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***The EFL Teacher at the Crossroads of
Professionalism: To Be Professional or not to
Be***

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ABSTRACT

“Professionalism” is one of the fundamental prerequisites for success in all domains. It is a set of skills and qualities that should be attributed to any profession in order to warrant certitude and certainty of quality and perfection of any product or task. Therefore, professional parameters and features must be respected and valued in all professions. Teaching English as a Foreign Language is no exception. The current investigation aims at providing a conceptualisation of “professionalism” in the field of teaching English as a foreign language. Also, it attempts to explore the extent to which Algerian EFL teachers manifest professionalism and yield professional outcomes during the process of teaching. Towards that aim, this paper uses a questionnaire administered to thirty teachers at the Department of English at Batna -2 University to examine their awareness, attitudes and readiness towards adopting and developing professional skills that would unavoidably perfectionate their mission. Finally, some practical suggestions are put forward to raise teachers’ awareness of the usefulness and necessity of professionalism in the refinement of the whole process of education.

Keywords: Professionalism, teaching English as a foreign language, professional skills.

1. Introduction:

Globalisation initiated innumerable transformations and metamorphoses to all domains (Chinnammai, 2005). It emanated new configurations of the fundamental parameters that form any process. Indeed, globalisation established a variety of complexities like new ideologies, policies and reforms in different contexts. This led specialists to express the need for a specific elementary pack of skills, behaviours and attitudes to fit the new requirements of each domain and each profession.

Being professional, for instance, is one of the main qualities emphasised almost in all arenas in the era of globalisation. Actually, “being professional” is the aspect that determines and guarantees the degree of excellence and the level of perfection of the product or the task accomplished. Henceforth, professional principles are necessary and compulsory in all professions. In other words, those principles should be respected and well mastered by the adherents of any occupation. Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is no exception. Accordingly, EFL teachers should possess and boost the skills that permit them to be more professional. Unavoidable questions might come to the mind here: “What is the meaning of “being professional?””, “Do teachers adopt professional behaviours?””, “What are the core principles of professionalism?” and “Are those principles relevant to a specific profession or all professions?”

The current paper attempts to provide answers to the questions above by offering a global conceptualization of “professionalism” and elucidating the key professional principles and competencies in the field of teaching EFL. Additionally, it investigates Batna-2 University teachers' perceptions of professionalism and examines the extent to which they adopt professional principles while pursuing their noble and honourable mission. Furthermore, this paper offers some recommendations to help teachers to raise teachers' awareness of the usefulness of the professional tenets in the refinement of the process of education.

2. Professionalism and Professional Standards in The Realm of EFL

The concept of “professionalism” has been approached and highlighted by different perspectives and frames of reference. Although various definitions and binary interpretations were the inherent consecutions (Fox, 1992), almost no consistent definition was yielded. Some researchers like Freidson (1994) and Hargreaves & Godson (1996) agree that professionalism is a vague concept that could be perceived differently. On the other hand, Helsby (1999) and Evetts (2006) posit that professionalism is a dynamic and flexible concept that could be exposed to different transformations to mainly accomplish specific objectives and gain particular benefits.

