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Skills in Teaching and Learning for Career Choice on Individuals with Special Needs

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Abstract

Skills in teaching and learning involve a comprehensive and strategic approach that integrates the efforts of educators, policymakers, institutions, and society at large. It entails not only equipping teachers with essential pedagogical and subject-specific skills but also nurturing both intrinsic motivations, such as a passion for teaching, and extrinsic motivations, including career advancement and adequate remuneration. Systemic reforms such as raising entry standards into the teaching profession, investing in continuous professional development, and ensuring supportive working conditions are crucial to elevating the status of teaching as a respected and desirable career. The strong link between skill acquisition and career choice underscores the importance of robust teacher education programs that are aligned with evolving educational demands. As global education systems face increasing challenges and demands, the professionalization of teaching remains vital for ensuring quality learning outcomes, fostering equity, and creating sustainable educational progress.

Keywords: Skills, Teaching, Learning, Career, Special Needs.

Introduction

Teaching as both an art and a science underscores the dual nature of effective education, requiring educators to master a dynamic interplay of creativity and empirical rigor to meet the diverse needs of their students (Marzano, 2022). The artistry of teaching lies in the ability to adapt lessons to individual learning styles, foster engagement through innovative methods, and create inclusive classroom environments that inspire curiosity and growth. Simultaneously, the science of teaching demands a deep understanding of evidence-based strategies, such as differentiated instruction, formative assessment, and cognitive development theories, which are grounded in research and proven to enhance learning outcomes. Darling-Hammond (2019) highlights that robust teacher preparation programs are critical in bridging this art-science divide, integrating theoretical frameworks with hands-on practicums to equip educators with both the technical skills and creative flexibility needed to thrive. By embedding opportunities for reflective practice and real-world application, these programs enable teachers to hone their craft while internalizing the pedagogical principles that drive student success.

The professionalization of teaching is a cornerstone for elevating the quality and consistency of education across diverse contexts. This process involves establishing rigorous standards, comprehensive training, and continuous professional development to ensure teachers are well-prepared to navigate the complexities of modern classrooms. Policies that promote ongoing learning such as mentorship programs, professional learning communities, and access to advanced certifications empower educators to stay current with evolving educational research and technologies (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2020). Furthermore, professionalization fosters a culture of collaboration and ethical accountability, encouraging teachers to share best practices and uphold high standards of practice. By treating teaching as a true profession with clear developmental pathways, educational systems not only enhance teacher efficacy but also signal to society that teaching is a valued and respected career, ultimately leading to improved student achievement and systemic equity.

The decision to pursue and persist in a teaching career is influenced by a complex interplay of intrinsic and extrinsic factors that shape the profession's appeal and sustainability. Intrinsic motivations, such as a passion for fostering student

growth, a commitment to social good, or the joy of lifelong learning, often draw individuals to teaching. However, extrinsic factors like competitive salaries, supportive working conditions, and opportunities for career advancement play a critical role in both recruitment and retention (Ingersoll & Strong, 2022). In regions where teaching is culturally revered and structurally supported through robust benefits, reasonable workloads, and clear paths for professional growth educators are more likely to remain committed long-term. Conversely, Tomlinson (2021) noted that undervaluation of the profession, coupled with challenges like burnout or inadequate resources, can deter even the most passionate educators. By enhancing the professional status of teaching through better compensation, societal recognition, and systemic support, educational systems can attract and retain talented individuals, ensuring a stable and high-quality teaching workforce that benefits students and society at large.

Concept of Skills

Professionalization in teaching involves establishing teaching as a profession characterized by rigorous standards, continuous professional development, and societal recognition. According to Hargreaves & Fullan (2020), professionalization requires teachers to possess specialized knowledge, adhere to ethical codes, and engage in reflective practice to meet the diverse needs of learners. Unlike traditional views of teaching as a craft learned through experience, professionalization emphasizes formal education, certification, and ongoing skill enhancement.

