

## Experiencing Professional Identity of Vocational College Teachers

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### Abstract

**Background and Originality:** The quality of the learning process in higher vocational schools is also influenced by the awareness of experiencing teachers' identity. It is important to be aware of how teachers' identity affects their personal identity and satisfaction with the chosen profession. The article aims to contribute to greater recognition of the teaching profession at a vocational college in Slovenia, identify different practices of experiencing the teaching profession, and gain insight into the possible gap between theory and practice. Not only sound education but also vigilance and commitment are needed. Most of the selected topics focused on the new perspective, recognising that by acknowledging the characteristics of teachers' identity and the teaching profession and its experiences, we contribute significantly to greater visibility of the teaching profession.

**Method:** We used different studies based on content analysis of various articles from the existing literature of foreign and domestic authors. We conducted semi-structured interviews and the moderator's diary entry, which we analysed based on a qualitative approach, using the definition of third-order concepts and thematic network.

**Results:** The study results showed that teachers are inexperienced at the beginning of their careers and pass through different stages, from sovereignty to competence, as their professional experience increases. Professional experience influences perceptions of the teaching profession and thus professional identity. In the latter, knowledge is most important for teachers, followed by communication and personality traits. Teachers believe that the environment influences them by valuing the role of the teacher. Initially, teachers are sceptical of the environment, but as they gain professional experience, they perceive the environment's support, which influences their professional identity.

**Society:** The teacher is first and foremost the one who gives value to one's profession by acknowledging one's identity, role, task, and experience with the environment and society. This increases the value of the educational process and, consequently, society's academic and cultural level.

**Limitations / further research:** We have limited our research from selective databases from a predetermined period. The study includes a small sample of teachers from southeastern Slovenia. Further research could be conducted on a larger sample using focus groups, where interaction between the participants themselves is possible and examined through the lens of the length of professional experience. As such, additional differences in the experience of the teaching profession in relation to professional experience can be revealed.

**Keywords:** teacher, personality, identity, competencies, role, characteristics, recognition.

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## 1 Introduction

In modern society, there are various views on the concept of identity that essentially have in common that identity is dynamic, ambiguous, and changeable. Jenkins (2014, p. 3) says that who we are and whom we appear to be are extremely important. Identity always includes the individual, but we must not forget that it also consists of the collective and history. He also says (p. 200) that identity and identification are general aspects of human life everywhere that it is a strategic concept to understand the relationship between individuality and collectively.

Identity is formed in the relationship between the external and internal environment and the experience of the individual's environment in daily life. Identity shows the individual who one is, what ideas they have about who they are and their desires about whom they want to be. Carrinusa et al.'s (2011, p. 593) study show that professional identity should not be viewed as a composite variable with a unified structure. The study on teacher identity concludes that it is necessary to consider teachers' satisfaction with their work, effectiveness and professional commitment, and their level of motivation as indicators of teacher identity.

In the present study, we are primarily interested in how teachers in higher vocational schools experience their professional identity. We are interested in the role of their work in shaping their own identity, how group identity influences the teacher, their personal identity, and consequently, the profession or task chosen.

Based on interviews and diaries of college teachers who have been teaching for varying lengths of time, we attempt to highlight the elements of identity change that teachers experience in their professional lives and how this affects them and their work with young adults entering education.

The purpose of the article is to contribute to greater visibility of the teaching profession at a vocational college in Slovenia, identify different practices of experiencing the teaching profession, and gain insight into the possible gap between theory and practice. Not only a sound education but also vigilance and commitment are most needed. By recognising the characteristics of teachers' identity and the teaching profession, as well as their experiences, we contribute to the enhancement of the teaching profession. By recognising the teachers' identity, role, task and experiences, the teacher also increases the value of their work to the environment and society. This increases the value of the educational process and consequently raises society's educational and cultural levels. Thus, the research will help improve the quality of the learning process, and it will also shed light on the experience of professional identity of higher education teachers and help them experience themselves based on empirical material.

## 2 Theoretical framework

Each teacher perceives identity in their own way. Teachers view identity as a set of different factors. According to a study conducted among secondary teachers, it is primarily their previous perceptions of teacher identity that they perceived and experienced at the beginning of their career that has the most significant influence on teacher identity (Beijaard, Verloop, & Vermunt, 2000, p. 749). This study shows that most teachers perceive identity differently today than when they were novice teachers. Maclure (1993, p. 311) understands identity as a type of argument or resource that people use to explain, justify, and frame feelings about themselves in relation to others and the world in general. Junior teacher identity is also addressed in the study by Skotta (2019, p. 469), who notes the interdependence of identity with the environment, i.e., colleagues and management that changes a junior teacher's identity from being a teacher to becoming a teacher.

For a society for which knowledge is one of the most important foundations, it is important to identify the current and future skill needs of educational participants and teachers. Identifying needs allows society to respond appropriately. It is important to choose strategies to mitigate the possible negative consequences of a teacher's professional development in a given period (Javrh, 2011, p. 8). However, identifying a teacher's needs is undeniably linked to understanding their mission and identity.

Ideas of what a teacher should be are formed at a very early stage of child development: as good, kind, fair, fun, and playful. Research among elementary school teachers has shown that children's ideas of what a teacher should be like in the first two years of elementary school are unrealistic, as children expect versatility and perfection from teachers. This can be very stressful for teachers (Planinc, 2016, p. 49).

Teachers' impact on the environment depends on how they perceive their identity and how they manifest it in the environment in which they operate. Maclure (1993, p. 311) defined the concept of identity as an organising principle in the work and lives of teachers. She sees identity as a resource that people use to explain and justify their sense of self in relation to others and the world at large. She understands identity as a place of constant struggle for all, particularly highlighting teachers who are experiencing a crisis of identity due to the disintegration of old teaching models under the influence of modern society and economic pressures.

The work of teachers extends beyond the classroom as teachers incorporate the knowledge they gain from networking with each other, pursuing innovation, and gaining experience in their teaching process. Finally, there is support within the teaching staff. In this way, they also strengthen their relationship with students. Shapiro (2010, p. 616) states that increasing awareness of emotional experiences improves the strength of relationships among teachers and prevents the continued dehumanisation of the teaching profession in our current socio-political environment. The author also states that emotional identity must be better recognised in schools to become an integral part of learning practice (p. 620).

