AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF BEGINNING TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS ON TEACHER PROFESSIONALISM

Ei Khaing Win[1], Zin Nwe Than [2] and Khaing Khin Kyaw[3]

Abstract

The aim of this study is to explore the beginning teachers' perceptions on teacher professionalism in seven selected townships in Mandalay Region. The questionnaire survey was constructed based on the models of Dr. Kornhauser (1962), Hall (1968), Hargreaves and Goodson (1996), Tichenor and Tichenor (2009), and the OECD (2016). It included 68 items, which had five subscales: subject and pedagogical knowledge, commitment, autonomy, ethics, relationships, and work responsibilities beyond the classroom. A four-point Likert scale was used in this study. Although the questionnaires were distributed to 423 beginning teachers from the selected townships, the responses of 407 beginning teachers were collected for the study. After collecting the data, descriptive statistics, an independent samples *t-test,* one way ANOVA, and post-hoc multiple comparison tests were calculated to analyze the data. The findings showed that the beginning teachers' perceptions on teacher professionalism were high. It was found that there was a significant difference in perceptions of beginning teachers in the dimension of autonomy according to their gender and in the dimension of subject and pedagogical knowledge according to their teaching subjects. However, no significant differences were found in beginning teachers' perceptions on teacher professionalism according to their age, position, academic qualification, and professional training. The information gained from the responses to three open-ended questions was complementary to the quantitative findings.

Keywords: Beginning Teachers, Teacher Professionalism

Introduction

Beginning teachers are newcomers to the school community and the teaching profession. They should be provided with assistance from everyone in the educational environment for coping with the pressures and challenges of an increasingly demanding society. According to Sozen (2018), beginning teachers mostly face the challenge of such feelings as belongingness and being appreciated by their school principals, colleagues, and students.

Furthermore, according to Arends and Phurutse (2009, as cited in Domingo, 2013), support for beginning teachers is a major factor in determining whether such teachers stay in the profession for any length of time. In the absence of support, a high number of beginning teachers have difficulties in their school environment and develop burnout symptoms. Therefore, there is a need to enhance beginning teachers' professionalism for their career development because professionalism is one of the key elements in their professional lives.

Significance of the Study

The role and part of beginning teachers play an extremely critical role in the teaching profession. In reality, there would be differences between beginning teachers' expectations of the teaching profession and the realities they faced in the classroom. The general complaint of beginning teachers mostly results from inconsistency between their expectations from pre-service training and the outcomes of the actual teaching experience (Anhorn, 2008, as cited in Barokah, 2020). Furthermore, beginning teachers usually feel shocked when dealing with the actual situation in schools. At this time, teachers will seek out a guide that can help build their self-professionalism. If they fail, they will have a negative attitude towards the profession.

[1] Department of Educational Studies, Manadaly Education degree College
[2] Department of Educational Theory, Sagaing University of Education
[3] Department of Educational Theory, Sagaing University of Education

A deeper understanding of the term teacher professionalism in teaching can give teachers confidence in performing their tasks. Teachers who have professionalism in their souls will always strive to produce professional work (Ariff, Mansor, & Yusof, 2016). With a better understanding of beginning teachers' professionalism from this study, school principals, educational leaders, and experienced teachers can take into account the fact that they take part in leading roles in motivating and giving support to beginning teachers for improving their professionalism. Moreover, this study intends to provide valuable research findings about the challenges that beginning teachers face in their schools. The information in this study can offer valuable information concerning how to enhance beginning teachers' professionalism. For all of these reasons, the researcher aims to explore the perceptions of beginning teachers about teacher professionalism.

Purpose of the Study

The general objective of the study is to investigate beginning teachers' perceptions on teacher professionalism.

The specific objectives of the study are:

- To explore the perceptions of beginning teachers on teacher professionalism,
- To find out a significant difference in beginning teachers' perceptions on teacher professionalism according to their gender,
- to investigate a significant difference in beginning teachers' perceptions on teacher professionalism according to their age,
- To explore a significant difference in beginning teachers' perceptions on teacher professionalism according to their position,
- To find out a significant difference in beginning teachers' perceptions on teacher professionalism according to their teaching subjects,
- To explore a significant difference in beginning teachers' perceptions on teacher professionalism according to their academic qualifications
- To investigate a significant difference in beginning teachers' perceptions on teacher professionalism according to their professional training.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide the direction of the study:

- What are the perceptions of beginning teachers on teacher professionalism?
- Is there a significant difference in beginning teachers' perceptions on teacher professionalism according to their gender?
- Is there a significant difference in beginning teachers' perceptions on teacher professionalism according to their age?
- Is there a significant difference in beginning teachers' perceptions on teacher professionalism according to their position?
- Is there a significant difference in beginning teachers' perceptions on teacher professionalism according to their teaching subjects?
- Is there a significant difference in beginning teachers' perceptions on teacher professionalism according to their academic qualifications?
- Is there a significant difference in beginning teachers' perceptions on teacher professionalism according to their professional training?

