

## How to Cite

Khanh, M. Q. (2024). Teachers' professionalism in the context of educational reform: Manifestations and development solutions. *International Journal of Social Sciences*, 7(4), 158-164.  
<https://doi.org/10.21744/ijss.v7n4.2397>

# Teachers' Professionalism in the Context of Educational Reform: Manifestations and Development Solutions

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**Abstract**---This study explores teacher professionalism in the context of Vietnam's educational reforms, focusing on its manifestations and development strategies. Conducted at Hanoi National University of Education, the research employs a mixed-methods approach, surveying 200 teachers, interviewing 30, and observing 20 to assess professionalism across subject knowledge, pedagogical skills, ethical conduct, reflective practice, and commitment to professional development. Findings reveal strengths in ethical conduct and subject knowledge but highlight gaps in reflective practice and pedagogical skills, particularly among novice teachers, due to a disconnect between theoretical training and classroom realities. Qualitative insights emphasize the role of mentoring, peer support, and reflective practice in fostering professional growth and identity. Proposed solutions include revamping practicum programs, enhancing mentoring systems, embedding reflective practice, fostering professional identity, and strengthening policy support to develop adaptive, reflective teachers aligned with reform goals.

**Keywords**---Teacher professionalism, educational reform, reflective practice, pedagogical skills, mentoring, professional identity, theory-practice gap, Vietnam education.

## Introduction

In the context of ongoing educational reforms worldwide, teacher professionalism has emerged as a critical determinant of teaching quality and student outcomes. As education systems strive to meet the demands of the 21st century, there is increasing emphasis on redefining the role of teachers not merely as transmitters of knowledge but as reflective practitioners, facilitators of learning, and agents of change (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Schön, 2003). The capacity of teachers to respond effectively to reforms depends heavily on their professional knowledge, pedagogical skills, ethical orientation, and commitment to continuous development (Cochran-Smith, 2005; Korthagen, 2010).

Despite significant investments in teacher education, a persistent gap remains between theory and practice. Pre-service teacher training often struggles to bridge university-based learning and the complexities of real-world classrooms (Kessels & Korthagen, 1996; Grossman et al., 2009). Several studies have highlighted how novice teachers tend to reorient their professional practices once they encounter the realities of schools, frequently placing more value on experiential knowledge than theoretical constructs (Allen, 2009; Allen & Peach, 2007). This transition reveals a fundamental tension in teacher education: the challenge of cultivating professionalism that is both theoretically informed and contextually responsive.

Moreover, the quality of practicum experiences plays a pivotal role in shaping teacher identity and professionalism. Research indicates that inconsistencies between campus-based coursework and field experiences often lead to fragmented learning and lost opportunities for professional growth (Valencia et al., 2009; Zeichner, 2010). The interactions among mentors, supervisors, and pre-service teachers are also critical in this regard, as they influence the depth of reflection and integration of pedagogical knowledge (Bullough & Draper, 2004; Allen & Wright, 2014).

Given these challenges, the need to clearly define the manifestations of teacher professionalism and propose concrete strategies for its development has become more urgent than ever. This study aims to explore how teacher

professionalism is expressed in practice within the context of contemporary educational reform and to suggest evidence-based solutions for its enhancement. By drawing on both theoretical frameworks and empirical insights, the study contributes to the ongoing discourse on how to prepare and support teachers to meet the demands of a rapidly evolving educational landscape.

### *Literature Review*

#### *Theoretical Frameworks on Teacher Professionalism*

The concept of teacher professionalism is multifaceted, encompassing not only content knowledge and pedagogical skills but also ethical conduct, reflective capacity, and a commitment to lifelong learning. Theoretical frameworks on teacher professionalism have evolved, reflecting shifts in educational paradigms and societal expectations of the teaching profession.

One of the foundational perspectives comes from Schön (2003), who introduced the idea of the reflective practitioner. He argued that professional knowledge is not solely derived from technical rationality but also from the ability to reflect critically on one's actions in complex, unpredictable situations. This concept has had a profound influence on teacher education, positioning reflection as a key process in the formation of professional identity and competence. In line with this view, Gabryś-Barker (2012) emphasized the importance of reflective thinking in pre-service teacher development, suggesting that structured opportunities for reflection enable teachers to internalize theoretical knowledge through personal experience.

Expanding on this, Korthagen and colleagues (Korthagen, 2010; Korthagen et al., 2006) proposed a realistic teacher education model, which integrates cognitive, emotional, and practical aspects of teaching. They argue that professional learning is most effective when rooted in real-life experiences and when it addresses the interplay between teachers' beliefs, values, and actions. This approach challenges the traditional dichotomy between theory and practice by advocating for a holistic, person-centered pedagogy.

