

Possible future scenarios of teacher professionalism for 2035

Krista Loogma^{a1}, Maria Erss^a, Meril Ümarik^a, Maret Aasa^a

^aSchool of Educational Sciences, Tallinn University

Summary

Globally, the teaching profession has been subjected to a number of significant changes in the last few decades which have left teachers in a vulnerable position. Like in all democratic societies where multiple opinions can be expressed, there is no agreement in Estonian society regarding the questions: what is the function of education and who is a professional teacher? Instead, contradictory expectations of teachers are voiced from different stakeholders.

According to the vision document of the Estonian education strategy 2035, the most crucial problems in Estonia, regarding the future professionalism of teachers, are the low status of teachers along with the structural shortage of teachers, especially a lack of new teachers. The issues of teacher well-being, teacher burn-out, autonomy and agency are related to these problems. A teachers' ability to support the development of general and subject-matter competencies of students while helping them to reflect on their learning experiences from various contexts is gradually gaining importance (Lauristin et al. 2019).

The aim of this article is to envision how teacher professionalism and the teaching profession may change in Estonia by 2035 by analysing trends that shape it. First, the current situation of teachers in Estonia will be outlined, then key factors shaping the teaching profession will be identified and, finally, four alternative scenarios of possible development paths of teacher professionalism until 2035 will be envisioned.

Freidson defines professionalism as a set of institutional conditions which enable a profession to control their own work. These conditions are: 1) self-regulation which indicates the profession's control over their work tasks, division of work, working conditions and work results, 2) science-based academic education, 3) high status, privileges and influence in the society, 4) control over entrance requirements to the profession, 5) specific ideology and professional ethics (2001).

¹ School of Educational Sciences, Tallinn University, Narva Road 25, Tallinn 10120 Estonia; loogma@tlu.ee

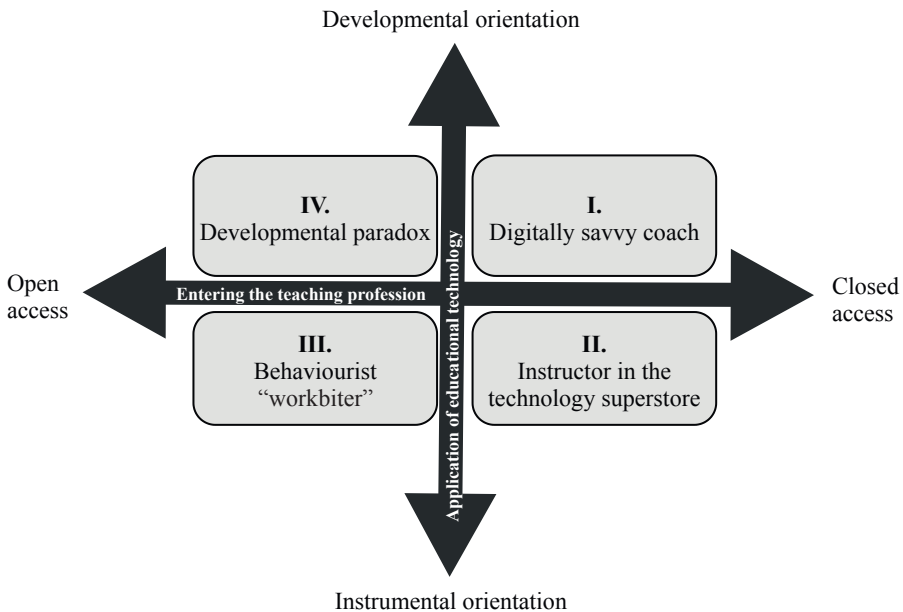
Changing social contexts have brought about multiple concepts of professionalism. For example, Evetts (2013) distinguishes between institutional and organisational professionalism. Noordegraaf (2007, 2013) uses the term hybrid professionalism referring to the adoption of principles of both professional work and management. Hoyle (1975) distinguishes between professionalism and professionalism. While interdependent, professionalism indicates the institutional dimension. Professionalism can be understood as the unique approach that each teacher has to her/his work within the broader context of professional ideology. Depending on the work context, teacher education and experience, professionalism can contain different pedagogical beliefs, procedures and methods which can imply narrow or extended professionalism (Hoyle, 1975). According to Hoyle's theory, a narrow professional learns mainly from her/his own experience and is limited to the individual classroom activities while an extended professional also values theoretical knowledge, cooperation with colleagues and a wider organisational and societal mission of teachers.