Scope of the Study

The participants of the study were limited to beginning teachers who had less than three years of teaching experience after entering the teaching profession from selected seven townships in Mandalay Region during the 2021–2022 academic year.

Definition of Key Terms

The terms used throughout the current study are defined for clarifying and understanding in the following.

▪ ***Teacher Professionalism:*** Teacher professionalism is a teacher's ability to perform and enrich effective classroom practices, create an environment appropriate for learning in the classroom, and improve their professional knowledge and skills with the aim of providing students with richer learning experiences (Day, 2007, as cited in Hargreaves, 2000). In this study, teacher professionalism refers to subject and pedagogical knowledge, commitment, autonomy, ethics, work responsibilities, and relationships beyond the classroom that beginning teachers must have in order to be professional teachers.

▪ ***Beginning Teachers***: Beginning teachers refer to new teachers who have trained and worked for between one and three years (Ariff, Mansor, & Yusof, 2016).

Theoretical Framework of the Study

The theoretical framework for exploring novice teachers' professionalism in this study was based on five models of teacher professionalism developed by Dr. Kornhauser (1962), Hall (1968), Hargreaves and Goodson (1996), Tichenor and Tichenor (2009), and the OECD (2016). According to Dr. Kornhauser (1962, as cited in Khin Zaw, 2001), the features of professions are the characteristics of expertise, autonomy, commitment, and responsibility.

According to Hall (1968, as cited in Chan & Chan, 2007), there were five major attitudes that comprise an important part of professional work. They are (1) the use of the professional organization as a major reference, (2) a belief in service to the public, (3) a belief in self-regulation, including peer evaluations, (4) a sense of calling to the field, and (5) a feeling that one ought to be able to make their own decisions regarding their work.

According to Hargreaves and Goodson (1996, as cited in Hargreaves, 2000), professionalism is expressed by the following central dimensions: (1) their skills and theoretical/specialist knowledge; (2) their adherence to a professional code of conduct and self-regulation; (3) their relationship with the clients based on trust; (4) their autonomy; and (5) their altruism directed towards the public good.

According to Tichenor and Tichenor (2009), there are four dimensions of teacher professionalism: (1) the teacher's character; (2) subject and pedagogical knowledge; (3) the teacher's commitment to change and continuous improvement; and (4) the teacher's work responsibilities and relationships outside the classroom. According to the OECD (2016, as cited in Rhodes, 2017), teacher professionalism is discussed with reference to autonomy, collaboration with colleagues, and professional knowledge. Based on these five models, beginning teachers' professionalism was investigated with five dimensions in the following Figure 1.
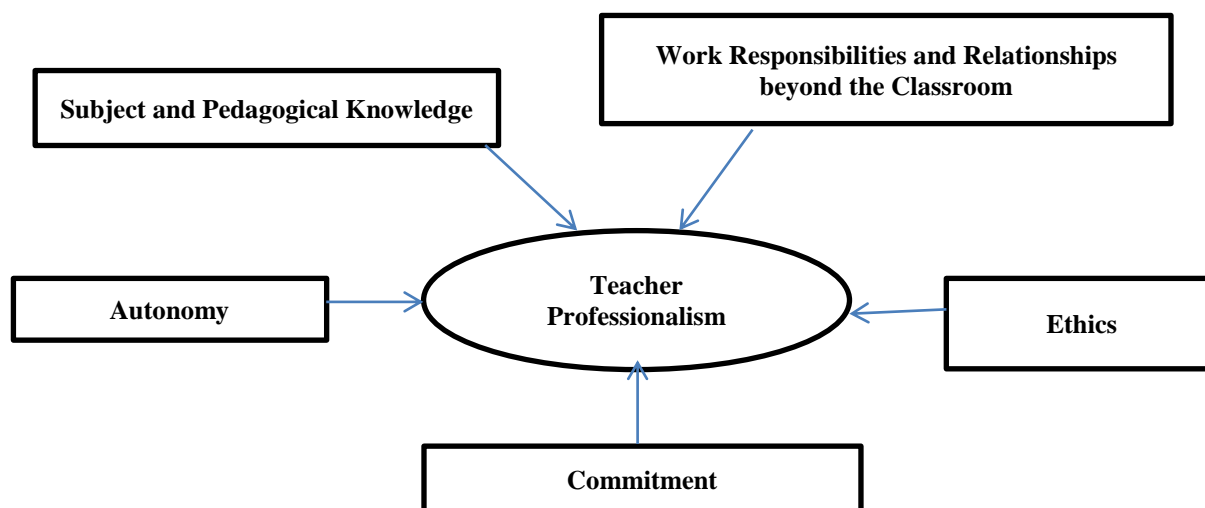
Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

Review of Related Literature

Profession, Professionalization, Professionalism

According to Hoyle and John (1995, as cited in Bukhatir, 2018), being a professional has three main points of emphasis: knowledge, autonomy and responsibility. In addition, the profession is a different category in a work and professionalism is a process in which a group of professionals who are pursuing, developing, acquiring and retaining the profession characteristics (Hargreaves, 2000), Again, professionalization is related to promoting the material and ideal interests of an occupational group (Goodson, 2000), and so it includes the attempt to gain professional associated with professions whereas professionalism focuses on the question of what qualifications and acquired capacities, what competence is required for the successful exercise of an occupation (Englund, 1996, as cited in Ariff, Mansor & Yusof, 2016).