In constructing identity, it is essential on the one hand to shape and secure the state of identity itself, and on the other hand to explore the emotional components of a teacher's identity, which allows for a better understanding of the teacher about oneself. A teacher's identity is embedded in the context of power relations, ideology, and culture (Zembylas, 2003, p. 213).

Teachers who are satisfied in their professional environment and work have found meaning and purpose in their work. Klampfer (2012) says that finding purpose is not easy, but we certainly look for reasons to do what we do (p. 7), what goals we want to achieve, what makes us happy, where we are good at, and what we can offer to the environment. On the other hand, the search for meaning is open to everyone (p. 1). Meaningful pursuits give meaning, provide sense to life. They become so when doing something or contributing to a goal is worthwhile.

A study examining teachers' identity in elementary schools in Slovenia (Dragovič, 2010) concluded that teachers who have taken a neurolinguistic programming course are more confident and positive about their work than teachers who have not. She also found that teachers who have taken the neurolinguistic programming course are more likely to maintain their professional identity, regardless of personal, social, or political changes/critical events. Therefore, the study considers the development of professional development courses with neurolinguistic programming content that focus less on skills and knowledge and more on beliefs, values, and identity, which may be a more effective approach (pp. 9-10).

Fullan and Hargreaves (2012, p. 1) embrace the passion and purpose of teaching that is quickly overlooked in the standards but give teaching its own rhythm that invites everyone to work. They emphasise that the teacher must be respected as a personality and someone who educates, not measured only by measurable outcomes. With this awareness, all teachers and leaders in every school can achieve a collective transformation of public education.

In Makovec's (2018, p. 33) study, she found two conclusions: teachers with many years of professional experience feel better qualified for their jobs than teachers with less professional experience. She also found that teachers define their professional identity, and thus their role, through personality traits, which should not be ignored as they influence teachers' perceptions of their identity. Similar to Makovec (2018), Haghighi Irani, Chalak, and Heidari Tabrizi (2020) also noted that building a teacher's identity is a process that develops over a long period. The study examined perceptions of teacher identity among teachers with different lengths of service from the beginning before they were hired. Three significant changes in participants' identities were found: (1) from a commitment to evaluation to a commitment to modality, (2) from unidimensional to multidimensional perceptions, (3) from problem analysis to problem-solving (p. 1).

According to a study by Canrinus et al. (2011), teachers' job satisfaction, efficiency, professional commitment, and motivation are indicators of teacher identity. Here, the authors state that a teacher's professional identity is primarily related to how teachers see themselves, perceive themselves, and interpret themselves in the context in which they find themselves (p.

593). Their research findings highlighted (p. 594) that interaction is reflected in teachers' job satisfaction, professional commitment, self-efficacy, and changing motivation. These are elements that testify to teachers seeing themselves as experts in their work. The study also concluded (pp. 596, 604) that professional identity cannot be attributed to all teachers in the same way, which is justified by several different profiles of professional identity according to the indicators of teachers' perceptions of professional identity: (1) dissatisfied and demotivated identity profile (these are teachers who evaluate the indicators negatively); (2) motivated and emotionally engaged identity profile (these are teachers who evaluate the indicators positively); (3) doubting competence identity profile (these are teachers who evaluate the indicators differently).

According to Tantawy (2020, p. 181), the relationship between the school environment and teachers, their readiness for professional development, consideration of personality traits, considering student achievement, teacher promotion, and workplace engagement are just some of the factors that explain teachers' perceptions and their impact on teachers' professional development. The study results showed the positive impact of professional development on job performance, personality traits, student outcomes, career, promotion, and commitment to the profession. The study found that a positive, supportive school culture encourages teachers to develop professionally and be aware of their importance to the teaching profession (p. 191). This also strengthens professional identity.

According to Tapani and Salonen (2019, p. 255), teachers must also adapt to societal changes and take this into account when managing competencies. They acknowledge that competencies are becoming increasingly fragmented, affecting a teacher's identity. The teacher in the traditional role, as we used to know it, has to master other competencies, so that instead of the term teacher, we increasingly use terms such as coach, mentor, facilitator. The word teacher in the traditional sense best describes the person as an expert who uses a set of specific competencies in the classroom. The fragmented nature of teachers' work means that they must share their expertise every day. Not every individual can master all the competencies, so the work is often done in pairs or groups. Sharing expertise allows everyone to focus on their strengths. It is a way of working that promotes well-being, community and social capital in the workplace.

According to Fullan and Hargreaves (2012, pp. 31-35), occupational capital consists of three components: Human capital, social capital, and decision-making capital. They mention that human capital, an attribute of the individual, must be complemented by social capital. The person's individuality is important, but the authors also emphasise the importance of the social component, which they consider even more important for the learning process. They note that if only a few teachers are exceptional, it does not detract from the uniqueness of the entire collective. With this awareness, all teachers and leaders in every school can achieve collective change in public education. They also emphasise that it is necessary for most teachers to possess the power of professional capital, as this means that they will then become wise and talented, collegial and prudent, thoughtful and wise. Their moral purpose manifests itself in a

tireless and professional effort to serve students while learning for themselves how to do even better.

Makovec (2018, p. 148) stated, "Teachers need to be made aware of the factors that impact their professional identity and development. It is important to pay attention to the changes that occur, not to be afraid of them, but to be aware of them and reflect on them to both improve their performance and reflect on their professional development." Her study also noted that teachers, as individuals, must take responsibility for their learning and personal development. It is about a teacher's ability to take charge of their work, plan for the development of their career, and monitor what needs to happen in the context of the organisation in which they work (p. 134). The author further stated that the role of a teacher is not clearly defined because various factors influence it.

Moreover, teachers do not always perceive a particular role in the same way but change their role and perception of identity during their career. Therefore, factors are divided into two groups, namely (1) internal factors, which influence the teacher's perception of the role, and (2) external factors, which indicate the teacher's view of the role and the expectations of students, colleagues, management, and the public). However, both internal and external factors influence the teacher's professional identity. The internal factors that originate with teachers themselves fall into two categories: their own beliefs about the importance of a role and the teacher's expectations about their role. Beliefs about their role are often worldly and not professionally based, but this does not mean that they are not important, for they usually have a strong emotional and evaluative component and influence teachers' teaching independently of knowledge-based perceptions. We must also not forget teachers' expectations, which are essential in understanding their role. How teachers experience themselves at work may also depend on how they experience themselves as professionals. A teacher's expectations are also influenced by experience and knowledge, where teachers build their professional self-image. Thus, teachers' expectations are also directly related to their professional identity (p. 135).