This paper uses the scenario method which allows us to anticipate and construct future knowledge. Scenarios depend on different factors including unavoidable factors such as demographic processes and others which contain choices, for example political decisions (Schwartz, 1991). Based on the current situation, scenarios take account of external factors with the highest unpredictability which may shape the future conditions of a phenomenon or system (Spaniol & Rowland, 2018, p. 9). Although scenarios are not absolutely proven statements or positions about the future, they may point at alternative choices on how to reach these future situations. Moreover, they can be seen as a starting point for a dialogue (OECD, 2001). The following steps were taken while applying the scenario method: first, the current situation of teacher professionalism was described on the basis of existing literature and data. Second, the driving forces that influence teacher professionalism in the external environment were analysed based on literature. These external forces included changes in technology, ideology, values and norms, as well as changes in future learning environments. Third, two key factors were extracted among the driving forces: technological developments in education along with entering the teaching profession. Fourth, the two key factors were paired as axes on a coordinate plane creating a 2x2 matrix, which forms the basis for four possible scenarios which are given in four quadrants. The horizontal axis depicts a continuum between openness and closeness in accessing the teaching profession while the vertical axis refers to choice between developmental and instrumental orientation of educational technology. Finally, scenario stories were composed.

Developments in educational technology were chosen as one of the key factors because they will certainly influence the teaching and learning through changes in demand for life and job related skills. Educational technology will enable more personalised and flexible learning environments within learning networks as well as supporting students with special needs. However, it will directly affect the role of teachers, depending on the orientation of technology and the advancements of artificial intelligence. The instrumental orientation (OECD, 2016a) is triggered by economic calculations and teacher shortages where some of teachers’ functions are replaced by technology. Furthermore, the development orientation emphasises maximising the human potential and general development of each student in the context of decreasing demand for specific skills in the labour market due to automation (Tuomi, 2018).

Another key factor that shapes teacher professionalism is access to the teaching profession which can be either closed or open. Differing paths to the teaching profession imply different types of teacher education. While closed access refers to traditional academic teacher education offered by universities with high demands on graduates regarding the subject-related and pedagogical competences, open access signifies alternative paths to teaching with usually lower competence expectations. Open access strategy is often used in the context of teacher shortage. The preferred way depends on political decisions and the education market.

We constructed the scenario framework as follows:



The scenarios cannot be interpreted as being simply good or bad. All of them contain something that may pose solutions to problems as well as create new or deepen existing problems. Scenarios I and II are likely to offer teachers a better subject-based and pedagogical training than scenarios III and IV, which may raise teachers' status. Since schools may exhibit different cultures and different technological orientations, we may as well speak of organisational or hybrid professionalism which is developed when the values and demands of teaching profession and educational organisations are symbiotically merged (Evetts, 2013, Noordegraaf, 2007).

Different technological orientations may trigger distinct forms of teacher professionalism. The instrumental orientation will likely induce narrow professionalism and the developmental orientation is more aligned with extended professionalism as described by Hoyle (1974). Obviously, the "digitally savvy coach" with her/his readiness for self-development, cooperation and reflection is more capable of supporting the development of learners than the "instructor in the technology superstore" who focuses on using ready-made technological materials for achieving instrumental goals. Scenario I may therefore seem preferable to II. Yet, scenario I may lead to teacher burn-out from work overload along with fuzzy boundaries between work and free time in the online learning environments.

Scenarios III and IV assume that open access to teacher education may lead to teachers' lack of interdisciplinary knowledge and poor understanding of the "big picture" in education. Scenario IV poses a paradox where technology is developing faster and in a more progressive way than teacher education. Teachers' roles within these scenarios are more like technicians with behaviourist approach regarding teaching as a "workbite" which may lower their status and not be in line with the demands of the 21st century expectations. On a brighter note, the more narrowly defined work tasks may be easier to accomplish. It seems the more idealistic the formal demands for teachers, the more the discrepancy between the real resources and skills. Yet, too narrowly defined tasks could lead to a yearning for more autonomy and challenge.

Which scenario is best to alleviate the structural lack of teachers in Estonia is debatable. The academic teacher education along with the developmental orientation of technology only contributes to teacher retention if the expectations are not set impossibly high to accomplish avoiding burn-out.

Keywords: professionalism, teachers, scenario method, key drives of future