Dimensions of the Study

The five dimensions of this study were based on the models of teacher professionalism developed by Dr. Kornhauser (1962), Hall (1968), Hargreaves and Goodson (1996), Tichenor and Tichenor (2009), and the OECD (2016). These dimensions of teacher professionalism are explained in detail as follows:

Dimension 1: Subject and Pedagogical Knowledge

With regard to *subject knowledge*, beginning teachers should focus on teaching the main concepts in the subjects they teach, try to link the lessons to real-life experiences in their teaching, learn the objectives of teaching subjects, understand how particular lessons are organized in the subjects they teach and how academic subjects are linked to other subjects, read empirical research studies, and use different kinds of reference books related to the subjects they teach. In *pedagogical knowledge*, they should understand how to plan the lesson, try to teach the lesson by linking the students' prior knowledge, understand learning theories, adapt to the diverse interests, abilities, and developmental needs of students, arrange different learning activities, use different teaching methods, use teaching aids for effective teaching, explain classroom rules and procedures, and use classroom assessment techniques during and after teaching a lesson in their classes.

Dimension 2: Commitment

Beginning teachers need to commit to their profession. Their commitment involves *commitment to school, commitment to students, commitment to teaching profession, and commitment to a professional learning base*. In their *commitment to school*, they should make an effort to meet the goals and values of the school, work hard for the school they serve, and feel as if the school's problems are their own. In their *commitment to students*, they should contribute to improving their students' quality of life, attempt to individualize learning and assessment, and give extra hours to teach the lesson for slow learners. In c*ommitment to the teaching profession*, they should have a desire to continue teaching without economic needs and a willingness to remain within their profession, although it is stressful work. They should not remain unwilling in their jobs because of their financial conditions and responsibilities for their families. In *commitment to a professional learning base*, they should attend conferences, workshops, and seminars for professional development, understand current trends in education, continue education to participate in further studies, take their jobs seriously and want to do them well, as well as engage in action research or small-scale research to improve their own teaching practices.

Dimension 3: Autonomy

Concerning autonomy, beginning teachers should have the freedom to learn, study, and teach and to be creative in their teaching. Among the subject matter contents taught in class, they should select *which lessons will be focused mainly on* teaching their students. Furthermore, *the goals and objectives of teaching a lesson, classroom procedures, the teaching learning materials, teaching methods and strategies, the scheduling of time, student learning activities, evaluation and assessment activities, as well as standards of behavior,* should be selected by themselves. They should not have too much interference in their work by the school principal and higher authorities.

Dimension 4: Ethics

As regard to ethics, beginning teachers should *respect* to principal, colleagues and students, *raise the morality* of their students by giving examples of good ethical behaviors of ideal persons in their surroundings, *treat* their students *fairly*, have a professional relationship with students and not let it get too casual and familiar, *put the welfare of students* before personal interests, *behave in an ethical manner* in and out of school in order to make sure the best ethical example for students, *arrive on time* to school and class, *be punctual* in their jobs, *avoid to discuss confidential information* related to the school with the laymen and students (e.g. examination matters) *and prepare the exam questions carefully* and *evaluate their students' performance without personal bias*. They should *not accept any illegal or immoral gifts* from their students, *push their personal beliefs on students*, or take advantage of their positions in any way.

Dimension 5: Work Responsibilities and Relationships beyond the Classroom

With regard to *work responsibilities and relationships beyond the classroom*, beginning teachers should build positive *communication with their students* to understand their students' behaviors by thinking back on their personal experiences as students, share teaching philosophies, ideas, and experiences with colleagues to seek their advice and feedback, focus on *cooperation with colleagues* rather than competition, consult with mentors and experienced teachers for needed emotional support, and have a close *relationship with their headmasters* to consult on their difficulties. Similarly, they should *participate actively in such activities as* networking with respective subject organizations within the school and with teachers in other

schools for sharing knowledge and experiences; associations such as the school council, parent-teacher association, and school board of trustees for school improvement; and school activities according to the educational calendar. In *collaborating with parents and community*, they should establish friendly relationships with them, give advice to parents and community if they are needed, inform school activities with parents and community, and participate actively in social activities for the improvement of the town or village they serve.

Methodology

Research Method

The required data for the study was collected using the descriptive research method.

Participants

The target population of the study was 423 beginning teachers from selected seven townships in Mandalay Region by using purposive sampling method.

