

# The Perspectives of Physical Education Teachers in Tanzania on Teacher Professionalism

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## Abstract

The notion of teacher professionalism is contested and contestable because it is used differently hence making it difficult to define. This study examined the perspectives of physical education (PE) teachers in Tanzania on teacher professionalism. The study went beyond theoretical definitions of teacher professionalism to explore what it means on the practical level. Specifically, the study utilized a descriptive survey design to gather data on PE teachers' perspectives on teacher professionalism. A focus group discussion (FGD) was conducted and questionnaires with closed questions were administered to 52 PE teachers. The findings indicated that teacher professionalism is exhibited in many ways and includes knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours. These are subject and pedagogical knowledge, character, commitment to change and continual improvement, communication, service to the community and working relationships. Based on the findings it is concluded that the perspectives of PE teachers in Tanzania on teacher professionalism matches most of the descriptions of teacher professionalism in the literature. It is thus recommended that pre-service teachers should have courses on teacher professionalism in order to develop and nurture their understanding of the profession they are aspiring to join. The government should encourage and facilitate in-service teachers to attend professional development courses and training in order to keep them informed of professional demands and standards.

*Key words:* Perspectives, physical education teachers, professionalism

## Background

The notion of teacher professionalism is contested and contestable (Morrel, 2003; Kasher, 2005; Tichenor & Tichenor, 2005; Meena, 2010). The concept is used in different senses and is somewhat difficult to define (Demirkasimoglu, 2010). However, this is not to say that the literature on the topic is sparse; rather there is a vast amount of literature on the topic that is characterized by sophistication, variety and rigour (Morrel, 2003). Depending on the context, the concept may evoke many images and has multiple definitions (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2005). In the world of sport, professionals are distinguished by the level of skill that sets them apart from amateurs. Likewise in music, professionals have a level of skill that enables them to perform beyond the amateur level and often, as in sport, this qualifies the professionals to be paid for their performance (Tichenor & Tichenor, *Ibid*). In the business world, "professional" is often synonymous with "successful" or at least refers to behaviour that is expected of individuals in specific occupations. Doctors, nurses, physical therapists, pharmacists and others are health care professionals with clearly delineated roles and responsibilities, as well as limits

on their occupational behaviours. Moreover, professionals in many fields have codified rules for and expectations of behaviour developed over many centuries (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2005). In these examples, there is a shared understanding of what it means to be “professional.”

According to Baggini (2005), the term profession has its roots in the Latin word for “*profess*”, meaning to be an expert in some field of knowledge. However, in daily language, it is generally used to mean an activity for which one is paid as opposed to doing it voluntarily. The term is also used to classify the status of occupations in terms of respectability (Kennedy, 2007). Because of the different conceptions of what a profession is, it is important to define the concept of teacher professionalism in relation to changing historical and social contexts (Hilferty, 2008).

Adendorff (2001) argues that professionalism in teaching is best defined and described not in terms of pay, status or qualifications, but by looking at the distinctive actions and judgments that teachers typically make. Beijaard, Verloop and Vermunt (2000) explain the concept of professionalism as a multi-dimensional structure consisting of one’s behaviour and attitudes towards his/her job, achieving high standards and being an expert in a subject. Similarly, Tichenor and Tichenor (2005) portray professionalism as the quality of one’s practice. They describe professionalism as how people conduct themselves in an occupation, how they integrate their obligations with their knowledge and skills in a context of collegiality, and their contractual and ethical relations with clients. They identify five major aspects of professionalism for teachers, namely, character, commitment to change and continual improvement, subject knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, obligations and working relationships beyond the classroom.

Stronge (2002) categorises the attributes, behaviours and attitudes of effective teachers into six major areas: prerequisites of effective teachers, the teacher as a person, classroom management and organization, organising for instruction, implementing instruction, and monitoring student progress and potential. The first two areas examine the teacher as an individual, while the remaining four explore the responsibilities and practices of teachers. He further summarizes the characteristics of effective teachers in three statements: the effective teacher recognizes complexity, communicates clearly, and serves conscientiously.

Morrell (2003) identifies five characteristics of professionals, namely, knowledge, pedagogical skills, autonomy, communication and service to the community. Hurst and Reding (2000) associate specific behaviours with teacher professionalism, from appearance and punctuality to using proper language and building strong relationships with colleagues. However, Kramer (2003) argues that the most critical elements of teacher professionalism can be put into three categories, attitude, behaviour and communication. David (2000) cites five commonly used professionalism criteria, which are service to the public, theoretical and practically grounded knowledge, a distinct ethical dimension which calls for expression in the code of practice, organization and regulation of recruitment and discipline and a high degree of individual autonomy for effective practice.

