior teachers and students, as well as enriching instruction with variety, challenge, and teacher autonomy. On the other hand, negative factors are the heavy workload, the bureaucracy, the working hours, the inability to balance work and life, and the behavioral problems of students [4]. The choice of junior teachers to leave an academic position is not usually the result of a single event. These self-awarenesses and professional identities are repeatedly constructed, challenged, and modified with the development of teacher experience [5].

When junior teachers experience a reality shock, such as a discrepancy between teaching realities and assumptions, they need to 'reconstruct' their initial identity as teachers to increase their professional identity [6].

The theme of this study was to explore the impact of reality shock on the professional identity of junior teachers and to look for similarities or commonalities through extensive literature reading. Much of the research on junior teachers has focused on the teaching environment and teacher experiences, and it is generally accepted that these factors interact with and influence teachers' thinking and behavior. On the other hand, junior teachers are more susceptible to external factors. As Nias suggests, people feel threatened when they face changes that affect their self-image and identity. The significance of this paper is also to explore the kind of impact that junior teachers have on their own professional identity when they are subjected to reality shock. [7].

2. Literature Review

2.1. Reality Shock

Reality shock is also known as transition shock [8-9]. When new teachers find that the "actual" world of teaching differs significantly from their "phenomenal" world of education, they are often taken aback and frustrated. Research has found that early in a teacher's career, when they are first exposed to teaching complex subjects, they can experience a higher level of emotional exhaustion, causing a certain amount of psychological stress. This stress can lead teachers to a sense of self-doubt, even self-denial, which has a worse impact on their professional identity [10].

Junior instructors' interactions with students and in the classroom are typically the leading causes of reality shock, with concerns about classroom management and discipline being cited as the most serious and ongoing issues. Some junior teachers start teaching believing they are competent in the classroom but are still determining their ability to handle the school environment in terms of organization and communication with leaders, staff, and parents of students. The working atmosphere in school hindered their development of self-awareness and professional confidence and was more likely to lead to psychological burnout. Besides novice teachers who experience shock due to physical exhaustion and mental stress, they often experience self-doubt at the beginning of their careers [11]. If junior teachers can face the demands of the profession, maintain a high level of recognition, and survive reality shock, this will enhance their professional development. Conversely, if junior teachers lack support, their professional development is likely to be hindered by the impact of reality shock at the expense of the education system [11].

2.2. Professional Identity of Teachers

Teacher identity is referred as teachers' perception of themselves as a certain kind of person in a given environment. A teacher's professional identity is based on their sense or perception of the characteristics associated with their role or profession. This definition of identity allows teachers to discover and shape their identity more closely. In a sense, teachers shape personal identity through their knowledge, values, feelings, and purposes. Regarding the development of the teaching profession, the formation of professional identity is not only about 'who I am' but, more importantly, about 'who I want to be.' Teachers must actively engage in professional development because developing their professional identities as teachers is a dynamic and continuing process.

Teachers' professional identity and competencies are crucial in determining commitment to the profession. Integrating a teacher's professional preferences, core values, goals, identifications, and viewpoints in their essential functions defines a commitment to the work. Because they typically take pride in their work and utilize it to grow and achieve self-actualization, teachers who have a strong sense of professional identity are more likely to succeed in their careers [12]. Many factors help

teachers to increase their professional identity, including job setting, work experience, teaching, and the help given by the school. When teachers have a sense of professional identity and receive positive feedback, they are more interested in researching changes in educational programs, exploring classroom education, and helping learners to learn [13].

The beginning of a teacher's career is critical, during which the most severe shocks from reality occur. This reality shock can lead new teachers to make major professional decisions that can have lifelong consequences [14]. Reality shock can simply be understood as the difference between theoretical training and teaching practice. And those who experience such wonders are more likely to be affected by the problems and stresses that come with the workplace and to leave teaching [15]. But strictly speaking, reality shock is not a clear-cut concept, it refers to many different forms. The first is perceptions of problems, including subjective perceptions of issues and stress, complaints about workload and pressure, and psychological and physical burdens. The second is behavior changes, which means a change in the teacher's teaching behavior due to external forces contrary to his or her beliefs. The following is a change in attitude, which means a change in the belief system of education. For example, the teaching methods are switched from a positive to a negative attitude. The fourth is personality change, especially the change from instability to stability in the emotional sphere, as well as the change of self-concept. The last is to leave the teaching profession. When junior teachers find that the gap between ideals and reality is too broad and all illusions are shattered, they leave their jobs [15].

3. The Analysis of Impact of Reality Shock on the Professional Identity of Junior Teachers

3.1. Teaching Attitude

The teachers' professional identity changes from a liberal and idealistic attitude towards education in the pre-service period to a more conservative and traditional philosophy in the first year of teaching. In the subsequent period, attitudes towards education plateaued, and attitudes towards students and teaching stabilized, leading to a stronger sense of professional identity [16]. Changes in professional identity are expected at the beginning of a teacher's career. Not all teachers' attitudes follow the same pattern of change. Changes in teachers' attitudes depend on personal variables, preferences for particular topics, the teacher's training process, and the characteristics of the workplace's environment. For example, young teachers with introverted and reticent traits show more conservative attitudes toward their professional identity as teachers, and they are increasingly inclined to go for authoritative behavior. Conversely, junior teachers with more positive attitudes show more persistent and innovative attitudes regarding their professional identity when they are subjected to natural shocks (such as the work environment, teaching, and communication with superiors and colleagues) [17].