Research Instruments

The questionnaire included demographic data and items for investigating the perceptions of beginning teachers about teacher professionalism. There are 68 items that were constructed on the basis of models developed by Dr. Kornhauser (1962), Hall (1968), Hargreaves and Goodson (1996), Tichenor and Tichenor (2009), and the OECD (2016). The questionnaire was rated on a four-point Likert scale: "strongly disagree (1)," "disagree (2)," "agree (3)" and "strongly agree (4)". Three open-ended questions were asked at the end of the questionnaire. The *first question* asked beginning teachers to give their opinions on how a professional teacher should conduct themselves to enhance their professionalism. Then the *second question* asked beginning teachers to mention the challenges they face in their professional work. Finally, the *third question* asked them to give comments on how their principals support them in order to improve their professionalism.

Data Collection Procedures

The related literature was analyzed to construct the questionnaire instrument. The advice and guidance were taken from the expert, who had special knowledge and experience in the field of the study. The pilot study was conducted with 90 beginning teachers who had less than three years of teaching services from Basic Education Schools in Pakokku, Chauk, and Netmauk Townships in Magway Region in the last week of September 2022. One week after distribution, the questionnaires were collected. The valid response rate was 98% in the pilot study. In order to measure the reliability of the instrument, the Pearson product-moment correlation method (***Average Item Total Correlation***) was used for internal consistency reliability. The average coefficient of correlation for investigating beginning teachers' perceptions of teacher professionalism was 0.824.

And then, the researcher asked for permissions from the responsible persons for the main study. After getting permissions, the questionnaires were distributed to 423 beginning teachers from selected seven townships in Mandalay Region to complete on November 22, 2022. After lasting one week, they were collected. The responses of 407 beginning teachers were obtained for the study. The response rate was 96.13%. Based on the results of the responses, the study was conducted to investigate the perceptions of beginning teachers about their professionalism.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, independent samples *t*-test, one-way ANOVA, and post-hoc multiple comparison tests (Tukey HSD and Games-Howell) were used in analyzing the data to

determine if gender, age, position, teaching subjects, and professional qualification caused a difference in their professionalism. The mean value from 1.00 to 1.75 was identified as "low level," the mean value from 1.76 to 2.50 was identified as "moderately low level," the mean value from 2.51 to 3.25 was identified as "moderately high level," and the mean value from 3.26 to 4.00 was identified as "high level." Responses of beginning teachers to three open-ended questions were used in analyzing the data.

Research Findings

The purpose of the study was to investigate beginning teachers' perceptions of teacher professionalism. The data were analyzed in terms of mean values, standard deviation, independent samples t-test, ANOVA, and post-hoc multiple comparisons (Turkey and Games-Howell). The findings were presented as follows:

Table 1: Mean Values of Beginning Teachers' Perceptions of Teacher Professionalism

Dimensions of Teacher Professionalism	Mean	SD	Remark
Subject and Pedagogical Knowledge	3.42	.33	High
Commitment	3.39	.36	High
Autonomy	3.25	.41	Moderately High
Ethics	3.52	.38	High
Relationships and Work Responsibilities beyond the Classroom	3.38	.38	High
Overall Teacher Professionalism	3.40	.32	High

1.00-1.75 = Low   1.76-2.50 = Moderately Low   2.51-3.25 = Moderately High   3.26-4.00 = High

Table 1 shows the mean values of beginning teachers' perceptions of teacher professionalism. According to Table 1, it was found that beginning teachers' perception of the "autonomy" dimension was moderately high because the mean value was 3.25. Again, the mean value for "overall teacher professionalism" was 3.40 (SD = 0.32). Moreover, it was found that the mean value of beginning teachers' perceptions of the "ethics" dimension was the highest among the dimensions of teacher professionalism.

Differences in Beginning Teachers' Perceptions on Teacher Professionalism according to Demographic Information

In order to study whether there were significant differences in beginning teachers' perceptions of teacher professionalism based on their demographic information from selected townships in Mandalay Region or not, independent samples *t*-test, one-way ANOVA, and post-hoc multiple comparisons tests (Tukey HSD or Games-Howell) were employed to analyze the data.

Table 2 describes the mean values of beginning teachers' perceptions of teacher professionalism according to their gender.

Table 2: Mean Values and Independent Samples *t* Test Results for Teacher Professionalism Grouped by Gender

Variables	Gender	N	Mean (SD)	t	df	p
Subject and Pedagogical Knowledge	male	71	3.42(.33)	-.237	102.51	ns
	female	336	3.43(.33)			
Commitment	male	71	3.37(.31)	-.613	115.69	ns
	female	336	3.39(.37)			

Variables	Gender	N	Mean (SD)	t	df	p
Autonomy	male	71	3.15(.44)	-2.179	96.00	**.032***
	female	336	3.28(.40)			
Ethics	male	71	3.50(.35)	-.517	108.22	ns
	female	336	3.53(.38)			
Relationships beyond the Classroom	male	71	3.38(.38)	-.205	101.35	ns
	female	336	3.38(.41)			
Overall Teacher Professionalism	male	71	3.37(.29)	-.929	108.76	ns
	female	336	3.41(.32)			

1.00-1.75 = Low   1.76-2.50 = Moderately Low   2.51-3.25 = Moderately High   3.26-4.00 = High
Note. **ns=no significance *p< .05**

According to Table 2, the mean value of female beginning teachers' perceptions of "overall teacher professionalism" was slightly higher than that of male beginning teachers. Moreover, a statistically significant difference was found between the group of male beginning teachers and that of female beginning teachers in the "autonomy" dimension of teacher professionalism (t = -2.179, df = 96.00, p = 0.032).