Sachs (2003) developed two approaches to teacher professionalism portrayed as “old professionalism” and “new professionalism”. According to him, old professionalism is concerned with exclusive membership, conservative practices, self-interest, external regulations, slowness to change and reactionary. The characteristics of new (transformative) professionalism are inclusive membership, ethical code of practice, collaborative and collegial, activist orientation, flexible and progressive, responsive to change, self-regulating, policy-active, inquiry oriented, and knowledge building.

Sahin (2010) reviewed the characteristics developed by Sachs (2003) and makes a list of criteria of professionals that are essential for service to society and acceptance by society, namely, special knowledge and skills, including content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, curriculum knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, knowledge of learners and their characteristics, knowledge of educational contexts, and knowledge of educational ends, purpose, and values. Other criteria of a professional according to Sahin include credentials and advanced university training, code of ethics, professional organization, induction, professional development, specialization, autonomy and authority as well as compensation.

Meena (2010) adds that the concept of professionalism includes teachers’ confidence in their ability to control their work, ensuring the learning of individual students, cooperation and collaboration, influencing others in improving practice in schools and teachers’ autonomy. Similarly, Hurst and Reding (2000) associate specific behaviours with teacher professionalism, from appearance and punctuality to using proper language and building strong relationships with colleagues. Some scholars still consider professionalism as an ideology which embodies appealing values of service, trustworthiness, integrity, autonomy and reliable standards (Sachs, 2003; Ianiska & Garcia-Zamor, 2006; Van Nuland, 2009).

Using Aristotelian typology, Coulter and Orme (2000) describe three forms of knowledge that make up professionalism, namely: *episteme*, *techne* and *phronesis*. *Episteme* is conceived as knowledge about the world, scientific knowledge, deduction and induction. *Techne* is described as knowing how to do something, know-how or procedural knowledge (Coulter & Orme, 2000). *Phronesis* is seen in the judgements that teachers make about the treatment of the students in their care, and in how students are helped in their learning. *Phronesis*, therefore, provides teachers with a deeper understanding of the moral base of their profession.

Based on different conceptions of professionalism, research studies such as that of Adendorff (2001), Darling-Hammond (2005), Morrell (2003), Tichenor and Tichenor (2005) and Mpahla (2009), have drawn up some common characteristics of professionalism:

Service to society, implying an ethical and moral commitment to clients.

A body of scholarly knowledge that forms the basis of the entitlement to practice.

Engagement in practical action, hence the need to put knowledge into practice.

The importance of experience in developing practice, hence the need to learn by reflecting on one's practice and outcome.

The development of a professional community that aggregates and shares knowledge and develops a professional code of ethics and conduct.

It can therefore be asserted that the concept of "professionalism" belies a single definition. As Morrel (2003), Kasher (2005), and Tichenor and Tichenor (2005) contend, the notion of teacher professionalism is contested and contestable. In other words, defining exactly what is meant by professionalism is a difficult matter as there are many definitions. This paper does not intend to come up with a single, all-encompassing definition of teacher professionalism. Rather, it is to establish parameters of behaviours and characteristics that can be fostered among teachers (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2005). Further, while the literature describes the complexities of being a professional teacher, these descriptions are mostly theoretical in nature and informed by general observations rather than empirical research. While there are many descriptions of teacher professionalism and its importance, little research has examined what PE teachers think about this concept. This paper goes beyond theoretical definitions of teacher professionalism to explore what professionalism means for PE teachers on a practical level. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to begin an empirical examination of professionalism from the perspective of practising PE teachers. Specifically, the study examined how practising PE teachers define the term professionalism, what they believe are the basic qualities of professional PE teachers and what aspects of professionalism PE teachers should exhibit. Additionally, the paper examines the extent to which the perspectives of PE teachers are different from those of teachers in other fields.

## **Method**

The study employed a descriptive survey research design to gather data on PE teachers' perspectives on professionalism. The method was suitable for this study because it allowed the respondents freedom to express their views regarding their perspectives on professionalism. The study was conducted in Tanzanian secondary schools and teachers colleges. The sample of the study comprised 52 PE teachers who were purposively selected. Since the number of PE teachers in Tanzania is still very low, it was deemed appropriate to use purposive sampling to select PE teachers.