Actually, providing a clear and straightforward definition of professionalism is one of the major objectives of this paper. The latter retains and holds that professionalism is a 'normative value' that has a tremendous impact on the sustainability and the maintenance of balance in different systems (Towney, 1921). Indeed, it implies approaches that would inevitably adjust, arrange, and control the multidimensionality of the services provided by different sectors. This has been clearly demonstrated by Hoyle (1975) who suggests that professionalism refers to "those strategies and rhetorics employed by members of occupation in seeking to improve status, salary and conditions" (p.315). In other words, professionalism deals with the quality of the service provided by adherents of a given profession (Hoyle, 2001). Speculating the definitions above and applying them to the field of teaching EFL would make it possible to suggest that professionalism is a set of characteristics and parameters that warranty the peculiarity of the process of teaching. Ultimately, professionalism in the enterprise of teaching EFL comprises a series of standards that are still a matter of debate (Sachs, 2001). Indeed, disputes, discussions and controversies between specialists upon professional standards in the field of education issued and underpinned a variety of shapes and formats of the professional teacher. Thus, no single and uniformly agreed upon layout of the main professional principles of the EFL teacher was generated. Some researchers focus on managerial professionalism, which emphasises and highly values the ability of the teacher to manage the whole teaching process towards achieving the designed objectives (Sachs, 2001). On the other hand, other specialists such as Apple (1996) and Preston (1996) claim that democratic professionalism is one of the appropriate tools that might result in professional and well-developed outcomes. It involves and integrates learners and their parents in the process of decision-making. Thence, democratic professionalism necessitates collaboration and cooperation, and puts more burden on teachers to deal with larger communities than classrooms (Brennan, 1996).

Respectively, managerial and democratic professionalism open the way for an infinite number of endeavours that aim at improving teacher professionalism to be set forward. The main query that might arise here is: "Which one is appropriate for adoption?". Unfortunately, no approach is free of disadvantages. Therefore, the teacher should be critical and eclectic. He/she should analyse and select what is appropriate and efficient for his/her particular classroom.

The current paper attempts to emphasise some of the professional principles available in the literature in the field and holds them as imperative standards for the professional teacher. The following are some skills that would boost the professional behavior among teachers.

2.1.Punctuality and appropriate dress.

The professional teacher should always be on time (Reichl,2019). S/he should respect deadlines and fulfil his tasks in their due time. Also, the teacher should dress in a respectful and inoffensive way (Reichl,2019). S/he should be clean and tidy.

2.2. Communication and body language.

The teacher should be aware of body gestures' interpretations and take them into account while communicating with learners or administration agents. Additionally, s/he should be conscious of communication rules and norms and apply them appropriately to generate firm and polite interaction (Packard, 1993).

2.3. Mastery and readiness to update knowledge.

The teacher should master the body of knowledge he is supposed to teach (Ingersoll, 1997). Besides, s/he should be flexible and ready to update and renovate the mastered knowledge (Delong & Wideman, 1996). S/he should look for perfection and refinement. The professional teacher should be eager to learn, enlarge his perspectives, and enrich his insights to found a solid capital in all domains.

2.4.Ethics.

The teacher should respect the code of norms and principles that govern the noble profession of teaching (Anitha & Krishnaveni, 2013). S/he should account for any step s/he takes. Moreover, the teacher should be respectful, reliable, fair, confident, well-organised, collaborative, cooperative, honest, sincere, and polite.

2.5.Innovation.

The professional teacher should be innovative and creative. S/he should be ready and flexible to adopt any strategy, technique and method that would motivate learners and stimulate them to improve their way of thinking (Anitha & Krishnaveni, 2013).

2.6.Technology.

The professional teacher should cope with all changes and transformation (Anitha & Krishnaveni, 2013). In this respect, S/he should be familiar with technology literacy. The latter would inevitably ensure quality of work in different environments and assist professionalism.

The above skills are not the only competencies that would prompt, provoke and improve professionalism in the realm of teaching EFL. However, they could be described as the core components and the prerequisite constituents of the professional teacher.

3. Method

The current study endeavours to investigate the extent to which EFL teachers manifest professionalism and yield professional outcomes during the process of teaching. To collect the needed data, a questionnaire was designed and randomly administered to a sample of thirty EFL teachers at the Department of English at Batna-2 University. The used questionnaire contains three main parts (See Appendix A). The first part examines the teachers' perception of professionalism, its usefulness and its necessity in the field of EFL teaching. The second part attempts to measure, through the utilisation of a five point-Likert scale, the extent to which teachers respect professional principles while pursuing their work. Finally, the third part propels teachers to suggest practical ideas for training that would enhance professionalism. The quantitative and qualitative data gathered were organised, analysed and interpreted through descriptive statistics and interpretive analysis. The section below presents an analysis of data and discusses the findings thoroughly and draws conclusions and recommendations.