Table 3: Mean Values and ANOVA Results for Teacher Professionalism Grouped by Age

Variables	Age	N	Mean (SD)	F	p
Subject and Pedagogical Knowledge	Under 25	128	3.41 (.32)	.803	ns
	25-30	226	3.42 (.34)		
	Above 30	53	3.47 (.33)		
Commitment	Under 25	128	3.35 (.34)	1.674	ns
	25-30	226	3.40 (.36)		
	Above 30	53	3.46 (.37)		
Autonomy	Under 25	128	3.29 (.40)	.579	ns
	25-30	226	3.24 (.43)		
	Above 30	53	3.24 (.38)		
Ethics	Under 25	128	3.51 (.36)	.769	ns
	25-30	226	3.51 (.39)		
	Above 30	53	3.58 (.37)		
Relationships beyond the Classroom	Under 25	128	3.36 (.36)	.714	ns
	25-30	226	3.38 (.39)		
	Above 30	53	3.44 (.38)		
Overall Teacher Professionalism	Under 25	128	3.39 (.30)	.617	ns
	25-30	226	3.40 (.33)		
	Above 30	53	3.44 (.32)		

1.00-1.75 = Low   1.76-2.50 = Moderately Low   2.51-3.25 = Moderately High   3.26-4.00 = High
Note. **ns=no significance**

Table 3 shows the mean values and ANOVA results for teacher professionalism perceived by beginning teachers according to their age. According to Table 3, the mean value of the group of beginning teachers who were above 30 years old in "overall teacher professionalism" was slightly higher than that of the other groups of beginning teachers but there was no significant difference in each dimension of teacher professionalism among beginning teachers' age groups.

Table 4: Mean Values and ANOVA Results for Teacher Professionalism Grouped by Position

Variables	Position	*N*	Mean (*SD*)	*F*	*p*
Subject and Pedagogical Knowledge	Assistant Primary Teacher	252	3.42 (.33)	.575	ns
	Assistant Junior Teacher	45	3.47 (.32)		
	Senior Assistant Teacher	110	3.42 (.33)		
Commitment	Assistant Primary Teacher	252	3.38 (.37)	.529	ns
	Assistant Junior Teacher	45	3.43 (.34)		
	Senior Assistant Teacher	110	3.40 (.34)		
Autonomy	Assistant Primary Teacher	252	3.25 (.42)	.054	ns
	Assistant Junior Teacher	45	3.27 (.41)		
	Senior Assistant Teacher	110	3.27 (.40)		
Ethics	Assistant Primary Teacher	252	3.50 (.39)	1.708	ns
	Assistant Junior Teacher	45	3.55 (.35)		
	Senior Assistant Teacher	110	3.58 (.35)		
Relationships beyond the Classroom	Assistant Primary Teacher	252	3.40 (.37)	.383	ns
	Assistant Junior Teacher	45	3.36 (.35)		
	Senior Assistant Teacher	110	3.36 (.37)		
Overall Teacher Professionalism	Assistant Primary Teacher	252	3.39 (.33)	.213	ns
	Assistant Junior Teacher	45	3.42 (.30)		
	Senior Assistant Teacher	110	3.41 (.30)		

1.00-1.75 = Low   1.76-2.50 = Moderately Low   2.51-3.25 = Moderately High   3.26-4.00 = High
Note. **ns=no significance**

In Table 4, it was found that the mean value of the group of assistant junior beginning teachers in "overall teacher professionalism" was slightly higher than that of the other groups of novice teachers. However, there was no significant difference among the groups of positions in each dimension of teacher professionalism.

Table 5: Mean Values and ANOVA Results for Teacher Professionalism Grouped by Teaching Subjects

Variables	Teaching Subjects	*N*	Mean (*SD*)	*F*	*p*
Subject and Pedagogical Knowledge	Art subjects	113	3.41(.30)	5.234	**.006****
	Science subjects	99	3.35(.34)		
	Art and Science subjects	195	3.48(.34)		
Commitment	Art subjects	113	3.37(.36)	.349	ns
	Science subjects	99	3.38(.33)		
	Art and Science subjects	195	3.40(.37)		
Autonomy	Art subjects	113	3.24(.41)	.498	ns
	Science subjects	99	3.24(.36)		
	Art and Science subjects	195	3.28(.44)		
Ethics	Art subjects	113	3.50(.40)	.287	ns
	Science subjects	99	3.54(.35)		
	Art and Science subjects	195	3.53(.38)		
Relationships beyond the Classroom	Art subjects	113	3.36(.37)	2.331	ns
	Science subjects	99	3.33(.36)		
	Art and Science subjects	195	3.42(.39)		
Overall Teacher Professionalism	Art subjects	113	3.38(.32)	1.323	ns
	Science subjects	99	3.37(.29)		
	Art and Science subjects	195	3.43(.33)		

1.00-1.75 = Low   1.76-2.50 = Moderately Low   2.51-3.25 = Moderately High   3.26-4.00 = High
Note. **ns=no significance **$p < .01$

In addition, according to the findings shown in Table 5, the mean value of beginning teachers who taught art and science subjects was the highest among three groups, and there was only a statistically significant difference among beginning teachers' teaching subjects groups in "Subject and Pedagogical Knowledge" (F (2,404) = 5.234, p<0.01).