According to Al-Mahdi (2019, p. 37), a single teacher's value depends on the teacher's competencies. The author explained that this is only possible through the teacher's continuous professional development. However, a teacher's professional development is influenced by the continuous professional development mentioned by Li (2016) and by the mentorship that a teacher may receive, especially at the beginning of their career. Li (2016) also discussed teachers' identity crisis resolved by continuing education in terms of the institution's influence where teachers have been. They are studying or have already been trained in a particular field and have continued their professional journey until they obtain a doctorate (pp. 258-259). The results of Kutsyuruba et al.'s (2019, p. 2) study showed a strong relationship between the experience that the mentor has and passed on to the novice teacher and the consequent well-being of the teachers. Teachers who did not have a mentor felt worse about their role as a teacher than those who had experienced their role as a teacher with a mentor. Therefore, the study recommends increased mentor involvement as a strategy and support for beginning

teachers. This will help novice teachers overcome the negative experiences or challenges that novice teachers face early in their careers (p. 4).

A study by Colognesi, Van Nieuwenhoven, and Beusaert (2020, p. 258) showed the importance of mentoring in helping novice teachers persevere in their profession and not give up on it. This paper highlighted the importance of the role of mentoring, emphasising not only the aspect of formal mentoring but also the extent of knowledge sharing. The primary role is played by the mentor, who is often seen as a mechanism of monitoring or evaluation. The teacher prefers not to choose a more senior staff member as a mentor but a staff member who is trusted to teach the same content in the same year. When there is a good learning environment, it is easiest to share knowledge.

To more easily keep up with the changes that are a regular part of the teaching profession, teachers must engage in lifelong learning, noted Cai (2019, pp. 26-27), to meet the demands of their profession. Work experience or length of service should not be a change. Cai's study also identified the impact of non-formal learning on experienced teachers, focusing on non-formal learning activities in the age of the Internet and emerging technologies. It recognises non-formal learning as a significant form of professional self-development for teachers because other teachers do not receive it at later stages of their careers, except for early-career teachers who receive specialised training. The responsibility for academic development is placed on the teachers themselves, emphasising ICT training. However, research has also shown that teachers still value external encouragement from colleagues and attend in-service training and workshops regulated by the teachers' agency (p. 37).

Most of the selected topics in the research are dedicated to a new point of view, namely to try to answer the research question: what are the elements of teacher identity and the teaching profession and do their experiences contribute significantly to a greater visibility of the teaching profession?

Based on the presented theoretical starting points and the research question, we developed the following theses:

- 1) Teachers' perception of professional experience influences their perception and experience of the teaching profession.
- 2) For teachers, knowledge is paramount to their professional identity.
- 3) Teachers believe that the environment influences them by evaluating their role, which affects their professional identity as teachers.

The purpose of our study was to determine how teachers in higher vocational colleges experience their identity. We were interested in how teachers' group identity and environment affect their personal identity and, consequently, their satisfaction with their chosen profession.

By searching for answers, we aimed to contribute to a greater recognition of the teaching profession in a vocational college in Slovenia, identify different practices of experiencing the teaching profession, and gain insight into the possible gap between theory and practice. In addition, we wanted to shed light on the experience of professional identity of higher education teachers and sensitise teachers to their self-knowledge about their professional identity. In this way, teachers can continuously develop and progress.

### **3 Method**

A qualitative approach was used using semi-structured interviews and diary entries. We reviewed the literature related to our topic area published after 2010 for the semi-structured interviews. The literature review was conducted using Google Scholar, SpringerLink, and COBISS (a Slovenian library information system). In addition, primary data were obtained through interviews and diary entries.

We used several methods in the study: collecting and studying literature, the method of comparison, in which we examined the literature related to our research on professional identity; the method of semi-structured interviews (with five higher education teachers from vocational colleges); the method of diary entry (the first author, who is both a moderator and a researcher due to her own experience as a vocational college higher education teacher) and empirical qualitative analysis of the obtained results - content analysis through the definition of third-order concepts (Mesec & Lamovec, 1998, pp. 101-102) for each individual and thematic network (Roblek, 2009, pp. 56-60). Coding leads us from open to relational coding, as Kordeš and Smrdu write (2015, pp. 52-58), thus a paradigmatic research model. As mentioned, the moderator has experience as a vocational college higher education teacher and is also the first author of this article. Her knowledge of working in education helped her to navigate questions and moderate. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five higher education teachers from vocational college, the largest in Slovenia. We also considered the criteria of years of service (up to 8 years, up to 16 years, up to 24 years, up to 32 years, up to 40 years) and willingness to participate in research. We chose the largest vocational college to make the circumstances of teachers related to professional life as similar as possible.

The moderator asked questions based on her experience. Vogrinc (2008) points out that the researcher's influence on the research cannot be negated entirely (p. 158), as the moderator was often in the same role as the respondents. She is a teacher at a vocational college. This is an added value of the research because the questions are more comprehensive due to the knowledge of the topic with several aspects being covered. Bjekić (2012) mentions observing social relations during one's activity as one of the elements of the communication competencies model (p. 164). The moderator in our research also kept a diary of her professional knowledge acquired as a teacher.

The moderator conducted the interview with five vocational college teachers from southeastern Slovenia who have been teaching for different lengths of time and have different



professional experiences. Teachers from vocational colleges of southeast Slovenia were invited to participate. The criteria for participation included consent to participate in the study and the number of years of service. According to the national legislation of 40 years of service, we divided the participants into equal sections, namely eight years. The selection was completed when enough teachers came forward who met the selection criteria. The interviews were semi-structured. All interviews were recorded, then the moderator transcribed the text, which she analysed according to the definition of third-order concepts and thematic networks. She applied the same approach to the analysis of her diary entries. Interview transcripts and coding were sent to participants for a second review to ensure the reliability and validity of the transcripts and coding.

Triangulation of methods was used to test the theses; the model used is paradigmatic. We identified codes and categories from the data, selected those consistent with the research objectives, and assigned them meaning. As Vogrinc (2008, 65-66) stipulated, we linked them to causal or other contexts. Quotes from participants support the themes. The research was conducted in 4 steps: (1) data collection, (2) development of the theoretical model and measurement instruments, (3) reliability and interpretation of the data, (4) reliability and validity of the construct and data, as shown in the research design in Figure 1.