3.2. Teaching Strategies

Reality shock is the result of different causes, the causes of which can be divided into personal and situational causes. Personal causes may be misconceptions about the teaching profession, unmotivated work attitudes, and inappropriate individual personality traits. Contextual causes may be inadequate resources for professional training in schools, and problematic learning and working environments (bureaucracy, inadequate staffing, heavy workloads, etc.). Junior teachers are placed in classes that are more difficult to manage, require less competence, or have to teach subjects for which they need training [18]. Different types of junior teachers deal with the reality shock differently. The most direct impact of this situation on the professional identity of junior professors is that junior teachers with a high professional identity will perform better in the classroom, be more flexible, better able to withstand pressure, more adaptable and adopt multiple perspectives, and use a wider variety of teaching strategies to cope [19]. When junior teachers have a low level of identification, they

usually see themselves as defensive and have no way to motivate their students. This can lead to junior teachers becoming less motivated and resistant to the teacher position.

3.3. Teaching Responsibility

The school administration should take responsibility for classroom discipline. When junior teachers' sense of identity increases, they emphasize the importance of respect, flexibility, and tolerance, the importance of communicating empathy, the need to understand individual differences, and the responsibility to respond in ways that promote students' academic and personal growth. Junior teachers' sense of identity and responsibility increases self-concept and autonomy and suggests that differences among teachers can be adjusted appropriately in the face of reality shock. Because Junior teachers' sense of identity has increased, they have changed their attitudes to their work and have gradually deepened their sense of teacher responsibility over time. [15].

4. Discussion

4.1. For Junior Teacher

4.1.1. Emotional Support

The study discovered that while the joy of teaching can soften the reality shock of constructivist beliefs, it cannot relieve instructors' emotional tiredness. Thus, teacher motivation was associated with constructivist ideas and levels of emotional exhaustion and was also linked to changes in junior teachers' constructivist beliefs, that is, junior teachers' professional identity [20]. Collaboration between teachers can effectively reduce junior teachers' emotional exhaustion and increase their sense of identity with the profession. This finding was confirmed in a study of 336 junior teachers: about 45% of junior teachers who intended to leave reported a lack of teaching resources to share with colleagues [21]. On the other hand, the emotional support of colleagues, has been proven in several studies of experienced in-service younger teachers to help with motivation and stress reduction.

4.1.2. Instrumental Support

Instrumental support may be more important than emotional support for inexperienced junior teachers, making it easier for them to gain a sense of professional identity. However, as teaching experience increases and junior teachers grow, emotional support becomes more critical [20]. Appropriate assistance is essential when junior teachers start their careers. This helps junior teacher build confidence and further improve their job satisfaction teaching skills. While reducing the negative impact of reality shock on junior teachers, it can increase their sense of identity with the teaching profession [22].

4.2. For College

Before entering the profession, junior teachers have 'vague concerns' about the work, envisaging problems and situations that will arise in the workplace. However, junior teachers enter the profession with more specific and practical concerns and encounter more issues outside the case, which can lead to increased stress [23]. The difficulty of assisting and keeping junior teachers is a top priority for schools today. Reality shock sheds new light on the formation of junior teachers' professional identities. However, schools that want to hire junior instructors should emphasize developing professional identities and long-term plans that are more important to their careers than just the current short-term attractiveness [24].

The fallibility of information, the uncertainty of the future, and the complexity of education also add to a large extent to the ambiguity of teaching situations. This uneasy feeling prevents junior teachers from identifying deeply with the profession. The emergence of reality shock also means that general teacher education needs to be improved, as it does not provide the situations that will happen to teachers in the classroom. School authorities have resisted reality shock, but this hides the educational innovations triggered by junior teachers [15]. Reality shock reveals many problems that junior teachers face in their jobs, issues that are often overlooked, and that people believe they should learn to solve by becoming teachers but ignore the plight of junior teachers. If the problems posed by reality shock were addressed, junior teachers' professional identity would gradually increase, and they would find joy and happiness in the profession, making it more attractive [25].

5. Conclusion

A junior teacher's professional identity develops from a pre-service perception of their future orientation and plays a role in shaping future behavior. In the face of this reality, teacher education programs play a crucial role in constructing teachers' professional identity by emphasizing the practical aspects of teaching, raising awareness of the importance of emotions, and prompting pre-service teachers to reflect on their profession and improve it. A junior teacher's professional identity is formed through the ongoing interaction between the person and the external environment. How teachers perceive the results of this interaction is reflected in changes in junior teachers' motivation levels, job satisfaction, professional commitment, and sense of self-efficacy. In conjunction with teachers' lives outside of school and the expectations of society and policy for junior teachers, they must perceive professional development and growth.