In order to find out which particular groups had significant differences, a post-hoc multiple comparisons test (Games-Howell) was conducted. The following Table 6 points out the results of multiple comparisons of beginning teachers' perceptions on subject and pedagogical knowledge according to their teaching subjects.

Table 6: The Result of Multiple Comparisons for Subject and Pedagogical Knowledge Dimension Grouped by Teaching Subjects

Variables	Teaching Subjects (I)	Teaching Subjects (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	*p*
Subject and Pedagogical Knowledge	Art and Science subjects	Science Subjects	0.126	**.005***

*The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

According to Table 6, there was a statistically significant difference was found between the group of beginning teachers who taught art and science subjects and the group of beginning teachers who taught science subjects in the dimensions of "subject and pedagogical knowledge".

Table 7: Mean Values and ANOVA Results for Teacher Professionalism Grouped by Academic Qualifications

Variables	Professional Qualifications	*N*	Mean (*SD*)	*F*	*P*
Subject and Pedagogical Knowledge	Undergraduate	52	3.38 (.31)	1.231	ns
	BA/BSc/BEd	287	3.44 (.33)		
	MA/MSc	68	3.39 (.34)		
Commitment	Undergraduate	52	3.31 (.39)	1.778	ns
	BA/BSc/BEd	287	3.40 (.35)		
	MA/MSc	68	3.43 (.35)		
Autonomy	Undergraduate	52	3.22 (.39)	.254	ns
	BA/BSc/BEd	287	3.26 (.43)		
	MA/MSc	68	3.26 (.37)		
Ethics	Undergraduate	52	3.45 (.39)	1.422	ns
	BA/BSc/BEd	287	3.52 (.37)		
	MA/MSc	68	3.57 (.38)		
Relationships beyond the Classroom	Undergraduate	52	3.35 (.39)	.400	ns
	BA/BSc/BEd	287	3.39 (.38)		
	MA/MSc	68	3.36 (.38)		
Overall Teacher Professionalism	Undergraduate	52	3.34 (.32)	.846	ns
	BA/BSc/BEd	287	3.40 (.32)		
	MA/MSc	68	3.40 (.31)		

1.00-1.75 = Low   1.76-2.50 = Moderately Low   2.51-3.25 = Moderately High   3.26-4.00 = High

According to Table 7, the mean values of all groups of beginning teachers were at high levels in "overall teacher professionalism," and there was no statistically significant difference among them.

Table 8: **Mean Values and ANOVA Results for Teacher Professionalism Grouped by Professional Training**

Variables	Professional Training	*N*	Mean (*SD*)	*F*	*P*
Subject and Pedagogical Knowledge	DTEd/BEd	109	3.45 (.32)	.118	.899
	PPTT/PGDMA/SRC	234	3.42 (.32)		
	Township-based Teacher Training	64	3.43 (.30)		
Commitment	DTEd/BEd	109	3.44 (.36)	.494	.610
	PPTT/PGDMA/SRC	234	3.38 (.34)		
	Township-based Teacher Training	64	3.39 (.31)		
Autonomy	DTEd/BEd	109	3.32 (.42)	1.715	.181
	PPTT/PGDMA/SRC	234	3.21 (.39)		
	No Township-based Teacher Training	64	3.20 (.35)		
Ethics	DTEd/BEd	109	3.55 (.38)	0.16	.984
	PPTT/PGDMA/SRC	234	3.51 (.36)		
	Township-based Teacher Training	64	3.49 (.34)		
Relationships beyond the Classroom	DTEd/BEd	109	3.39 (.38)	.071	.931
	PPTT/PGDMA/SRC	234	3.38 (.37)		
	Township-based Teacher Training	64	3.28 (.28)		
Overall Teacher Professionalism	DTEd/BEd	109	3.39 (.32)	.325	.723
	PPTT/PGDMA/SRC	234	3.38 (.29)		
	Township-based Teacher Training	64	3.36 (.24)		

1.00-1.75 = Low   1.76-2.50 = Moderately Low   2.51-3.25 = Moderately High   3.26-4.00 = High

Note. **ns=no significance**

*Note***:** BEd = Bachelor of Education   DTEd= Diploma in Teacher Education

PPTT= Pre-Primary Teacher Training

PGDMA= Post-graduate Diploma in Multimedia Arts

SRC= Special Refresher Course (one month)

As illustrated in Table 8, the mean values of all groups of novice teachers were at high levels in "overall teacher professionalism." It was also found that there was no statistically significant difference among all groups of novice teachers according to their professional training in "overall teacher professionalism."