4. Results and Findings:

4.1.Part A

Respondents' answers reveal that teachers possess different perceptions of "professionalism". Indeed, according to thirty per cent of teachers, professionalism is the process of doing the task following specific instructions and respecting deadlines to answer the student's need. On the other hand, sixty per cent of teachers suggest that professionalism is doing one's work properly with conscience, respect, passion and love. The remaining ten per cent posit that professionalism is the mastery of specific knowledge and the expertise in a particular field that would generate higher performance levels. Differences in respondents' answers could be explained through the inconsistency and the lack of commonality that characterised the specialists' definitions. Subsequently, discrepancies and disagreement among researchers on a proper conceptualization of "professionalism" could effectively justify teachers discord and antagonism. Also, it determines the incapability of yielding definitions that share common aspects.

When asked about the main criteria of "professionalism" and its "significance", sixty per cent of respondents' answers maintain that skillfulness, effectiveness, expertise, proficiency, seriousness, integrity, morality, affection, adoration and patience are the main benchmarks of professionalism whereas thirty per cent of teachers view that training meant for developing knowledge, skills, positive attitudes and mannerism are essences of professionalism. One prevalent aspect that could be deduced from respondents' answers is that professionalism is of paramount importance in warranting the quality of product and the satisfaction of the consumers. Teachers posit that professionalism could be the framework that encompasses all the rules and

norms that assure effectiveness in accomplishing and achieving objectives and ensure the proper and appropriate behaviour. Hence, all respondents approach professionalism as a necessity that causes a tremendous influence on the process of learning/ teaching a foreign language. Certainly, FL education immensely requires adoption and adaptation to professionalism as a precondition for the success of the teaching/learning equation.

4.2.Part B

The following tables indicate and summarise respondents' reactions to twenty statements suggested by the researcher for the purpose of depicting the frequency, regularity and constancy of EFL teachers in manifesting professional principles.

Table 1: I am on schedule

		Number	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Almost always	15	50,0	50,0	50,0
	Always	15	50,0	50,0	100,0
	Total	30	100,0	100,0	

Table 2: I respect the deadlines provided by the administration

		Number	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Occasionally	1	3,3	3,3	3,3
	Almost always	11	36,7	36,7	40,0
	Always	18	60,0	60,0	100,0
	Total	30	100,0	100,0	

Table 3: My clothes are respectful, clean, tidy and inoffensive.

		Number	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Occasionally	1	3,3	3,3	3,3
	Almost always	11	36,7	36,7	40,0
	Always	18	60,0	60,0	100,0
	Total	30	100,0	100,0	

Table 4: I do respect the physical distance.

		Number	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Occasionally	1	3,3	3,3	3,3
	Almost always	13	43,3	43,3	46,7
	Always	16	53,3	53,3	100,0
	Total	30	100,0	100,0	

Table 5: I take into account good mannerism and etiquettes.

		Number	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Occasionally	1	3,3	3,3	3,3
	Almost always	14	46,7	46,7	50,0
	Always	15	50,0	50,0	100,0
	Total	30	100,0	100,0	

Table 6: I am reliable.

		Number	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Occasionally	1	3,3	3,3	3,3
	Almost always	13	43,3	43,3	46,7
	Always	16	53,3	53,3	100,0
	Total	30	100,0	100,0	

Table 7 : I am accountable.

	Number	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid Almost always	13	43,3	43,3	43,3
Always	17	56,7	56,7	100,0
Total	30	100,0	100,0	

Table 8 : I am honest

	Number	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid Almost always	14	46,7	46,7	46,7
Always	16	53,3	53,3	100,0
Total	30	100,0	100,0	

Table 9: I am integrous.