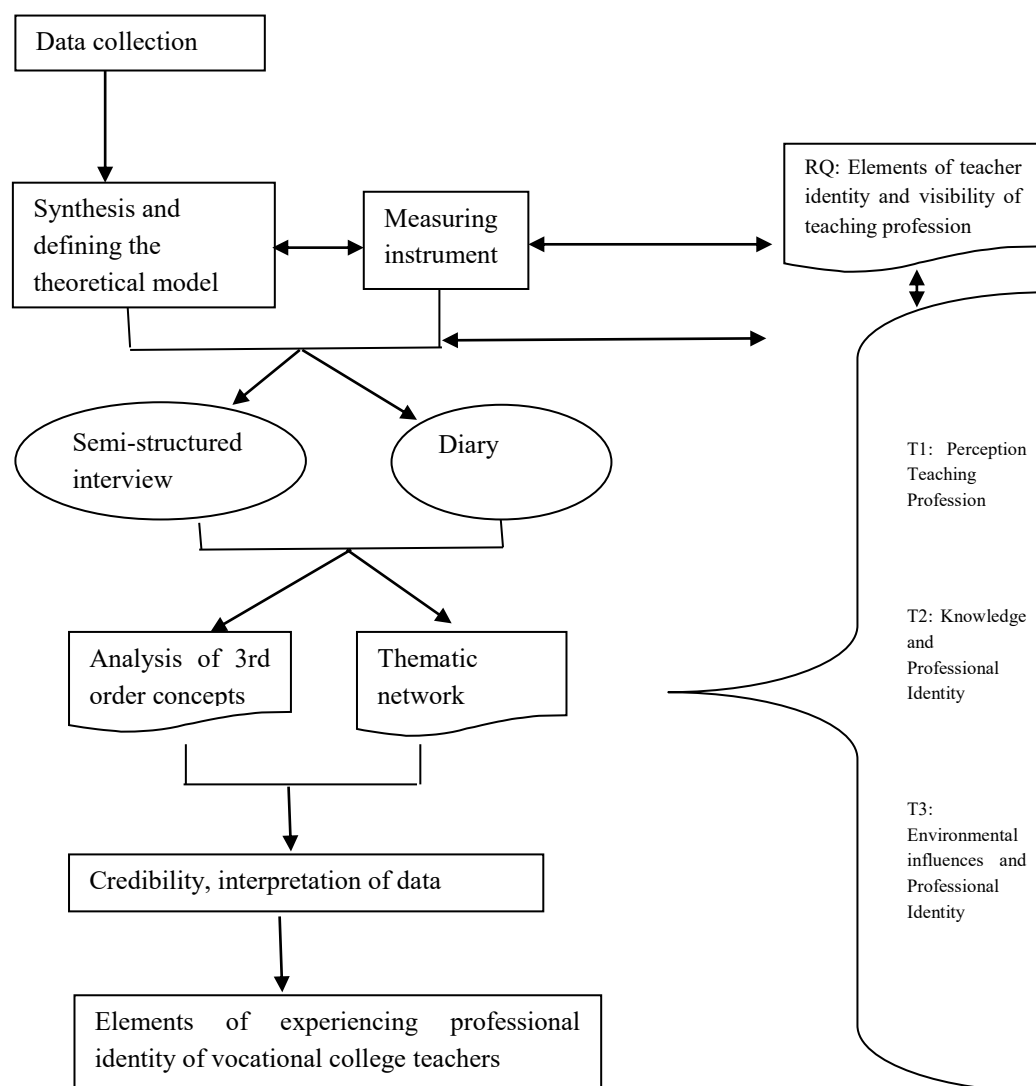


Figure 1. Research design

Qualitative research makes it possible to investigate phenomena and appearances in a way that we cannot yet measure with quantitative methods. Qualitative research is suitable for capturing, describing, and interpreting patterns of behaviour, experience, and communication and are the most appropriate method, especially in the case of the human experience (Kordeš & Smrdu, 2015, p. 11). Validity and reliability were determined using Kordeš and Smrdu's (pp. 71-72) guidelines. These are: 1. construct validity (thesis is developed on relevant literature); 2. internal validity (given causally supported relationships); 3. external validity (research results can be transferred or generalised to the broader environment); 4. conceptual validity (data from interviews and diary entries were combined into a new construct); 5. intercoder validity (verification of recorded interviews); 6. ecological validity (school environment with living conditions); 7. consensual validity (verification of interpretation of data with feedback to participants). This study also ensured greater reliability of results through triangulation of methods (semi-structured interviews, diary, an additional researcher

to code, collect and examine the literature), determining the thesis, research question, participants, and analysis of collected data

## 4 Results

### 4.1 Interview Results

#### 4.1.1 Demographic Data

All college teachers from southeastern Slovenia were invited to participate in the study. According to the selection criteria (consent to participate, different professional experience, number of years of service), college teachers were included in the study, all of them employed at the largest vocational college. Each of them covered a different subject area, namely the field of technical terminology in a foreign language, business communication, computer science, cosmetology and mechanical engineering. The results of the research are presented on the basis of the outlined theses.

#### 4.1.2 Thesis 1 Results – *Professional experience influencing perception and experience of the teaching profession*

Interviewee 1 (I1), who has four years of professional experience, admits that she does not consider herself a teacher due to a lack of experience. Stating:

"Well, I feel that I'm not autonomous enough. I know I have a lot to learn to gain the experience that additional years of teaching brings."

Interviewee 2 (I2) and interviewee 3 (I3), who have 10 and 25 years of professional experience, respectively, experience themselves as confident; being a teacher is a way of life for them. As interviewee 4 (I4) and interviewee 5 (I5), who have 32 and 36 years of professional experience, respectively, gain more experience, the experience becomes more intensely associated with a sense of competence based on mastery and transmission of knowledge. I5 explains:

"I experience myself as a competent teacher, I have a lot of experience and I have continued my education throughout my life."

I4 also recognises:

"I believe in teaching the profession; I enjoy passing on my knowledge to people. I enjoy it most when I can be an expert and when I can inspire young people to do the work."