Open-ended Responses

The responses to three open-ended questions were collected at the end of the questionnaire. The *first question* asked beginning teachers to give their comments on how a professional teacher should conduct themselves to enhance their professionalism. Among respondents, 21 (5.16%) beginning teachers did not answer that question, while 386 (94.84%) teachers responded to the question.

According to beginning teachers' responses, 135 (34.97%) beginning teachers said that a professional teacher should behave in an ethical manner in and out of school, arrive on time to school and class, and work hard for the school as much as we can."

Additionally, 62 (16.06%) beginning teachers responded that a professional teacher should use different learning activities, teaching methods, and teaching aids in accordance with the lesson objectives and should adapt students' interests, needs and abilities."

Besides, 87 (21.38%) beginning teachers answered that a professional teacher should read different kinds of reference books related to the subjects they teach. Moreover, a professional teacher must be a lifelong learner by participating in continuous professional development programs.

Similarly, 64 (16.58%) beginning teachers gave the response that a professional teacher should understand current trends in education, such as new curriculum implementation.

Furthermore, 38 (9.84%) beginning teachers responded that a professional teacher should apply the experiences and knowledge learned from their professional training and professional development workshops to his or her teaching practices and learn well other teachers' explanations in subject-matter refresher courses in order to get new knowledge and experiences.

The *second question* asked beginning teachers to mention the challenges they face in their professional work. Among the respondents, 251 (61.67%) beginning teachers answered the question, and 156 (38.33%) did not answer the question.

Among respondents, 82 (32.67%) beginning teachers reported that they had challenges in curriculum delivery. They struggled with preparing for the lessons, making the lesson interesting and explaining some lessons in new curriculum reforms. Therefore, they needed guidance and support in planning and teaching the lessons."

Besides, 44 (17.53%) beginning teachers answered that they were facing the challenges of classroom management in solving the behavioral as well as emotional problems of students in our classrooms."

Additionally, 67 (21.38%) beginning teachers answered that they were facing the challenges of managing the physical resources. They didn't get suitable teaching aids for the lessons and electronic media such as TV, computer, projector, and audio-visual materials sufficiently. Moreover, they didn't have sufficient reference books, educational magazines, journals and articles in order to learn new ideas and concepts as their instructional aids. They also had no laboratory classrooms for doing practical activities in science subjects.

Additionally, 58 (23.11%) beginning teachers responded that they were facing the challenges of managing time. They had teaching many different subjects in classes, and so they had difficulties to teach them well in the allocated time as there were insufficient teachers in our school."

Finally, the *third question* asked them to give comments on how their principals support them in order to improve their professional development. Among respondents, 109 (26.78%) beginning teachers did not answer that question, while 298 (73.21%) beginning teachers responded to the question.

According to teachers' responses, 56 (18.79%) beginning teachers said that their principals encouraged them to attend workshops, seminars, conferences, and professional development courses at the local and central level."

Furthermore, 103 (34.56%) beginning teachers answered that their principals encouraged to have a close relationship between new teachers and experienced teachers in order to get needed emotional support. In addition, they asked experienced teachers to help new teachers when they had difficulties."

Additionally, 112 (37.58%) beginning teachers gave the responses that their principals encouraged them to collaborate with other colleagues and students from their schools in performing their school activities".

Besides, 27 (9.06%) beginning teachers replied that their principals gave them the opportunity to talk and share their knowledge and experiences in school assemblies."

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore beginning teachers' perceptions of teacher professionalism. **Research question one** investigated the perceptions of beginning teachers about teacher professionalism. It was found that the mean value of beginning teachers' perceptions on autonomy dimension was moderately high. Moreover, it was found that the mean value of beginning teachers' perception of the dimension of "ethics" was the highest among the other dimensions of teacher professionalism. This finding of the study is similar with the assumption of Hargreaves (2003, as cited in Hassan, Musa, Gengatharan, & Sabri, 2021), which revealed that firm value, together with belief and ethical spirit, has become an integral part of teacher professionalism. Moreover, this finding is also consistent with the assumption of Killen (2016, as cited in Hassan, Musa, Gengatharan, & Sabri, 2021) which stated that teachers need to accept the ethics of a teacher as a guide to enable them to succeed in the profession.

For **research question two**, the findings showed that the mean value of female beginning teachers' perceptions of teacher professionalism was higher than that of male beginning teachers' perceptions of teacher professionalism according to their gender. Therefore, it can be assumed that female beginning teachers had higher perceptions of teacher professionalism than male beginning teachers. These findings of the study are in line with the assumptions of Ingersoll and Merrill (2010, as cited in Swezey & Finn, 2014), which stated that the teaching profession is increasingly dominated by females, and they said that with the increased role of females, examining the effect of gender offers the potential factor for new insights into how teachers perceive various aspects of teacher professionalism. Moreover, the findings showed that there was a significant difference in the dimension of autonomy between those gender groups.