To determine the perspective of PE teachers on professionalism, the instruments used for data collection were closed questions in a questionnaire and focus group discussion (FGD). One advantage of using a questionnaire is that it gives the respondents freedom to give their views in a private setting. It also enables the collection of a large amount of information in a reasonably quick time (Orodho, 2009) and has a high level of reliability (Balci, 2001). The closed questions required PE teachers to evaluate their understanding of the term professionalism on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree (5), agree (4), no opinion (3), disagree (2) to strongly disagree (1). The FGD sought information concerning what professionalism means for a PE teacher and 2) what qualities or aspects teachers as professionals should exhibit.

Data were analysed with the help of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, version 19). Means, percentages and standard deviations were obtained from the data to simplify understanding of the distribution of the responses. The mean is a very significant measure of central tendency because of its sensitivity to all the scores on a continuum (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003), hence its choice. Standard deviation measures the distance of a score (dispersion) from the mean, thus significant for this study. Percentage gives a clear ranking of a score in the distribution (Thomas & Nelson, 2001). The FGD responses were coded and categorized in common themes for analysis.

## Findings

The purpose of the research was to determine the perspectives of PE teachers in Tanzania on teacher professionalism. To capture this, PE teachers' perspectives on professionalism were evaluated in four categories: 1) subject and pedagogical knowledge, 2) character, 3) commitment to change and continuous improvement, and 4) communication, service to the community and working relationships. These categories covered a wide range of aspects of professionalism and effectiveness and provided a comprehensive coding scheme for the teachers' comments. The items measured PE teachers' perspectives on teacher professionalism on a five-point Likert scale and were administered to PE teachers with the options provided as strongly agree (5), agree (4), no opinion (3), disagree (2) and strongly disagree (1). Responses from open-ended questions with similar themes were coded for analysis.

## Defining the concept of Professionalism

In the FGD, PE teachers described the meaning of professionalism in terms of attainment of competency in the subject matter, working relationships, an excellent level of skills for teaching, good character, the quality of teaching and the manner of conduct in teaching. Summing up the conceptions of PE teachers of professionalism, their understanding of teacher professionalism concurs with that of Tichenor and Tichenor's (2005) conceptualization of professionalism. According to Tichenor and Tichenor, the term professionalism refers to the manner of conduct in an occupation, and how teachers integrate their obligations, knowledge and skills in their contractual and ethical relations with students, fellow teachers, administrators, parents and the community. The results therefore imply that PE teachers define teacher professionalism in terms of skills, attitudes and behaviours.

## PE Teachers' Perspectives on Professionalism in the Dimensions of Subject Knowledge and Pedagogical Knowledge

PE teachers' perspectives on teacher professionalism regarding subject and pedagogical knowledge were evaluated by 11 items, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: PE Teachers' Perspectives on Professionalism in the Dimensions of Subject Knowledge and Pedagogical Knowledge**

Item: An ideal teacher is one who	Mean	SD
Possesses content knowledge and knows all areas of the curriculum.	4.50	0.54

Knows the relevant applications of the content he/she teaches	4.56	0.50
Knows how to use a variety of methods to teach and assess students.	4.52	0.51
Can plan instruction that is appropriate for the students	4.56	0.54
Reflects on and evaluates his choices and actions to improve instruction.	4.40	0.53
Refrains from using faulty or unsafe equipment	4.31	0.47
Cooperates with students to prepare for sporting activities and PE lessons	4.29	0.54
Is articulate and uses proper language	4.48	0.61
Is innovative in teaching	4.35	0.52
Effectively implements the curriculum	4.40	0.53
Knows how to assess students accordingly	4.37	0.49
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.43</b>	<b>0.52</b>

Table 1 shows that PE teachers agreed with most of the items relating to teacher professionalism in the dimension of subject and pedagogical knowledge ( $M = 4.43$ ,  $SD = .52$ ). For example, PE teachers agreed that an ideal teacher is one who possesses content knowledge and knows all areas of the curriculum ( $M = .450$ ,  $SD = .54$ ). This is an indication that PE teachers recognized the importance of subject knowledge as a component of teacher professionalism. PE teachers' responses to the open-ended questions were similar to those in the FGD, in which they argued that teacher professionalism entails innovative teaching, reflecting on and evaluating choices to improve instruction, effectively implementing the curriculum, knowing how to assess learning and plan lessons accordingly, applying learning theories, addressing the needs of children, using proper language and being articulate, using appropriate learning strategies according to the level of the learners (depending on the needs of learners and the subject) and using various teaching strategies.