	Number	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid Occasionally	1	3,3	3,3	3,3
Almost always	14	46,7	46,7	50,0
Always	15	50,0	50,0	100,0
Total	30	100,0	100,0	

Table 10: I can control and manage my emotions while dealing with learners.

	Number	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid Almost always	16	53,3	53,3	53,3
Always	14	46,7	46,7	100,0
Total	30	100,0	100,0	

Table 11: I master the module I teach.

		Number	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Occasionally	2	6,7	6,7	6,7
	Almost always	12	40,0	40,0	46,7
	Always	16	53,3	53,3	100,0
	Total	30	100,0	100,0	

Table 12: I integrate new technologies

		Number	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Never	6	20,0	20,0	20,0
	Almost never	1	3,3	3,3	23,3
	Occasionally	7	23,3	23,3	46,7
	Almost always	10	33,3	33,3	80,0
	Always	6	20,0	20,0	100,0
	Total	30	100,0	100,0	

Table 13: The learner is the center of my class.

		Number	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Occasionally	3	10,0	10,0	10,0
	Almost always	12	40,0	40,0	50,0
	Always	15	50,0	50,0	100,0
	Total	30	100,0	100,0	

Table 14: I collaborate with learners

	Number	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid Occasionally	2	6,7	6,7	6,7
Almost always	16	53,3	53,3	60,0
Always	12	40,0	40,0	100,0
Total	30	100,0	100,0	

Table 15: I keep connected with learners.

	Number	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid Occasionally	4	13,3	13,3	13,3
Almost always	14	46,7	46,7	60,0
Always	12	40,0	40,0	100,0
Total	30	100,0	100,0	

Table 16: I keep updating my knowledge

	Number	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid Occasionally	2	6,7	6,7	6,7
Almost always	15	50,0	50,0	56,7
Always	13	43,3	43,3	100,0
Total	30	100,0	100,0	

Table 17: I prepare and organise my lecture

	Number	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid Occasionally	4	13,3	13,3	13,3
Almost always	11	36,7	36,7	50,0
Always	15	50,0	50,0	100,0
Total	30	100,0	100,0	

Table 18: I respect all my learners

	Number	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid Occasionally	2	6,7	6,7	6,7
Almost always	12	40,0	40,0	46,7
Always	16	53,3	53,3	100,0
Total	30	100,0	100,0	

Table 19: I keep my promises.

	Number	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid Occasionally	1	3,3	3,3	3,3
Almost always	14	46,7	46,7	50,0
Always	15	50,0	50,0	100,0
Total	30	100,0	100,0	

Table 20: I am tuned to my learners' needs

	Number	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid Occasionally	3	10,0	10,0	10,0
Almost always	12	40,0	40,0	50,0
Always	15	50,0	50,0	100,0
Total	30	100,0	100,0	

Thoroughly, the results displayed in the previous tables allow to unveil some realities. Almost, the majority of respondents display a positive attitude towards punctuality and fulfil their duties in their due time. Likewise, most answers maintain that teachers pay attention to their appearance to the extent that they wear respectful, clean and inoffensive clothes. Concerning the body language, the preponderant responses indicate that teachers have the propensity to respect the physical distance, and promote good mannerism. Also, they hold that they are able to control their emotions.

Furthermore, all teachers value some principles like accountability, honesty, integrity, reliability and respect. The plurality of teachers respect their learners, collaborate with them and treat them as the centre of the classroom. However, respondents display the aforementioned behaviours differently and to various extents.

Besides, most teachers have a good mastery of the content they teach, and they constantly update their knowledge and reinforce their teaching with the adoption of new tools and techniques. On the contrary, persistent minority tends to avoid integrating technology during their lectures. This minority is represented by the category of teachers whose age ranges from (55 - 63).

Ultimately, the analysis of responses postulates that the recruited research sample of EFL teachers at Batna-2 university sustains some professional principles that would lead to professional and satisfactory outcomes. Nonetheless, results do not permit the researcher to assert and assure that those teachers are one hundred per cent professional. For this reason, training would be compulsory and imperative to raise teachers' awareness of professional principles and their tremendous benefits and advantages.