The need for professionalize teaching arises from several factors. First, the increasing complexity of educational environments marked by diverse student populations, technological advancements, and globalized curricula demands teachers who are adaptable and highly skilled (Darling-Hammond, Bransford, 2023). Second, societal perceptions of teachers often undermine their professional status, necessitating efforts to elevate their role through structured career pathways and recognition mechanisms (Ingersoll and Strong, 2023). Finally, the global push for educational equity highlight the importance of well-trained teachers who can address disparities in learning outcomes (UNESCO, 2020).

Core Skills for Effective Teaching

a. Pedagogical Skills

Pedagogical skills are fundamental to effective teaching, encompassing a wide range of competencies such as lesson planning, classroom management, and the ability to tailor instruction to meet the varied needs of students. A well-prepared lesson plan provides structure and direction, enabling educators to deliver content clearly and effectively. Classroom management ensures a conducive learning environment, promoting student engagement and minimizing disruptions. Differentiated instruction, as emphasized by Tomlinson (2021), allows teachers to modify content, process, and assessments based on students' readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles, thereby supporting inclusive education. Additionally, research conducted by Marzano (2022) highlights the importance of setting explicit learning objectives and offering timely, constructive feedback, both of which are linked to improved academic performance. Overall, mastery of these pedagogical skills equips teachers to foster meaningful learning experiences, accommodate individual differences, and enhance overall student achievement.

b. Technological Proficiency

Technological proficiency has become an essential competency for educators as the integration of digital tools continues to reshape the educational landscape. Teachers are now expected to effectively incorporate technology into their instructional strategies, which necessitates a deep understanding of Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) a framework that highlights the dynamic interaction between technology, pedagogy, and content knowledge (Mishra and Koehler, 2023). Mastery of TPACK enables teachers to design and deliver lessons that not only align with curriculum goals but also enhance student engagement and learning outcomes through the use of tools such as learning management systems, virtual simulations, and interactive multimedia. As technology evolves, educators must continuously update their skills to adapt to new platforms and ensure that digital integration supports meaningful and inclusive learning experiences (Koehler, et al. 2019).

c. Emotional and Interpersonal Skills

Teaching is inherently relational, relying heavily on emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills to cultivate a supportive and inclusive learning environment. Goleman (2021) emphasizes that core components of emotional intelligence such as empathy, self-regulation, and social skills are vital in building strong, trusting teacher-student relationships. These relational competencies enable teachers to recognize and respond effectively to students' emotional and academic needs, fostering a sense of belonging and psychological safety in the classroom. Furthermore, such skills play a critical role in promoting students' socio-emotional development and academic engagement, as emotionally attuned teachers are better equipped to manage classroom dynamics and reduce behavioral issues (Jennings & Greenberg, 2020). As a result, educators who demonstrate high emotional intelligence contribute significantly to a positive school climate and to the holistic development of their students.

d. Reflective and Adaptive Skills

Reflective and adaptive skills are crucial for effective teaching, as they empower educators to continuously assess and

improve their practice in response to evolving classroom dynamics. Reflective practice, as proposed by Schön (2021), encourages teachers to critically analyze their instructional methods, student interactions, and learning outcomes, fostering a cycle of ongoing professional growth. Complementing this, the concept of adaptive expertise developed by Hatano & Inagaki (2021) highlights the importance of balancing routine efficiency with the capacity for innovation. Teachers with adaptive expertise are not only proficient in standard teaching procedures but also capable of responding creatively to unexpected challenges, such as diverse student needs or shifts in curriculum demands. This combination of reflection and adaptability ensures that educators remain responsive, flexible, and effective in diverse educational contexts.

