Teacher Professionalism in Higher Education: An Analysis of Multiple Identities Based on the UK Professional Standards Framework

Yichen Zhang

Queen's University Belfast, Belfast, Northern Ireland, BT7 1NN, UK

Abstract: This article discusses several important professional roles of higher education teachers based on the Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning in Higher Education 2023, including designer, instructor, supporter, supervisor, and learner. Moreover, it explores the challenges that university teachers may encounter in performing these roles, such as how to enhance self-efficacy, how to analyse the behaviour of students, how to make use of students' assessments of the course, and so on.

Keywords: Higher Education, Teacher Professionalism, Pre-service Teacher Training

1. Introduction

Teaching is an intervention that leads to a specific efafect [1]. Hudson and Weatherby-Fell [2] regard the process of teaching and learning as a circle model with planning, teaching and assessing, which means that these three processes circulating make up teaching and learning. Teachers, as the implementers of education, are crucial in the process of teaching and learning [3]. An excellent teacher is seen by students as someone who can create a great learning environment and being able to guide them through tasks in detail. In addition, having a good relationship with their students is also an important element for excellent teachers [4]. However, Hattie [5] suggests that the teacher's behaviour in the classroom is not the most significant, but rather it is the things that could be done by the students through these behaviours. For instance, some teachers have taught all the knowledge but have not interacted with the students during the whole lesson, which has led to the distraction of the students and a lack of reflection process in the classroom [6]. It shows the difference between some non-specialist teachers and expert teachers, who would have a mastery of the classroom that is not limited to the lesson plan handbook, which means that they have the flexibility to modify their teaching according to the demands of students and their own goals [7]. Biesta [1] argued that the present objectives of education are skewed toward students' academic performance, which could cause the degradation of teachers who place too much emphasis on performance and ignore their own thinking, judgement and behaviour in teaching. The content and activities of teaching should be matched to the learners' own abilities as well as requirements to ensure the effectiveness of teaching and learning [8].

Therefore, in order to enhance the effectiveness of teaching and learning, teachers should learn teaching professional knowledge, which could ensure teacher professionalism [9]. Teacher professional learning frameworks and models have variously been developed by different scholars in different international backgrounds. For example, Hattie [5] proposes a framework of 8 mindsets that considers whether students can learn effectively is not related to what the teacher does or does not perform something, and it assumes that learning is much more important than teaching. It could be seen that he is overly concerned with student learning outcomes to ignores other valuable things that might be happening in the school. However, Coe *et al.* [10] believe that besides teaching content and study methods, it is equally important to create a supportive learning environment for teachers, stimulating independent thinking and giving them more opportunities to learn. Moreover, at different education stages, the role of teachers and the methods they use for teaching are variable due to the different needs of students [11]. *Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning in Higher Education 2023* categorises teachers' teaching and learning in higher education into three dimensions: professional values, core knowledge and areas of activity [12]. This paper will be based on this framework and discuss the teachers' multiple roles in higher education, which are motivated by teacher professionalism. Specifically, it will highlight the importance and challenges of professional development for teachers in higher education.

2. University Teachers as Designers of Programmes and Activities

Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning in Higher Education 2023 states that programmes and activities for teaching should be a combination of professional values and core knowledge [12]. Therefore, how to design appropriate programmes and activities is an essential aspect of professional development for university teachers. Firstly, teachers as designers of programmes and activities reflect the autonomy of teachers in their curriculum, which means that they have the freedom to choose what they would like to teach [13]. It is significant in protecting the professionalism of teachers. This is because some pedagogical frameworks that only use fixed modules cause teachers to lose the ability to independently explore the curriculum content and to make judgements about the content [1] [8]. Moreover, fixed learning modules cannot match the needs of all students [11]. Hence, Dewey [14] argued that courses should be designed to be flexible, as she had taught computer courses to some students who were over the age of 75 at a community college. During her courses, she advocated giving students the right to participate in the design of the course and to respect their ideas for the curriculum. One of her students presented a desire to find something in common with her grandchildren and did not want to be limited in what they might learn in the course because of her age, gender, and circumstances. By the end of the course, this student had learnt to use email, design and print invitation cards for parties, and even apply for e-coupons. It may be seen that this highly participatory approach to designing a course by the learner could be adapted to the different backgrounds and requirements of each student and is an extension of experiential learning [15] [16]. Therefore, the development of teachers' ability to design appropriate programmes for students from different backgrounds is crucial to the effectiveness of teaching and learning. With flexibility in curriculum design and effective judgement, teachers could provide a high-quality experience for learners, enabling each student to have equal opportunities in learning.