The results show that the years of work experience impact what the respondents consider essential in the teaching profession. I1 and I4 emphasised the importance of imparting knowledge, with I1 highlighting the importance of teaching the subject to young people, while I4 already understands why she wants to impart knowledge to young people because

her work experience is much greater. In addition to safety, I2 also highlighted the advantage of flexibility at work:

"I see the advantage of teaching with a flexible schedule. I have young children, and the time off for us teachers coincides with the children's holidays, which means a lot to me. Either way, for me, being a teacher means, also...a steady income, which gives me a sense of security."

The acceptance of work as a way of life (I3) and the awareness that the teacher influences and changes society (I5) were highlighted by the other respondents. I5, who has the most professional experience of the respondents, said:

"What's important to me is the opportunity to work with young people so I can help them, advise them and change society for the better."

The synthesised results or constructs are also shown in Table 1 at the end of the interview results.

#### ***4.1.3 Thesis 2 Results - Knowledge is paramount to their professional identity***

An important characteristic of the teacher mentioned by all respondents except I5 was knowledge, to which I1, I2, and I3 also added emotional experiences such as empathy, warmth, honesty, patience, and consistency. As an example, I1 highlights:

"I want to influence students with empathy because I want to awaken it in them. I think that for the profession they are studying, they must have developed empathy, without which it simply cannot be done. Empathy seems, to me, to be a necessary skill for me as a teacher as well, but objectivity, honesty and professionalism are also needed."

The respondent with the most professional experience, I5, mentioned versatility, determination, and strength as important qualities of the teacher personality. I5 said:

"The teaching profession is a big part of my mission. I consider a teacher ... Hmm, as a versatile person who is extremely broad when it comes to accepting young people, but at the same time determined and firm when it comes to guiding them. He needs to know what's good for young people before they know it themselves."

As a result, the respondents also experience their professional purpose as the transmission of knowledge (I1, I2), which is expressed as knowledge for life for teachers with more professional experience (I3, I4). I3 also emphasises awareness of changes in an individual's purpose, saying:

"The purpose of a teacher changes. At first, I had the desire and need to survive, but now I have to show students that knowledge is often related to life in a very practical way."

The interviewee (I5), who has the most professional experience and defines the purpose of the teacher by fostering the thirst for knowledge, sees a change in the purpose of the individual, as does I3:

"I notice in myself that the purpose at the beginning of my career has changed a lot compared to today. I feel it as a tireless transmission of knowledge to young people because they are curious about life and are happy to discover new things."

All respondents expressed that knowledge is the most important competence for a teacher. I1 added communication. Respondents I2 and I3 mentioned the importance of acquiring new competencies, such as setting limits (I3) or differentiating content. Regarding the latter, I2 stated that as a novice, he did not know how to:

"I also want to emphasise the competency to differentiate content- it depends on the students' abilities. As a beginner, I really didn't know how to do that."

The synthesised results or constructs are also shown in Table 1 at the end of the interview results.

#### ***4.1.4 Thesis 3 Results - Teachers believe that the environment influences them by evaluating their role affecting their professional identity***

In addition, all respondents expressed that the teacher's role affects other roles in the teacher's life, which depends on the teacher's personality traits. For example, I4 said:

"The teaching profession has a strong influence on my other roles. What can I say ... There is less time for family. This causes me to feel guilty. Therefore, I consciously try to devote as much time as possible to the family."

The respondent with the most work experience (I5) explains the interaction of the roles, all working simultaneously, as follows:

"I'm convinced that the roles that a person performs all influence each other. It is impossible for the role of a teacher not to influence the other roles and for the other roles to influence my role as a teacher. That also seems to me to be the only acceptable way, because otherwise it would mean that we are only playing within a role, that we are only allowing a part of ourselves to be, or that I am something that I want to portray. If I am a complete personality, the roles are always present at the same time."

Respondents I4 and I5, who have a great deal of professional experience, believe that being a teacher is a way of life and that one cannot work anywhere without being in the role of a

teacher. Other respondents, I1, I2, I3, pointed out that they are not in a teacher's role in their personal relationships. As an example, they mentioned their relationships with friends and relatives. The influence of today's society (I1) was additionally highlighted as an important element for the teacher, namely that the teaching profession is underestimated in terms of responsibility. Awareness of personality traits is also important for a teacher, as two respondents emphasised (I2, I4). Because the teaching profession is not just a profession, as I5 believes, but a way of life, teacher collaboration is another essential element for a teacher (I3). I3 illustrates this by saying:

"It's important for teachers ... Well, to be aware that they must stick together in relation to students. They do this by helping and supporting each other. When teachers work well together, they set the best example for students."

All of the interviewees believe that teachers first influence the environment themselves. I1 expressed that she affects the environment by example and emphasised the importance of actions rather than words. I4 also emphasised influence by example. I1 stated:

"I think that as a teacher, I also influence the environment. I believe that each individual can positively impact society and, therefore, on the environment in which they live. In doing so, everyone educates and sets a good example. I myself do the same. It is not the words that are important, but the actions of how each individual does something. it's important how I do something."

Both I2 and I5 believe that the teacher influences today's society. I3 acknowledges the fear of influence and emphasises the importance of responsibility:

"I'm aware that I can influence the environment. Sometimes I'm afraid of it because the responsibility is big. As far as the profession is concerned, I am sovereign; in the relationships that I feel are particularly important to me and seem comfortable to me. I'm precise. I'm well aware that misunderstandings and misjudgements can occur. That kind of fills me with awe, I have to admit."

In addition to the teacher's influence on the environment, the environment also influences the teachers. I1 and I3 emphasise the importance of contemporary society's influence on the teacher. This is also considered by I2, who perceives the influence of supporting young people:

"I think that the teaching profession is not appreciated; the environment is always on the side of young people and often opposes the teacher without anyone checking the objective circumstances."

The impact of the environment on teachers is also evident with I4, who perceives the impact as resentment of the environment of teachers, and complements it with her perception as a person. I5 also gives importance to the influence of the environment on her and her attitude

towards work, but I5 perceives this influence as positive. On the impact of the environment on I4, she said:

"The environment is not supportive of the teachers. They criticise the teachers and their work... Certainly, if they knew the system, I'm sure they would be more bothered by the system than we teachers are. I think the environment resents teachers for not teaching young people and being inconsistent and unfair. I'm well received by my environment because honesty and objective evaluation are high on the value scale for me."