The issues raised in this study may be limited and analyzed only through articles, which limits flexibility and may bias some of the perceptions. Future research could be put into practice by conducting in-depth analysis and understanding with junior teachers through questionnaires or interviews. Alternatively, the results could be made more convincing through meta-analysis.

References

- [1] National Commission on Teaching & America's Future (US). (2003). *No dream denied: A pledge to America's children. National Commission on Teaching and America's Future.*
- [2] Alliance for Excellent Education. (2010). *Tapping the Potential: Retaining and Developing High-Quality New Teachers.*
- [3] Hong, J.Y. (2010) *Pre-service and beginning teachers' professional identity and its relation to dropping out of the profession, Teaching and Teacher Education.* Pergamon. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0742051X10000831>
- [4] Purcell, K., Wilton, N., Davies, R., & Elias, P. (2005). *Education as a graduate career: Entry and exit from teaching as a profession.* Accessed 9/01/06 at <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/RRP/u014666/index.shtml>.
- [5] Van den Berg, R. (2002). *Teachers' meanings regarding educational practice. Review of educational research, 72(4), 577-625.*
- [6] Flores, M. A., & Day, C. (2006). *Contexts which shape and reshape new teachers' identities: A multi-perspective study. Teaching and teacher education, 22(2), 219-232.*
- [7] Nias, J. (1987). *Teaching and the self. Cambridge journal of Education, 17(3), 178-185.*
- [8] Veenman S. (1984). *Perceived problems of beginning teachers. Review of Educational Research, 54(2), 143-178.*
- [9] Corcoran E. (1981). *Transition shock: The beginning teacher's paradox. Journal of Teacher Education, 32(3), 19-27.*
- [10] Gavish B., & Friedman I. A. (2010). *Novice teachers' experience of teaching: A dynamic aspect of burnout. Social Psychology of Education, 13(2), 141-167.*
- [11] Hobson A. J., & Ashby P. (2012). *Reality aftershock and how to avert it: Second-year teachers' experiences of support for their professional development. Cambridge Journal of Education, 42(2), 177-196.*
- [12] Jue, J., & Ha, J. H. (2018). *The professional identity, career commitment and subjective well-being of art therapy students. Arts Psychotherapy 57, 27-33.*

- [13] Zhao, Q. (2022). *On the Role of Teachers' Professional Identity and Well-Being in Their Professional Development*. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.913708>
- [14] Lynn, S. K. (2010). *The Winding Path: Understanding the Career Cycle of Teachers*. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 75(4), 179- 182. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00098650209604926>
- [15] Veenman, S. (1984). *Perceived Problems of Beginning Teachers*. *Review of Educational Research*, 54(2), 143-178. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543054002143>
- [16] Dann, H.D., Müller-Fohrbrodt, G. & Cloetta, B. (1981). *Sozialisation junger Lehrer im beruf "Praxisschock" drei Jahre später*. *Zeitschrift für entwicklungspsychologie und Pädagogische psychologie*. 13, 251-262.
- [17] Dann, H.D., Cloetta, B., Müller-Fohrbrodt, G., & Helmreich, R. (1978). *Umweltbedingungen innovativer kompetenz*. stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.
- [18] Müller-Fohrbrodt, G., Cloetta, B. & Dann, H.D., (1978). *Der Praxisschock bei junger lehren*. Stuttgart: klett.
- [19] Glassberg, S. (1979). *A developmental model for the beginning teacher*. In K.R. Howey & R.H. Bents (Eds.), *Toward meeting the needs of the beginning teacher*. Lansing, MI: Midwest Teacher Corps Network. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 206581).
- [20] Voss, T., & Kunter, M. (2020). "Reality Shock" of Beginning Teachers? Changes in Teacher Candidates' Emotional Exhaustion and Constructivist-Oriented Beliefs. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 71(3), 292–306. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487119839700>
- [21] Burke, P. F., Aubusson, P. J., Schuck, S. R., Buchanan, J. D., & Prescott, A. E. (2015). *How do early career teachers value different types of support? A scale-adjusted latent class choice model*. *Teaching and teacher education*, 47, 241-253.
- [22] Chen, X. Y. (2018). *When Expectation Meets Reality: Taiwanese High School Novice English Teachers' Reality Shock and Coping Strategies in the First Year of Teaching* (Doctoral dissertation, National Taiwan Normal University).
- [23] Fuller, F. F., & Bown, O. H. (1975). *Becoming a teacher*. *Teachers College Record*, 76(6), 25-52.
- [24] Walkington, J. (2005). *Becoming a teacher: Encouraging development of teacher identity through reflective practice*. *Asia-Pacific Journal of teacher education*, 33(1), 53-64.
- [25] Clandinin, D. J., Murphy, M. S., Huber, J., & Orr, A. M. (2009). *Negotiating narrative inquiries: Living in a tension-filled midst*. *The journal of educational research*, 103(2), 81-90.