### PE Teachers' Perspectives on Professionalism in the Dimension of Character

As regards character, PE teachers' perspective on teacher professionalism was evaluated by 14 items. The results are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: PE Teachers' Perspectives on Professionalism in the Dimension of Character**

<b>Item: An ideal professional teacher is one who</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
Strives to maintain the highest standards of professional competence and integrity	4.50	0.54
Refrains from engaging in sexual relationships with students	4.56	0.50
Shows concern and care for injured students.	4.52	0.51
Demonstrates a high moral standard in the classroom and in his/her personal life.	4.56	0.54
Prefers discipline to winning	4.40	0.53
Is patient, determined and courageous.	4.31	0.47
Respects and takes care of learners	4.29	0.54
Dresses neatly, cleanly and appropriately for the situation	4.48	0.61
Believes teaching is a moral endeavour	4.35	0.52
Recognises diversity and inclusiveness	4.40	0.53
Places a high value on choices that affect students' opportunity to learn	4.37	0.49

Is not involved in illegal activities such as corruption and drug abuse	4.42	0.50
Treats everyone equally regardless of gender or ability	4.22	0.58
Places more value on the health and safety of the student	4.41	0.32
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.41</b>	<b>0.51</b>

Table 2 shows that PE teachers agreed that character is an important aspect of teacher professionalism. Teachers in this study seem to agree with Sockett's proposition that personal virtues such as patience, determination, courage and respect for children contribute to professionalism. In the FGD, PE teachers described an ideal "professional" teacher as one who is resilient and keeps his/her composure at all times and in all circumstances, is caring, nurturing, friendly, patient, well-organized, flexible, displays confidence in the classroom and remembers that he/she is a role model for the students. According to the PE teachers, professional teachers are also conscientious, creative, dedicated and goal oriented. They also care about what they do, take a pride in their work, have good morals, are ethical in and out of school, adhere to the code of conduct/ethical behaviour, set high standards for themselves and students, have high expectations of their job, and are open to new ideas for improvement. They dress neatly and appropriately for teaching, have a positive attitude, respect children and their thinking, have a passion for teaching, are dedicated to students, and put their safety and welfare first. They are risk takers, eager to learn new things, view teaching as a career, not just a job, look forward to coming to school, and are enthusiastic about teaching.

### **PE Teachers' Perspectives on Professionalism in the Dimensions of Commitment to Change and Continuous Improvement**

The responses of PE teachers on teacher professionalism regarding the dimension of commitment to change and continuous improvement are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3: PE Teachers' Perspectives on the Dimension of Commitment to Change and Continuous Improvement**

<b>Item: An ideal teacher is one who</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
Reflects on and constantly evaluates his/her choices and actions to improve instruction	4.50	0.54
Reads and understands new trends in PE and sports	4.56	0.50
Constantly seeks to develop professionally	4.52	0.51
Strives to be up-to-date on knowledge relevant to PE	4.56	0.54
Tries continuously to improve their standard of work and ability	4.46	0.58
Attends meetings, workshops and conferences relating to teaching	4.23	0.60
Seeks new opportunities to grow professionally	4.60	0.45
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.49</b>	<b>0.53</b>

As Table 3 shows, the PE teachers agreed with all items relating to teacher professionalism in the dimension of commitment to change and continuous improvement ( $M = 4.49$ ,  $SD = .53$ ). For example, PE teachers agreed that professional teachers are reflective and constantly evaluate their choices and actions to improve instruction ( $M = 4.50$ ,  $SD = .54$ ). Furthermore, PE teachers

agreed that teacher professionalism entails knowing about current trends in education, seeking opportunities to grow professionally, participating in meaningful professional development activities, initiating changes (new programmes), and lifelong learning. This clearly indicates that PE teachers recognised the need to change and continually seek to improve their classroom practices (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2005). In the FGD, PE teachers mentioned other attributes relating to this dimension, which are continuous education, reads journals and attends conferences, stays up-to-date with latest research in the field and changes in best practice, is dissatisfied with the status-quo, attends workshops to help classroom practice and looks for resources to aid lessons.