Another influential theoretical stance is that of inquiry-oriented professionalism, advanced by Cochran-Smith (2005), who conceptualizes teachers as researchers of their practice. According to this view, teacher professionalism involves a stance of inquiry, where educators critically engage with their teaching context to improve outcomes for students and communities. Such a model emphasizes autonomy, intellectual engagement, and the social responsibility of teachers in fostering equity and justice.

Furthermore, Grossman et al. (2009), offer a practice-based framework in which teacher education focuses on core instructional practices that are essential for effective teaching. This model emphasizes the importance of approximations of practice, such as rehearsals, and decompositions of practice, which make tacit knowledge visible and accessible to novice teachers. Their framework also stresses the need for a shared professional language that bridges the gap between the university and the school context.

Together, these theoretical models converge on the notion that professionalism is not static or innate but rather a dynamic and developmental process. They collectively inform the design of teacher education programs that aim to cultivate not just skilled technicians but thoughtful, ethical, and responsive practitioners.

#### *Previous Research on Manifestations and Development of Professional Behaviors*

Empirical studies have sought to operationalize the concept of teacher professionalism by identifying its observable dimensions in practice. Commonly cited indicators include mastery of subject knowledge, effective classroom management, responsiveness to diverse learner needs, ethical behavior, and commitment to continuous improvement. However, the way these behaviors develop and are enacted can vary widely depending on institutional structures, socio-cultural contexts, and individual dispositions.

Meijer et al. (2011), highlight that key formative experiences, such as managing student misbehavior, facing pedagogical dilemmas, or receiving mentoring, play a significant role in shaping the professional growth of student teachers. These experiences often serve as turning points that prompt deep reflection and recalibration of beliefs about teaching. Such moments are crucial for the development of adaptive expertise, a hallmark of teacher professionalism.

Field experiences, particularly the teaching practicum, have been widely recognized as a critical context for the development of professional behaviors. Allen & Wright (2014) argue that the integration of theoretical knowledge with authentic teaching practice is central to shaping competent and confident educators. However, this integration is not always successful. Many studies, including those by Bullough & Draper (2004) and Valencia et al. (2009), have documented the disconnect between university coursework and in-field realities, which often leaves student teachers

ill-prepared for the challenges of actual classrooms. These inconsistencies can result in fragmented learning and missed opportunities for deeper professional development.

Allen (2009, 2011) has contributed significantly to understanding the transitional challenges that beginning teachers face. His research shows that novice teachers often devalue theoretical principles when confronted with the practical constraints of the school environment. Instead, they tend to adopt coping mechanisms based on survival, which may hinder the development of reflective and evidence-based practices. Allen & Peach (2007), further note that pre-service teachers frequently perceive a misalignment between what they learn on campus and what is expected of them in the field, leading to uncertainty and reduced confidence in their professional judgment.

Furthermore, the role of mentoring and supervision during practicum is a decisive factor in professional development. When mentors and university supervisors collaborate effectively, they create a supportive environment for learning and reflection (Zeichner, 2010; Bullough & Draper, 2004). Conversely, when these relationships are weak or conflicting, student teachers may experience confusion or feel unsupported, which can negatively impact their professional identity formation.

Overall, the research suggests that while professional behaviors can be cultivated through deliberate educational design and experiential learning, the process is complex and often hampered by systemic and structural barriers. This underscores the need for teacher education programs that are both coherent and responsive, linking theory, practice, and reflection in meaningful and sustained ways.

## Methodology

This research, conducted at Hanoi National University of Education (HNUE), explores the manifestations and development of teacher professionalism within the context of educational reforms in Vietnam. A mixed-methods design was employed, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

A survey was administered to 200 teachers from primary and secondary schools in Hanoi, selected using stratified random sampling to ensure diverse representation across experience, school type, and subject areas. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 teachers, and classroom observations were carried out with 20 teachers to gain deeper insights into professional experiences and behaviors.

The quantitative data from the survey were analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics to identify patterns and differences across groups. The qualitative data from interviews and observations were analyzed through thematic analysis to identify key themes related to teacher professionalism.