In addition, for subjects like natural sciences, it is possible to design the location of courses and activities outdoors. The outdoor classroom is a model of teaching and learning that both teachers and students appreciate [17]. The study by Kerr [18] proves that outdoor teaching can be well applied to teachers and students at the basic education level. However, at the higher education stage, this mode of teaching and learning would still be suitable [19]. This is because effective outdoor teaching and learning could help both teachers and students enhance their classroom engagement while completing classroom tasks [20] [21]. Parson, Donato and Johns [19] appeal for the integration of outdoor learning into higher education classrooms, which would also explore outdoor experiential learning opportunities. For college students, outdoor classrooms have a higher degree of freedom, meaning they can explore knowledge independently and expand their minds while being less restricted compared to traditional classrooms. Furthermore, in addition to motivating them to learn, the outdoor classroom allows learners to understand more about society, culture and the environment, which might even change their worldview (Ibid). For teachers, they could meet other teachers in outdoor teaching and share teaching skills and experiences [18]. However, conducting an outdoor classroom requires teachers to have sufficient self-confidence as well as self-efficacy as it is about student safety, which is still a challenge for many teachers [19] [22]. Consequently, professional training for university teachers could focus more on developing self-efficacy while developing technical skills.

3. The Role of University Teachers as Instructors and Supporters of Teaching and Learning Activities and Supervisors of Learning Effectiveness

Firstly, according to the *Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning in Higher Education 2023*, teachers in higher education should use appropriate methods to guide and support learners [12]. It requires teachers to choose effective teaching strategies for different classroom situations. Dunlosky *et al.* [23] and their colleagues ranked the effectiveness of 10 common teaching strategies. Their findings showed the most effective instructional strategy is practice testing, meaning using low-stakes quizzes to support important knowledge in the course rather than rigorous grading [24]. This is because students were frequently afraid of any form of testing, making some students unable to receive the knowledge as well as complete the test due to psychological barriers. A practice test consists of answering questions and actively repeating the answer information, which can be applicable for highly efficient repetition memory of information from the previous lesson before the start of the lesson [23]. Moreover, providing clear and concise classroom models not only helps learners understand complex concepts but also enhances their memory [25]. Besides, there are many other classroom strategies that could help teachers guide and support learners, such as logically ordering classroom tasks and so on [10] [26].

For instance, reflection is an essential component of teacher education and professional development [27]. Bates [16] argued that reflection is an important part of the classroom which could help teachers to understand the extent of students' understanding of knowledge. In addition, teachers should focus on learners' behaviour, taking feedback and providing it in their teaching. Furthermore, according to Everston and Weinstein [28] and Kyriacou [4], teachers should establish a good teacher-student relationship to create a positive learning environment for students. However, many teachers stated that it is a primary challenge for them to provide guidance and support with some challenging behaviours performed by students in the classroom [6]. Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) can be effective in dealing with challenging behaviour in the classroom and it aims to implement behavioural preventative measures across the whole school [29]. Specifically, this intervention prevents the emergence of negative behaviours by reinforcing the positive behaviours of students rather than punishing students after an incident [30]. The experimental results from Luiselli *et al.* [31] indicated that Positive Behaviours Support could be effective in reducing the frequency of problematic behaviours while also enhancing students' performance. However, this positive prevention strategy needs teachers to have the ability to predict students' undesirable behaviours, which requires teachers to carefully observe and assess each student's status at school [32]. It may be quite difficult for teachers who have a large number of students in their classrooms and who have not systematically studied behaviour analysis strategies. Therefore, it is necessary to include behaviour analysis in the professional training of teachers in higher education so that they can instruct and support students more effectively.

Furthermore, as supervisors of the effectiveness of learning, teachers should learn to choose appropriate assessment methods. Assessment is an essential part of supporting and developing teaching and learning [33]. McConlogue [34] described how university instructors should choose assessment methods for their courses. Brown, Race and Smith [35] argued that the type of assessment ought to depend on what the instructor expects the students to gain from the module. Effective assessment will enhance learning and encourage teachers and students to reflect on their performance. They have summarised a 10-point assessment statement which includes 500 assessment tips. In developing assessment strategies, teachers should consider using a variety of assessment tools according to the needs of learners rather than relying on one form of assessment. Craddock and Mathias [36] advocated that alternative assessment programmes could be implemented in the assessment of teaching and learning. She revised the assessment methods for five students with dyslexia and gave the other students in her class the freedom to choose their preferred form of assessment. The results of the experiment showed that students who chose either assessment style returned data on similar academic performance. Moreover, after testing, there was no significant difference in the results obtained by students choosing two different assessment options. It could be seen that alternative assessment options can not only meet the needs of students' specific differences but also fairly and effectively assess students' learning achievements. However, in higher education, the assessment of teaching and learning is bidirectional, which means that the assessment of the programme by the students is equally important [37]. At the end of a programme, students will provide feedback on their perceptions of the subject based on their experiences. Teachers are expected to use the results of students' assessment of modules to rationalise course content, which will contribute to the sustainability of the course as well as the professionalism of teachers [38]. Also, students' perspectives have a crucial role to play in the transformation of higher education [39]. However, at present, students' attitudes towards course assessment are still accountable, and few of them genuinely consider and express their authentic opinions about the course within themselves [33]. Therefore, how teachers could effectively access and utilise students' assessment of their courses is a key direction for the future professional development of higher education teachers.