Research question three examined the mean values of beginning teachers' perceptions on teacher professionalism according to their age. It was found that the mean values of beginning teachers' perceptions on teacher professionalism were high in overall teacher professionalism according to their age. Moreover, it was also found that the mean value of perceptions of beginning teachers who were above 30 years old was slightly higher than that of the other groups of beginning teachers in overall teacher professionalism. However, according to ANOVA results, there were no significant differences in all dimensions of teacher professionalism and overall teacher professionalism among those age groups.

The findings of **research question four** also showed that the mean values of beginning teachers' perceptions of teacher professionalism were high in all dimensions of teacher professionalism according to their position. Moreover, it was also found that the mean value of perceptions of primary beginning teachers on the dimension of autonomy was moderately high according to their position. According to ANOVA results, the findings showed that there was no significant difference in all dimensions of teacher professionalism and overall teacher professionalism among those position groups.

In the findings of **research question five**, it was found that the mean values of beginning teachers' perceptions of teacher professionalism were high in overall teacher professionalism according to their teaching subjects. Moreover, it can be seen that the mean values of perceptions of beginning teachers who taught art subjects and beginning teachers who taught science subjects were moderately high in the dimension of autonomy according to their teaching subjects. According to ANOVA results, it could be found that there was a statistically significant difference among those groups in the dimensions of subject and pedagogical knowledge. Moreover, as a result of the Multiple Comparisons Test (Game-Howell), the group of teachers

who taught art and science subjects significantly differed with the group of teachers who taught science subjects in the dimensions of subject and pedagogical knowledge. This finding was identical with the finding of Munawar, Sattar & Gull (2020), in which they found that there was no significant difference between those groups according to their teaching subjects.

In **research question six, i**t was found that the mean values of perceptions of teacher professionalism were high in all dimensions of teacher professionalism according to their professional qualifications. Moreover, it can be assumed that the mean value of perceptions of beginning teachers who were undergraduates in the dimension of autonomy was moderately high. According to ANOVA results, the findings showed that there was no significant difference in all dimensions of teacher professionalism and overall teacher professionalism among those groups. This finding is not identical with the findings of Toh, Diong, Boo & Chia (1996), which revealed that there was a significant relationship between professional qualification and teacher professionalism in their studies.

Research question seven examined the mean values of beginning teachers' perceptions on teacher professionalism according to their professional training. It was found that the mean values of beginning teachers' perceptions on teacher professionalism were high in overall teacher professionalism according to their training. Moreover, it was also found that the mean value of perceptions of beginning teachers who attended DTEd/BEd was slightly higher than the other groups of beginning teachers in overall teacher professionalism. Among those three groups, the the mean value of perceptions of beginning teachers who had attended township-based teacher training was the lowest. This finding follow the conceptualization of Ulyik, Smith & Helleve (2009) that beginning teachers could experience difficulties in adapting to the school culture, either due to the lack of support of relevant training, or by teaching subjects that they did not receive training for. However, according to ANOVA results, there were no significant differences in all dimensions of teacher professionalism and overall teacher professionalism among those groups.

Moreover, the responses to three open-ended questions were supported by the quantitative studies. Furthermore, the findings would provide useful information about the challenges beginning teachers encounter in their schools and their school principals' support. To sum up, beginning teachers who have less than three years of teaching experience need to improve their professionalism by getting the help and support of more experienced teachers and their school principals, because the first years of teaching are the most challenging years for them.

Suggestions

Beginning teachers should

- be given freedom to exercise their own judgement in their teaching by applying their specialized knowledge and skills learnt from teacher training.
- conduct action research and read findings from the action research in order to examine their own knowledge, skills and values.

Experienced teachers should

- give instructional and emotional support to prevent beginning teachers' under-confidence.
- collaborate with beginning teachers in school activities by giving guidance.

School principals should

- promote interaction between experienced and beginning teachers in order to share feedback for improving their practices.
- assign beginning teachers' jobs after giving effective school-based induction program.

- encourage beginning teachers to be able to read many educational books, journals and magazines and educational research papers as possible as they can.
- promote good communication between teachers and parents for carrying out school activities together.
- need to encourage beginning teachers for participating in continuous professional development programs.
- encourage beginning teachers to conduct action research by exercising their creative talents.
- organize and gather to get to know each other and form a healthy social relationship among colleagues.

Policy makers should

- assign their jobs after giving initial teacher training and preparation.
- implement effective teacher induction program for beginning teachers.
- manage effective subject-matter refresher courses, workshops, seminars and conferences at the district and township level in accordance with the objectives of conducting training.
- supply ICT materials for multimedia classrooms and materials for science laboratory sufficiently.

Recommendations for Further Study

This study was geographically restricted to Mandalay Region. As further research, it is necessary to explore the perceptions of beginning teachers with larger sample from other states and divisions to represent the whole country. Although the participants were beginning teachers who have less than three years of teaching services in this study, further research could explore teachers who have at least five years of teaching experiences in order to get larger sample. Moreover, the researcher asked the perceptions of beginning teachers to know their principals' support and excluded the school principals to be research participants. Therefore, it is suggested to conduct further research with the research participants of beginning teachers and their school principals.

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