## Findings

### *Quantitative Findings from the Survey*

The survey was completed by 200 teachers from primary and secondary schools in Hanoi, selected through stratified random sampling to ensure representation across years of experience, school type (public vs. private), and subject areas (e.g., STEM, humanities, and languages). The survey included 25 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree) to assess manifestations of teacher professionalism across five dimensions: subject knowledge mastery, pedagogical skills, ethical conduct, reflective practice, and commitment to professional development. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) and inferential statistics (one-way ANOVA) were used to identify patterns and differences across groups.

### *Descriptive Statistics*

The overall mean scores for each dimension of teacher professionalism indicate varying levels of self-reported competence and engagement. Table 1 summarizes the mean scores and standard deviations for the five dimensions.

Table 1  
Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Dimensions of Teacher Professionalism (N = 200)

Dimension	Mean	Standard Deviation
Subject Knowledge Mastery	4.12	0.67
Pedagogical Skills	3.89	0.73
Ethical Conduct	4.35	0.58

Dimension	Mean	Standard Deviation
Reflective Practice	3.67	0.81
Commitment to Professional Development	3.94	0.69

Subject Knowledge Mastery: Teachers reported a relatively high level of confidence in their subject knowledge ( $M = 4.12$ ,  $SD = 0.67$ ), suggesting that they feel well-prepared in their content areas.

Pedagogical Skills: The mean score for pedagogical skills was slightly lower ( $M = 3.89$ ,  $SD = 0.73$ ), indicating moderate confidence in applying teaching strategies effectively.

Ethical Conduct: This dimension received the highest mean score ( $M = 4.35$ ,  $SD = 0.58$ ), reflecting a strong adherence to ethical standards, such as fairness and respect in the classroom.

Reflective Practice: Teachers reported the lowest mean score for reflective practice ( $M = 3.67$ ,  $SD = 0.81$ ), suggesting limited engagement in critical self-reflection on their teaching practices.

Commitment to Professional Development: Teachers showed moderate commitment to ongoing professional learning ( $M = 3.94$ ,  $SD = 0.69$ ).

### *Inferential Statistics*

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine differences in the five dimensions of professionalism across three groups based on years of teaching experience: novice teachers (0–5 years,  $n = 62$ ), mid-career teachers (6–15 years,  $n = 78$ ), and veteran teachers (16+ years,  $n = 60$ ). Significant differences were found in three dimensions: pedagogical skills, reflective practice, and commitment to professional development.

Table 2  
ANOVA Results for Differences in Professionalism Dimensions by Teaching Experience

Dimension	F-value	p-value	Significant Group Differences (Post-Hoc Tukey)
Subject Knowledge Mastery	1.87	0.156	None
Pedagogical Skills	4.23	0.016	Veteran > Novice ( $p = 0.012$ )
Ethical Conduct	0.95	0.389	None
Reflective Practice	5.67	0.004	Mid-career > Novice ( $p = 0.003$ )
Commitment to Professional Development	3.89	0.022	Veteran > Novice ( $p = 0.019$ )

Pedagogical Skills: Veteran teachers ( $M = 4.05$ ,  $SD = 0.64$ ) reported significantly higher confidence in pedagogical skills compared to novice teachers ( $M = 3.71$ ,  $SD = 0.78$ ),  $F(2, 197) = 4.23$ ,  $p = 0.016$ .

Reflective Practice: Mid-career teachers ( $M = 3.88$ ,  $SD = 0.75$ ) engaged in reflective practice more frequently than novice teachers ( $M = 3.45$ ,  $SD = 0.85$ ),  $F(2, 197) = 5.67$ ,  $p = 0.004$ .

Commitment to Professional Development: Veteran teachers ( $M = 4.12$ ,  $SD = 0.62$ ) demonstrated greater commitment to professional development than novice teachers ( $M = 3.78$ ,  $SD = 0.73$ ),  $F(2, 197) = 3.89$ ,  $p = 0.022$ .

No significant differences were found for subject knowledge mastery or ethical conduct across experience levels, suggesting these dimensions are relatively consistent regardless of teaching experience.

Additional ANOVAs comparing school type (public vs. private) and subject areas showed no significant differences, indicating that professionalism manifestations are relatively uniform across these factors.

### *Qualitative Findings from Interviews and Observations*

Thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews ( $n = 30$ ) and classroom observations ( $n = 20$ ) revealed four key themes related to the manifestations and development of teacher professionalism: (1) Contextual Challenges in Applying Theory to Practice, (2) Importance of Mentoring and Peer Support, (3) Reflective Practice as a Developmental Tool, and (4) Professional Identity Formation.