External influences also contributed to shaping the sense of belonging expressed by respondents. I1 emphasised the motivation of belonging to a professional cohort; I4 expressed belonging more broadly as belonging to an organisation. I3 and I5 emphasised belonging to the teaching profession over belonging to the organisation. I5 said:

"I'm aware that I belong to an organisation, but I believe that the role of a teacher is above belonging to an institution. A greater certainty gives me the inner strength to continue being a teacher, more than a particular organisation. If the inner desire to continue teaching dies, it is worse than losing a job. At least for me."

I2 stands out, who places belonging to the family above belonging to an organisation or profession:

"The fact that I belong to an organisation that offers me social security reassures me and partially obliges me to be committed. But family always comes first."

The synthesised results or constructs are also shown in Table 1 at the end of the interview results.

Table 1. Synthesised results of all three theses

**Thesis 1:** *Teachers perception of professional experience influences their perception and experience of the teaching profession.*

Elements	Level 3	Relationship coding
- experiencing oneself as a teacher	- uncertainty - sovereignty - way of life/lifestyle - one is determined by knowledge - a sense of competence	Less work experience brings uncertain feelings about the perception of the teaching profession; teachers need to transfer knowledge with little emotional experience, the purpose is felt in the transfer of knowledge, which leads to <b>uncertainty</b> in the perception of the teaching profession.
- the importance of being a teacher	- knowledge transfer - flexibility of work - way of life/lifestyle - change of society/impact on society	More work experience brings more <b>sovereignty, lifestyle</b> and reflection of <b>knowledge</b> in the perception of the teaching
- important characteristics of the teacher	- knowledge and emotional experience - knowledge - personality traits	

»to be continued«

»continued«

- teacher's purpose
- knowledge for life
- encouraging the desire for knowledge

profession. **Work flexibility** is important; it is a **way of life** and **knowledge transfer** with more **emotional experience**. The purpose is perceived as knowledge transfer, including knowledge for life, leading to a more sovereign and knowledge-driven perception of the teaching profession or as a **way of life**. A lot of work experience brings a **sense of competence** in the perception of the teaching profession, the impact on society is important along with **personality traits**, the purpose feels like **encouraging the desire for knowledge**, which leads to a more competent perception of the teaching profession.

**Thesis 2:** *For teachers, knowledge is paramount to their professional identity.*

Elements	Level 3	Relationship coding
- teacher competencies	- knowledge and communication - new teacher competencies - setting boundaries/new competencies - knowledge	Due to personality traits, according to most teachers, each teacher has several roles, and these, especially according to teachers with more work experience, influence each other. In the role of teacher, all teachers recognise <b>knowledge</b> as a key competence in professional identity. At the beginning of their professional path with less experience as teachers, they emphasised <b>communication</b> and acquiring <b>new competencies</b> . In addition to knowledge, most teachers mention the impact of a <b>personal relationship based on traits</b> , which is supposed to affect professional identity. Teachers with more work experience point out that the perception of professional identity is a <b>way of life</b> . In particular, teachers mention the <b>influence of modern society</b> on them at the beginning of their professional path and, consequently, their influence on their perception of professional identity, which is based on knowledge and the <b>influence of personality traits</b> . Some teachers with medium work experience recognise the impact of teacher participation, which complements the competence of <b>knowledge</b> and
- the impact of the teacher's role on other roles	- roles according to personality traits - role interaction	
- not to be in the role of a teacher	- private relationship based on personality traits - lifestyle	
- additional importance of the teacher	- the influence of modern society - the influence of personality traits - teacher participation - lifestyle	

»to be continued«



»continued«

affects their **perception of professional identity**, while teachers with the most work experience believe that their professional identity is influenced by their **lifestyle** in addition to **knowledge**. With a **private relationship**, lifestyle, communication, **social influence**, teacher participation and personality traits, knowledge of professional identity is paramount.

**Thesis 3:** *Teachers believe that the environment influences them by evaluating their role, which affects their professional identity as teachers.*

Elements	Level 3	Relationship coding
- teachers' impact on the environment	- example - the influence of modern society - awareness of responsibility/following changes - impact on society	Teachers with little work experience set an <b>example</b> by influencing the environment, which is very much expected of teachers, and because of little work experience, it is sometimes sceptical. Teachers feel a sense of belonging to a professional cohort, motivating them to offer solutions to solve dilemmas that they face due to lack of experience. As a result, teachers experience the <b>influence of modern society</b> on them and thus on their professional identity. By increasing their work experience, teachers are aware of <b>the impact on today's society</b> , they are <b>aware of their responsibilities</b> and their example. They belong to the family, they belong to the teacher, and also to the organisation. Some teachers feel that the <b>environment supports</b> young people, others feel the <b>influence of modern society</b> , some already feel the support of the environment - with all this, the <b>environment affects</b> the teacher's identity. Teachers with a lot of work experience are aware of their <b>impact on society</b> , their <b>affiliation to be a teacher</b> is great, greater than <b>belonging to an organisation</b> , it is a <b>way of life</b> , so the teacher feels that the environment supports him because of his work, perception of the profession.
- the impact of the environment on the teacher	- the influence of modern society - the environment supports young people - the environment supports it	
- affiliation to the organisation	- affiliation and motivation - family affiliation - belonging to be a teacher - affiliation to the organisation - belonging to be a teacher	

## 4.2 Diary Results

After 22 years of professional experience, the moderator considers herself competent. She notes that her view of teaching has changed depending on her professional experience:

"Over the years, I have learned a lot and changed my view of teaching in general as well as my teaching. Life experiences have made me who I am today; I have become more competent. Looking back, I'm pleased with my progress. I'm less disappointed in the profession than when I started when I was too idealistic. I am more realistic now. That's important for a teacher. I feel less like I'm failing at work. I'm more competent and, therefore, calmer. The experience affects my perception of professional identity because I am more satisfied with my job after so many years."

The moderator also points out that it is important for her to be competent in teaching. She also mentions satisfaction as the most important quality of a teacher, which she justifies with inner satisfaction and a positive attitude. This is also reflected in the understanding of the teacher's purpose, which is based on the desire to teach students the importance of lifelong learning in addition to the profession and personal satisfaction.

The most important competence of a teacher is knowledge, which determines the teacher and thus influences the professional identity. Immediately following is communication. The moderator explains:

"In my opinion, to feel good as a teacher, to be sovereign and happy in the end, the most important thing is first to be an expert in your field. /... / Regardless of the professional field, the teacher must have a high level of communication competencies."