Factors Influencing Career Choice in Teaching

- (i) **Intrinsic Motivations:** Intrinsic motivations play a fundamental role in sustaining teachers' commitment and enthusiasm for the profession. Many educators are initially drawn to teaching by a genuine passion for educating others, a strong desire to positively impact students' lives, and a deep interest in their subject area (Kyriacou & Coulthard, 2023). These internal drivers not only influence the decision to enter the profession but also help maintain resilience and dedication amidst the challenges of teaching. Positive classroom experiences, student progress, and the fulfillment that comes from fostering learning further reinforce these motivations, cultivating a strong sense of professional identity and purpose (Day, et al. 2022). As such, intrinsic motivation is a key factor in teacher satisfaction, effectiveness, and long-term retention in the field.
- (ii) **Extrinsic Factors:** Extrinsic factors such as salary, job security, and working conditions play a critical role in shaping teachers' career decisions and long-term commitment to the profession. While intrinsic motivations often draw individuals into teaching, the sustainability of their careers is heavily influenced by external conditions. Ingersoll and Strong (2022) highlight that inadequate salaries, poor working environments, and limited administrative support are key contributors to teacher dissatisfaction and attrition. On the other hand, evidence from international comparisons shows that countries offering competitive compensation and comprehensive support systems such as Singapore tend to experience higher levels of teacher satisfaction and retention (OECD, 2018). These findings show the importance of addressing extrinsic factors to create a stable and motivated teaching workforce.
- (iii) **Societal Perceptions:** Societal perceptions of the teaching profession play a pivotal role in influencing individuals' decisions to pursue and remain in teaching careers. In cultures where teaching is regarded with high esteem such as in Finland respect for educators contributes to the recruitment of high-achieving and motivated candidates (Sahlberg, 2022). In contrast, in contexts where teaching is viewed as a low-status or fallback profession, it often struggles to attract and retain talent, as the lack of societal recognition diminishes its appeal (Dolton & Marcenaro-Gutierrez, 2022). Media portrayals and public discourse also shape these perceptions by either reinforcing the value of educators or perpetuating negative stereotypes, further affecting public attitudes and policy priorities. Therefore, enhancing the societal image of teaching is essential for elevating its status and ensuring a strong, professional workforce.
- (iv) **Teacher Preparation and Support:** The quality of teacher preparation and ongoing professional support plays a vital role in shaping both the entry into and sustainability of teaching careers. Well-designed teacher education programs that offer comprehensive training, including mentorship, classroom-based practicum, and reflective learning, significantly boost teachers' confidence, competence, and long-term commitment to the profession (Darling-Hammond, 2019). These structured experiences help new teachers navigate the complexities of the classroom and develop a strong professional identity. In contrast, insufficient preparation characterized by limited practical experience or lack of guidance can leave teachers feeling overwhelmed and ill-equipped, often resulting in early burnout and increased attrition rates (Ingersoll, 2021). Therefore, robust teacher preparation and continuous professional development are essential for fostering teacher effectiveness and retention.

Strategies for Professionalizing Teaching

- i. **Enhancing Teacher Education:** Teacher education programs must balance theoretical knowledge with practical experience. Clinical practice models, such as those used in medical education, provide structured opportunities for pre-service teachers to develop skills under mentorship (Grossman, et al. 2020). Programs should also incorporate training in digital tools and inclusive practices to prepare teachers for modern classrooms.
- ii. **Continuous Professional Development (CPD):** CPD is essential for maintaining and enhancing teaching skills. Collaborative models, such as professional learning communities (PLCs), foster peer learning and innovation (DuFour, 2024). CPD should be tailored to teachers' needs and aligned with educational goals to maximize impact (Guskey, 2002).
- iii. **Policy and Systemic Support:** Policymakers must create conditions that support teacher professionalization. This includes competitive salaries, manageable workloads, and opportunities for career progression (OECD, 2018). Finland's model, which combines high entry standards with autonomy and trust, serves as a benchmark for systemic reform (Sahlberg, 2022).
- iv. **Fostering Professional Identity:** A strong professional identity enhances teachers' commitment to the profession. Collaborative networks, recognition programs, and leadership opportunities can strengthen teachers' sense of purpose and belonging (Sachs, 2023). Mentorship programs also play a critical role in supporting early-career teachers (Ingersoll and Strong, 2022).