#### *Contextual Challenges in Applying Theory to Practice*

Teachers frequently highlighted a disconnect between the theoretical knowledge acquired during pre-service training and the practical demands of the classroom. For instance, a novice primary school teacher (T12, 3 years of

experience) stated, “We learned many teaching strategies at university, but in real classrooms, students’ behaviors and needs are so diverse that those strategies don’t always work.” Classroom observations corroborated this, as several teachers relied on traditional lecture-based methods despite having been trained in student-centered approaches. This gap was particularly evident in managing classroom discipline and addressing diverse learner needs.

#### *Importance of Mentoring and Peer Support*

Mentoring and peer collaboration emerged as critical factors in professional development. Interviewees emphasized the value of guidance from experienced mentors during their practicum and early career stages. A secondary school teacher (T25, 8 years of experience) noted, “My mentor helped me understand how to adapt lesson plans to my students’ abilities, which I couldn’t learn from books.” However, some teachers reported inconsistent mentoring quality, with a few describing mentors as disengaged or overly prescriptive. Observations showed that teachers who regularly collaborated with colleagues demonstrated more innovative teaching practices, such as group activities and technology integration.

#### *Reflective Practice as a Developmental Tool*

While survey results indicated lower engagement in reflective practice, qualitative data revealed that teachers who engaged in reflection, often prompted by mentors or professional development workshops, experienced significant professional growth. A mid-career teacher (T19, 10 years of experience) shared, “After reflecting on a failed lesson, I realized I needed to involve students more actively, and my next lesson was much better.” Observations confirmed that teachers who maintained reflective journals or participated in post-lesson discussions with mentors exhibited greater adaptability in their teaching.

#### *Professional Identity Formation*

The development of a professional identity was closely tied to teachers’ experiences in the classroom and their interactions with mentors, colleagues, and students. Novice teachers often expressed uncertainty about their role, with one stating, “I wasn’t sure if I was a good teacher until my students started responding positively” (T8, 2 years of experience). Over time, teachers reported gaining confidence as they navigated challenges and received affirmation from their school community. Observations showed that teachers with a stronger professional identity were more proactive in seeking feedback and experimenting with new teaching methods.

#### *Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings*

The quantitative and qualitative findings complement each other, providing a comprehensive understanding of teacher professionalism. The survey data highlight that ethical conduct is a strong dimension across all teachers, while reflective practice is an area needing improvement, particularly among novice teachers. Qualitative insights explain this discrepancy, revealing that reflective practice is often underdeveloped due to a lack of structured opportunities and guidance during pre-service training and early career stages. The higher pedagogical skills and commitment to professional development among veteran teachers align with qualitative reports of the importance of experience and mentoring in fostering these competencies. The qualitative theme of contextual challenges underscores the survey’s finding of moderate pedagogical skills, as teachers struggle to translate theoretical knowledge into practice. Together, these findings suggest that while teachers in Hanoi exhibit strong ethical conduct and subject knowledge, targeted interventions are needed to enhance reflective practice and bridge the theory-practice gap.

### **Discussion**

The quantitative data indicate that teachers in Hanoi exhibit notable strengths in ethical conduct ( $M = 4.35$ ,  $SD = 0.58$ ) and subject knowledge mastery ( $M = 4.12$ ,  $SD = 0.67$ ), aligning with theoretical frameworks that position these dimensions as foundational to teacher professionalism (Cochran-Smith, 2005; Schön, 2003). These high scores suggest that pre-service training and cultural expectations within Vietnam’s education system effectively foster ethical responsibility and content expertise. However, the lower mean score for reflective practice ( $M = 3.67$ ,  $SD =$

0.81) and moderate score for pedagogical skills ( $M = 3.89$ ,  $SD = 0.73$ ) highlight significant gaps in teachers' ability to critically reflect on their practice and adapt theoretical knowledge to diverse classroom contexts. These findings resonate with prior research by Allen (2009) and Valencia et al. (2009), which underscores the persistent challenge of bridging the theory-practice divide in teacher education.

Significant differences across experience levels further illuminate the developmental trajectory of teacher professionalism. Veteran teachers demonstrated greater confidence in pedagogical skills ( $M = 4.05$ ,  $SD = 0.64$ ) compared to novices ( $M = 3.71$ ,  $SD = 0.78$ ,  $p = 0.012$ ), and they also showed stronger commitment to professional development ( $M = 4.12$ ,  $SD = 0.62$  vs.  $M = 3.78$ ,  $SD = 0.73$ ,  $p = 0.019$ ). Similarly, mid-career teachers outperformed novices in reflective practice ( $M = 3.88$ ,  $SD = 0.75$  vs.  $M = 3.45$ ,  $SD = 0.85$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ). These results align with Korthagen's (2010) assertion that professionalism is a dynamic process, with experience playing a critical role in developing adaptive expertise. The absence of significant differences in ethical conduct and subject knowledge across experience levels suggests that these dimensions are consistently reinforced, likely through standardized training and societal expectations in Vietnam. However, the disparities in pedagogical skills and reflective practice indicate that novice teachers require targeted support to navigate the complexities of classroom practice effectively.