She mentions communication as present in all roles and coincides with the teacher's role. She also states that there is no situation in which one is not a teacher and points out the importance of communication. She recognises the added value of a teacher in the joy of teaching, which many miss.

The moderator is aware that as a teacher, she is making changes in the environment; she emphasises responsibility. The environment also affects the teacher and therefore on professional identity, which is reflected in respect, especially towards oneself. Stating:

"Just as I influence others, so does the environment. When generalising findings about teachers, I sometimes get sad because not all teachers are like that, especially when it comes to generalising negative things. I am aware of my influence, so I handle my work responsibly. I try to take into account the constructive comments of my peers as much as possible so that I can continue to improve in my work. Then I am even more competent. I find the energy for this in the desire to work on myself to strengthen my self-esteem."

She emphasises the sadness of the general disapproval of teachers, but also the possibility of self-improvement and self-respect. At the same time, she emphasises her affiliation with the organisation because of her sense of security.

## **5 Discussion**

### **5.1 Thesis 1 Discussion**

In analysing the interviews and diary entries, we found that even if teachers have little professional experience, as I1 puts it, they experience uncertainty, sovereignty increases with professional experience, to the point of feeling competent (I5 and moderator). Other respondents emphasised the experience of experiencing themselves as teachers and the realisation that knowledge makes a teacher.

Respondents consider the transmission of knowledge important for the teacher (I1, I4), I2 expressed the flexibility of the work; otherwise, it is a way of life (I3) or awareness of the changing society (I5) and competence of the moderator.

The respondents perceive the teacher's important characteristics as knowledge and emotional experience, for I4 only as knowledge, I5 as personality traits, and the moderator as satisfaction.

Also, the purpose of teachers I1 and I2 see as knowledge transfer, I3 and I4 as knowledge for life, the moderator as lifelong learning, and I5 as promoting knowledge for life.

Teachers with little professional experience are insecure because of the lack of professional experience. Sovereignty increases with professional experience, from the experience of feeling like a teacher to the realisation that teachers determine knowledge to a sense of competence. A different perception of one's professional identity is also shown in a study by Douwe Beijaard, Verloop, and Vermunt (2000, p. 749), who found that most teachers' perceptions of their professional identity today differ from those of teachers at the beginning of their careers. Makovec (2018, p. 33) also found that teachers with many years of professional experience feel more qualified for their jobs than teachers with less professional experience. Weinberg, Balgopal, and McMeeking (2021) also highlighted the identities of novice teachers, noting that despite their qualifications, they must step out of their comfort zone and into the field of innovation (p. 99).

A third of the teachers consider the transfer of knowledge necessary; some expressed the flexibility of the work, while others believe that it is a way of life, a matter of awareness of the changing society or a matter of competence. Canrinus et al. (2011, p. 593) wrote that a teacher's professional identity is primarily related to how teachers see themselves, perceive themselves, and interpret themselves in context. On this basis, it is possible to experience competence in your work.

The opinion of all teachers about the quality of the teacher, which is important, is perceived as knowledge and emotional experience, for a single teacher only as knowledge, personality traits and satisfaction. Shapiro (2010, p. 620) also speaks of emotional experiences and the emotional identity associated with them, noting that emotional identity needs to be more widely recognised in schools to become an integral part of learning practices. Understanding the emotional components of a teacher's identity also allows teachers to understand themselves better, noted Zembylas (2003, p. 213). Jiang et al. (2021) also examined the connections between teachers' emotions and their professional identity and emphasised the importance of understanding emotions for teachers' professional identity (p. 1). Understanding the link between identity and emotions is influenced by three processes: (1) the educational process changes, (2) new or multiple professional identities are created, and (3) teachers' emotions within a generation influence the identity itself (p. 17).

One-third of teachers perceive the purpose as the transfer of knowledge, one-third as knowledge for life, individuals as lifelong learning or promoting knowledge for life. What the teacher experiences as purpose is not easy to find, stated Klampfer (2012, p. 7); we certainly have to find reasons why we want to do something the way we do it.

Thesis 1, which states that teachers' perceptions of their professional experience influence their teaching profession's perceptions and experiences, was analysed using interviews and diary entries. In analysing the interviews, we found that less professional experience leads to uneasy feelings about perceptions of the teaching profession. Teachers need to transfer knowledge with little emotional experience; the purpose is felt in the transfer of knowledge, which leads to insecurity in the perception of the teaching profession. More work experience brings more sovereignty, lifestyle and reflection of knowledge in the perception of the teaching profession. Work flexibility is important; it is a way of life and knowledge transfer with more emotional experience. The purpose is perceived as knowledge transfer, including knowledge for life, leading to a more sovereign and knowledge-driven perception of the teaching profession or as a way of life. Much professional experience brings a sense of competence in the perception of the teaching profession, the effect on society along with personality traits is important, the purpose is perceived as promoting the desire for knowledge, leading to a more competent perception of the teaching profession.

Analysing the diary entry, we found that a good one-half of the working life brings a sense of competence with the perception of the teaching profession, competence is vital for the teacher, as well as satisfaction with teaching, which the teacher perceives in the context of lifelong learning. This leads the teacher to a competent experience of the teaching profession.

Based on the interviews and the diary entry analysis, we can say that the teachers in this study believe that their professional experience influences their perception and experience of the teaching profession.

## 5.2 Thesis 2 Discussion

Competencies that are important for the teacher are identified as knowledge by all respondents and the moderator, new competencies by respondents I2 and I3, and communication by the moderator.

According to the respondents, the role of the teacher influences other roles according to the personality traits; I5 emphasises the interaction of roles, and the moderator emphasises communication. A personal relationship based on personality traits is when a teacher is not in the role of teacher - this is how I1, I2, I3 see it, while I4, I5 and the moderator think that this is not possible because it is a way of life.

The competencies relevant to the teacher are recognised as knowledge by all respondents. Makovec (2018, p. 135) also found that teachers' expectations are influenced by experience and knowledge and build their professional self-concept on these two elements. The perceived value of an individual teacher depends on their competencies that enable them to provide high-quality knowledge (Al-Mahdi, 2019, p. 37). Two out of five teachers in our research found to have new competencies in addition to knowledge, and individual teachers were found to have new competencies in the area of communication. New competencies result from adapting to societal changes, to which teachers must also adapt (Tapani & Salonen, 2019, p. 255).