### **PE Teachers’ Perspectives on Professionalism in the Dimensions of Communication, Service to the Community and Working Relationships**

Table 4 shows PE teachers’ perspectives on teacher professionalism in the aspects of communication, service to the community and working relationships

**Table 4: PE Teachers Perspectives on the aspects of Communication, Service to the Community and Working Relationships**

<b>Item: An ideal teacher is one who</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
Collaborates and communicates with fellow teachers, staff, administration, and community members.	4.12	0.50
Participates in school decisions, setting policies and rules.	4.22	0.58
Effectively communicates with parents	4.11	0.55
Participates in professional organisations	3.90	0.65
Constantly participates in community activities, including sporting activities	4.50	0.33
Shows respect for colleagues, parents and community members	4.54	0.45
Encourages parents and the community to support school activities and the education of their children	4.50	0.39
Mentors other teachers	4.10	0.45
Is a role model for other teachers in and outside the classroom	4.21	0.40
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.24</b>	<b>0.48</b>

As the table indicates, PE teachers in the study recognised that professionalism involves more than simply their actions inside the classroom. They understood that professional teachers have a responsibility to collaborate and cooperate with fellow teachers, staff, administration, parents, and community members. In addition, PE teachers also understood that professionals have the responsibility of providing a service to community. The findings in this study also illustrate that PE teachers were aware that teacher professionalism entails developing and changing policies and rules that can impact many educational settings. Moreover, PE teachers were aware that teacher professionalism goes beyond the classroom and includes effectively communicating with parents, colleagues and community members, being a role model for other teachers in and out of the classroom, mentoring other teachers, participating in school decisions, cooperating with fellow teachers, staff, administration, parents and community members, showing respect



for colleagues and parents, engaging in collaborative efforts, being concerned about fellow teachers and participating in professional organizations.

### **Conclusions**

The foundation of an educated society relies on the teachers who daily interact with students from the time they begin schooling in their early childhood to when they become adults. So, having professional teachers in the education system is imperative if we want to have future citizens who are morally sound. However, it might be misleading to simply state that the education system needs professional teachers without understanding what is meant by “teacher professionalism”. It is therefore important to understand what it means to be a professional teacher. In this study, what “teacher professionalism” means to PE teachers has been examined and results show that their conceptualization matches many of the descriptions in the literature on teacher professionalism.

First, the findings in this study indicate that PE teachers have high standards, ideals, and expectations of themselves and other teachers. The findings also suggest that PE teachers believe they have qualities and characteristics that distinguish them as professionals from others. In other words, they believe that not all teachers exhibit the behaviours and characteristics of being a professional. Hence, it is important for the educational community to determine ways in which to enhance the professionalism of all teachers. According to Stronge (2002), teacher professionalism can be fostered in veteran teachers through high quality and appropriate professional development activities and in novice teachers through “observing other teachers, receiving peer feedback, cultivating collegial relationships, and participating in lifelong learning experiences.

Undoubtedly, PE teachers discussed the character component of professionalism more than any other aspect. It is apparent that character is an important aspect of being a professional teacher. The emphasis on the character aspect of professionalism raises an important issue concerning teaching professional ethics when preparing pre-service teachers and when developing professional development courses for in-service teachers.

The results of the study have also revealed the need for professionals to offer a service to the community, which is very important for community development. It is important for professionals to use their knowledge and skills to resolve societal problems. PE teachers can use their skills to encourage community members to participate in physical activities as a way of improving their health. Additionally, PE teachers can be used to promote sports through coaching, which help to identify those with talent in their community.

The findings have also indicated the need for commitment to change and continuous improvement. For any professional to survive and grow in their field of specialization, it is imperative for them to get professional development given the changes in science and technology. There is a need for the government to encourage and strengthen the professional development of in-service teachers.

The results of this study have highlighted the need for and importance of positive working relationships and collaboration between teachers, parents and the community. Partnership is an important part of any development that is to occur. There is a need for the school and community to establish ways in which to enhance positive relationships. This could be done through organizing sporting activities between teachers and students as well as between teachers/school and the community.

Finally, the results of this study indicate the importance of communicating to a wider audience what it means to be a professional teacher. Although there may be general agreement among educators regarding what it means to exhibit professionalism, it is important to communicate this outside the field to combat the widely held notion that anyone can teach (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2005). Teachers in this study concurred by mentioning the importance of communicating what they do to the public. This is very important to PE teachers because some of their roles in society are not well articulated. While there has been a misconception concerning the work of PE teachers and the role they play in society, communicating what they do could help the wider society to understand the role of PE and sport. Sockett (1993) emphasizes the importance of communicating to the public the values and practices of the teaching profession. He believes that standards of professionalism need to be clarified in order to guide novice teachers, develop appropriate evaluation structures for teachers, and improve teaching. Therefore, it is important to continue research in this area.

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