4. University Teachers as Learners

Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning in Higher Education 2023 requires university teachers to have continuous professional development [12]. In order to strengthen the professionalism and specialised knowledge of teachers, the Department of Education [40] proposed a framework for lifelong learning for teachers. It indicated that teachers' learning can be categorised into personal and professional learning. Personal learning is the development of learning programmes that address the learning needs of individuals and are devoted to enabling teachers to realise their potential. Professional learning is directed towards content knowledge and activity knowledge of the subject matter taught by the teacher, as well as some teaching methods and strategies [10]. Zhou and Tu [41] suggest that there is a sustainable interaction between lifelong learning and the professional development of university teachers. Professional training of university teachers could provide them with teaching experience and prepare them for effective teaching and learning. In addition, professional training for teachers may help

them to discover the direction of their own development. A study by Heinonen *et al.* [42] compared the professional visions and teaching concepts of pre-service and in-service teachers. The results showed that teacher professional training can effectively support the development of pre-service teachers' professional vision and significantly improve their deductive reasoning skills. Consequently, it shows the importance of lifelong learning for the development of the teaching profession, and that the learner's identity is not only for better teaching but also contributes to the teachers' self-fulfillment [43] [44].

In addition, the Department of Education [40] expected to build professional learning communities for teachers, which are designed to promote cooperation between teachers, institutions and school clusters. For instance, in Australia, the Institute of Teacher Education has been established, and the partnerships it creates between educators and institutions could stimulate the leadership potential of teachers and achieve the revision of some university policies [45]. Furthermore, the Centre for Pre-Service Education at the University of Florida encourages teachers to develop personally and professionally together and expects that they could be transformational drivers of change in their classrooms and communities. The education centre provides a summer research experience program that gives teachers the opportunity to collaborate with scientists to develop a curriculum in biomedical sciences [42]. It could be seen that such learning communities can provide learners with opportunities and platforms for professional learning, development of curriculum and research, which facilitate interaction between different educational roles [45]. Thus, it could be argued that professional training of teachers is of great importance for the progress of teachers, universities and society. However, it may be difficult to realise that the establishment of such a community requires coordinated multi-sectoral planning [40]. Moreover, how teachers balance their teaching and learning identities may become an issue.

5. The Limitation of the Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning in Higher Education 2023

Based on the above descriptions, the *Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning in Higher Education 2023* has not considered the development of researcher identity for higher education teachers. Academic spirit is a crucial part of the professionalism of higher education teachers, which ensures that researchers remain rigorous when conducting research [46]. However, some academics have abandoned the academic spirit in pursuit of reputation and profit [47]. This would produce ineffective academic research achievements, which not only wastes resources, but also impedes the development and progress of society [48]. Therefore, academic spirit, as an important spirit of professionalism for university teachers, could be incorporated into the framework of professional values for the teacher's professional development.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this article discusses several important professional roles of higher education teachers based on the *Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning in Higher Education 2023*, including designer, instructor, supporter, supervisor, and learner. Moreover, it explores the challenges that university teachers may encounter in performing these roles, such as how to enhance self-efficacy, how to analyse the behaviour of students, how to make use of students' assessments of the course, and so on. In addition, teachers may also have a challenge in balancing these roles. It could be argued that all these challenges need to be supported by teacher professional development. Therefore, effective pre-service teacher training and teacher professional development are of great significance.

Furthermore, this paper explains this standard framework using some models of teaching strategies, and it may be argued that the three dimensions of professional values, core knowledge and areas of activity proposed by *The Professional Standards Framework for teaching and supporting learning in higher education 2023* illustrate university teacher professionalism with great effectiveness. However, it could be possible to insert the programmes and details of developing the academic research spirit in the professional values section.

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