Challenges and Future Directions

a. **Addressing Teacher Shortages:** Addressing teacher shortages, especially in high-need areas such as STEM and special education, is a pressing concern that requires strategic and multifaceted solutions. Effective approaches include targeted recruitment campaigns aimed at attracting candidates to underserved subjects and regions, financial incentives such as scholarships, loan forgiveness, and salary supplements, as well as the expansion of alternative certification pathways to diversify and accelerate entry into the profession (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond and Carver-Thomas, 2023). While these measures can help alleviate immediate staffing gaps, they must be implemented with care to uphold the quality and rigor of teacher preparation. Maintaining high professional standards ensures that students receive instruction from well-qualified educators, thus safeguarding educational outcomes while addressing systemic shortages.

b. **Navigating Technological Disruption:** Navigating technological disruption in education involves balancing the vast opportunities technology presents with the inherent challenges it introduces. The rapid integration of digital tools has transformed teaching and learning, enabling more interactive, personalized, and flexible educational experiences. However, this transformation demands that teachers consistently update their technological and pedagogical competencies through continuous professional development (CPD), which must be both accessible and affordable to ensure effectiveness and inclusivity (Mishra and Koehler, 2023). Additionally, disparities in access to technological infrastructure such as devices, internet connectivity, and digital literacy pose significant barriers, particularly in low-resource settings, thereby exacerbating existing educational inequalities. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated efforts from policymakers, educators, and stakeholders to ensure that technological advancement in education is equitable and sustainable.

c. **Promoting Equity and Inclusion:** Promoting equity and inclusion is a critical component of professionalizing teaching, as it ensures that all learners, regardless of background, have access to high-quality education. To achieve this, teachers must be adequately prepared to support a diverse student population, including those from historically marginalized and underrepresented communities (Tomlinson, 2021). This involves integrating culturally responsive pedagogy, which acknowledges and values students' cultural identities in the learning process, thereby fostering a more inclusive and engaging classroom environment (Ladson-Billings, 2021). Furthermore, anti-bias training is essential in helping educators recognize and challenge their own implicit biases, creating a more equitable educational experience for all students. Effective teacher preparation programs must therefore prioritize these elements to ensure that equity and inclusion are embedded in everyday teaching practice.

Conclusion

Professionalizing teaching and learning involves a comprehensive and strategic approach that integrates the efforts of educators, policymakers, institutions, and society at large. It entails not only equipping teachers with essential pedagogical and subject-specific skills but also nurturing both intrinsic motivations, such as a passion for teaching, and extrinsic motivations, including career advancement and adequate remuneration. Systemic reforms such as raising entry standards into the teaching profession, investing in continuous professional development, and ensuring supportive working conditions are crucial to elevating the status of teaching as a respected and desirable career. The strong link between skill acquisition and career choice underscores the importance of robust teacher education programs that are aligned with evolving educational demands. As global education systems face increasing challenges and demands, the professionalization of teaching remains vital for ensuring quality learning outcomes, fostering equity, and creating sustainable educational progress.

Recommendations

- i. Teacher education institutions should integrate both theoretical and practical components in their curricula, with an emphasis on inclusive education, digital literacy, and emotional intelligence.
- ii. Governments and educational stakeholders should institutionalize CPD opportunities through regular workshops, in-service training, and professional learning communities.
- iii. To attract and retain passionate educators, particularly in special education, it is essential to improve extrinsic motivators such as competitive salaries, clear promotion pathways, housing or transport allowances, and recognition schemes that highlight professional achievements.
- iv. Encourage reflective teaching through mentorship, self-evaluation tools, and peer collaboration.
- v. Expand access to assistive technologies, digital learning platforms, and inclusive learning software.
- vi. Public awareness campaigns and media engagement should be undertaken to elevate the status of teaching as a prestigious and impactful career.
- vii. Policymakers must provide systemic support through favorable policies that ensure manageable workloads, adequate classroom resources, mental health support for teachers, and inclusive infrastructure that accommodates students with various needs.

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