4.3 Part C

Almost all teachers, except those with more than thirty years of experience, agree on and show readiness to have training that would effectively develop and boost their professionalism. In addition, they identify specific skills that should be addressed by this training, namely, pedagogical, psychological, moral, and cultural skills.

According to those teachers, these skills might altogether enrich knowledge, develop appropriate capacities and savoir-faire that would help them face any dilemma, and generate professional behavior. This would assuredly result in a satisfactory and valuable outcome.

Respectively, respondents put forwards various suggestions that could help newcomers to refine and perfect their work. These could be categorised into three main classes: aspects vis-à-vis teachers themselves, aspects vis-à-vis- students and those vis-à-vis colleagues. Concerning the first category, teachers propose that newcomers to the field should not remain in stasis. That is, they must work to develop and display some attitudes and behaviours like respect, tidiness, organisation, seriousness, integrity, reliability, honesty, punctuality, collaboration and alignment. On the other hand, the aspects vis-à-vis students comprise the following propositions; teachers should master and fully control what they teach. Additionally, they should update their lectures and knowledge constantly. They must fairly treat students and provoke their thinking by encouraging and providing them with equal opportunities to participate and ask questions. Finally, aspects vis-à-vis their

colleagues. This category advocates that teachers should be close to each other. They should be open-minded, courageous and able to face one's weaknesses, and discuss them with experienced peers to gain effective advice. Moreover, teachers should exchange information and inform each other with news in the common field of interest.

5. Conclusion

Professionalism is an integral component for the perfection of any profession. Certainly, it is a set of complementary and interrelated knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours that enormously contribute to the refinement of any task. Henceforth, it is compulsory for EFL teachers to adopt professional principles while teaching. Unfortunately, few frames of reference that detail the exact standards of professionalism in the realm of FL education exist in the relevant literature. This paper focused on some aspects of professionalism and canvassed EFL teachers' suggestions of some practical ways that would help in the professionalisation of the process of teaching/learning. Teachers' responses could provide other researchers and specialists with indexes that would assist them to develop and design a well-thought framework of professional standards reserved for FL education.

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7. Appendix

Dear teacher,

Would you, please, fill in this questionnaire to help us complete our research on professionalism in teaching English as a foreign language. Information provided will be used only for the sake of our research and will remain anonymous.

Thank you.

Age:

Male ☐ Gender ☐ Female

Years of experience:

Part I: Answer briefly

What is professionalism?

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What are the main criteria of professionalism?

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What is the significance of *professionalism*?

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To what extent is “*professionalism*” necessary in the process of teaching English as a foreign language?

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Part II: Tick appropriately

		Always	Almost always	Occasionally	Almost never	Never
1.	I am on schedule.					
2.	I respect the deadlines provided by the administration.					
3.	My clothes are respectful, clean, tidy and inoffensive.					
4.	I do respect the physical distance.					
5.	I take into account good mannerism and etiquette.					
6.	I keep my promises.					
7.	I am reliable.					
8.	I am accountable.					
9.	I am honest.					
10.	I am integrous.					
11.	I can control and manage my emotions while dealing with learners.					
12.	I master the module I teach.					
13.	I integrate new technologies.					
14.	The learner is the center of my class.					

15.	I collaborate with learners.					
16.	I keep connected with learners.					
17.	I keep updating my knowledge.					
18.	I prepare and organise my lectures.					
19.	<u>I respect all my learners.</u>					
20.	<u>I am tuned to my learner s' nee ds.</u>					

Part III: Answer appropriately

To what extent are you ready to have a training to boost your professionalism?

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What are the skills that should be targeted by this training?

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Suggest other ways that could help newcomers into the profession of teaching English as a Foreign Language to develop their professionalism.

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Thank you