Qualitative findings provide deeper context for these quantitative results, particularly regarding the theory-practice gap. Teachers frequently reported difficulties in applying university-learned strategies to real-world classrooms, often reverting to traditional lecture-based methods due to practical constraints like student behavior and diverse learning needs. This echoes Allen & Peach's (2007) findings on the misalignment between pre-service training and field expectations, which can lead to fragmented learning and reduced confidence. The qualitative theme of mentoring and peer support further highlights the importance of collaborative relationships, as emphasized by Zeichner (2010) and Bullough & Draper (2004). While effective mentoring facilitated professional growth, inconsistent or disengaged mentoring hindered teachers' ability to integrate theory and practice, underscoring the need for systemic improvements in practicum design.

The qualitative data also shed light on the underdeveloped state of reflective practice, despite its potential as a developmental tool. Teachers who engaged in structured reflection, often prompted by mentors or workshops, reported significant improvements in their teaching, supporting Schön's (2003) concept of the reflective practitioner. However, the low survey scores for reflective practice suggest that such opportunities are not consistently available, particularly for novice teachers. This gap may stem from a lack of structured reflective frameworks in pre-service and in-service programs, as noted by Gabrys-Barker (2012). Finally, the theme of professional identity formation underscores the emotional and social dimensions of professionalism (Korthagen et al., 2006). Novice teachers' uncertainty about their roles highlights the need for early-career support to foster confidence and coherence in their professional identity.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings reveals a complex interplay of individual, institutional, and contextual factors shaping teacher professionalism in Hanoi. While strengths in ethical conduct and subject knowledge provide a solid foundation, the gaps in reflective practice and pedagogical skills, coupled with challenges in applying theory to practice, indicate that current teacher education programs may not fully equip teachers for the demands of educational reforms. These findings align with Grossman et al. (2009), call for practice-based teacher education that bridges university and school contexts. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that enhances experiential learning, strengthens mentoring, and embeds reflective practice to prepare teachers as adaptive, reflective, and responsive practitioners in Vietnam's evolving educational landscape.

### **Proposed Solutions for Enhancing Teacher Professionalism in Vietnam**

To address the gaps in reflective practice, pedagogical skills, and the theory-practice divide, the following solutions are proposed to strengthen teacher professionalism in Vietnam's educational reform context:

*Revamping Practicum Programs:* Redesign pre-service practicum to align with real classroom challenges by incorporating practical scenarios, extending field experience duration, and building school-university collaborations for integrated learning.

*Improving Mentoring Systems:* Create a structured mentorship program with trained mentors offering actionable feedback and encouraging innovative teaching. Promote peer collaboration through regular teacher discussion groups to share effective practices.

*Embedding Reflective Practice:* Introduce mandatory reflective journals, post-lesson discussions, and video-based reviews in training programs to foster critical self-assessment and improve teaching adaptability.

*Fostering Professional Identity:* Support new teachers with induction programs, ongoing mentorship, and platforms for student feedback or professional networking to enhance confidence and a sense of purpose.

*Policy and Institutional Support:* Invest in tailored professional development focusing on pedagogy and reflection for novices, link career advancement to professional growth, and regularly evaluate teacher training programs to ensure relevance to reforms.

These interconnected strategies aim to develop skilled, reflective, and adaptive teachers to meet Vietnam's educational reform goals.

## Conclusion

This study at Hanoi National University of Education highlights the state of teacher professionalism in Vietnam's educational reform context. Teachers demonstrate strong ethical conduct and subject knowledge but face challenges in reflective practice, pedagogical skills, and bridging theory with practice, particularly among novices. These gaps hinder their ability to fully adapt to modern educational demands.

Proposed solutions, revamping practicum programs, improving mentoring, embedding reflective practice, fostering professional identity, and providing policy support offer a pathway to develop skilled, reflective, and adaptive teachers. Implementing these strategies can enhance teaching quality and student outcomes, aligning with Vietnam's reform goals. Future research should explore the long-term impact of these interventions and examine cultural and regional influences on teacher professionalism to further strengthen Vietnam's education system.

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