According to teachers, the role of the teacher influences other roles depending on personality traits. Makovec (2018, p. 33) also stated that teachers define their professional identity and consequently their role through personality traits. Some of the teachers in our study emphasised role interaction, while others emphasised communication. A personal relationship based on personality traits is when a teacher is not in the role of teacher - this is perceived by one-half of the interviewed teachers in our research, while the other half believe that this is not possible because it is a way of life.

Also, when asked what is important for a teacher, two out of five teachers in our study stated personality traits. These are only one of the factors that understand a teacher's perceptions and influence a teacher's professional development, Tantawy noted (2020, p. 181). Individual teachers emphasised awareness of the impact of society, teacher commitment that this is a way of life, and enjoyment of teaching. The latter is based on teacher job satisfaction, which along with teacher effectiveness, professional engagement, and level of motivation, are indicators of teacher identity (Canrinus et al., 2011, p. 593). Dempsey, Mansfield, and MacCallum (2021) also discussed teacher engagement and suggested that teacher collaboration strongly influences teacher identity, especially early in their careers. Although novice teachers need collaboration the most, they receive it less than they would like (p. 211).

Thesis 2 explored that knowledge is paramount to a teacher's professional identity. In analysing the interviews, we found that due to personality traits, most of the teachers (respondents) hold multiple roles, and they interact with each other, especially the teachers

with more professional experience. All teachers recognised knowledge as a key competency for their professional identity in a teacher's role. Early in their careers and with less teaching experience, teachers also emphasise communication and acquiring new competencies. In addition to knowledge, most teachers mentioned the influence of a personal relationship based on personality traits on professional identity, and teachers with more professional experience point out that the perception of professional identity is a way of life. Teachers specifically mention the influence of contemporary society on them at the beginning of their professional career and consequently the influence on their perception of professional identity based on knowledge as well as the effect of personality traits. Some teachers with mid-career experience recognised the impact of teacher collaboration, which complements knowledge competence and affects their perception of professional identity. In contrast, the teachers with the most professional experience believe that their lifestyle influences their professional identity in addition to knowledge. Knowledge ranks first in professional identity and then with personal relationships, lifestyle, communication, social influence, teacher collaboration, and personality traits.

However, in analysing the diary entry, we found that the teacher has multiple roles interacting with each other because of communication. In addition to communication, the teacher acknowledges the key competence of knowledge, which the moderator believes is the most crucial in a teacher's professional identity. She never perceives that she is not a teacher; she associates the role of a teacher with the pleasure of teaching.

Based on the interviews and the diary entry analysis, we can confirm the second thesis that teachers believe that knowledge is the most important thing for their professional identity.

### **5.3 Thesis 3 Discussion**

Respondents are aware of their influence on society, with I1, I4 and the moderator specifying this by example). All respondents talked about the influence of the environment on the teacher; I2 understands it indirectly as a support for young people, I4 and I5 as a support for the respondent, and as respect by the moderator.

All respondents feel committed to an organisation or organisational work (I1, I3, I4); it also gives the moderator security. I2 stands out from these feelings and places commitment to the organisation second to family, and I5, places commitment to the organisation secondary to being a teacher. Additionally important to the teacher is awareness of the influence of society (I1), personality traits (I2, I4), teacher cooperation (I3), that it is a way of life (I5), and enjoyment of teaching (moderator).

Teachers are aware of their influence on society, with half of the teachers (i.e., three) recognising their influence primarily by example. All teachers in our study confirmed the influence of the environment on them, although this is understood indirectly as support for the young people and not for the teachers. A similar influence of society is also spoken by Maclure (1993, p. 311), who views identity as a place of constant struggle for all, with a

particular focus on teachers, who are experiencing an identity crisis due to the disintegration of the old models of teaching under the pressure of modern society and the economy. Two out of five teachers in our study indirectly understood the influence of the environment as support for them personally, and some recognise it as respect for the individual as a teacher. Fullan and Hargreaves (2012, p. 1) also emphasised that the teacher must be respected as a person and as someone who educates, and not measured only by measurable outcomes.

Most teachers feel a commitment to an organisation or organisational work that provides security for the individual. For some teachers, commitment to an organisation is secondary to family; for others, commitment to an organisation is secondary to being a teacher.

Thesis 3 explored whether teachers believe that the environment influences them by evaluating their role, which affects their professional identity as teachers. In analysing the interviews, we found that teachers with little professional experience influence the environment by example, but the environment expects a great deal and is somewhat hesitant with teachers of little work experience. Teachers feel a sense of commitment to a professional cohort, which motivates them to solve dilemmas they face due to lack of experience. As a result, teachers experience the impact of modern society on themselves and thus on their professional identity. As teachers gain professional experience, they become aware of the impact of contemporary society and are conscious of their responsibilities and their role as role models. They are committed to their family, committed to being a teacher, and committed to the organisation. Some teachers feel that the environment supports young people, others feel the influence of modern society, others already feel supported by the environment - with all this, the environment influences the teacher's identity. Teachers with much professional experience are aware of their influence on society, their commitment to the teaching profession is great, more significant than their commitment to an organisation, it is a way of life, so the teacher feels that the environment supports them because of their work, perception of the profession.

Analysing the diary entries, we found that the teacher is aware that she influences and changes the environment; the environment also influences the teacher, often generalises and is negative. The teacher improves her work and respects herself. She works on herself and feels obligated and belonging to everyone, including the organisation providing her security. The influence of the environment causes changes in the teacher and affects her professional identity.

Based on the analysis of the interviews and the diary entries, we can say that the teachers in our study perceive that the environment influences them by evaluating the role of the teacher, which affects their professional identity.

Awareness of the needs of society brings constant changes that teachers must perceive, recognise, and respond to in the first place. At the same time, it is necessary to choose appropriate strategies to mitigate possible negative consequences, as already pointed out by

Javrh (2011, p. 8). In relation to this study, we can say that each teacher must be aware of their responsibility for professional development, which must be in line with the organisation's strategy in which they are employed. Because change is constantly present, every teacher has to become part of lifelong learning by acquiring formal and non-formal knowledge.

The study's goal on how teachers in higher vocational schools experience their identity was achieved by analysing interviews and diary entries with an exploration of all three theses. Namely, teachers believe that their professional experience influences their perception and experience of the teaching profession. They also believe that knowledge is the most important element for professional identity and that the environment influences them by evaluating the teacher's role, which in turn affects the teacher's professional identity. This is visually represented in Figure 2.

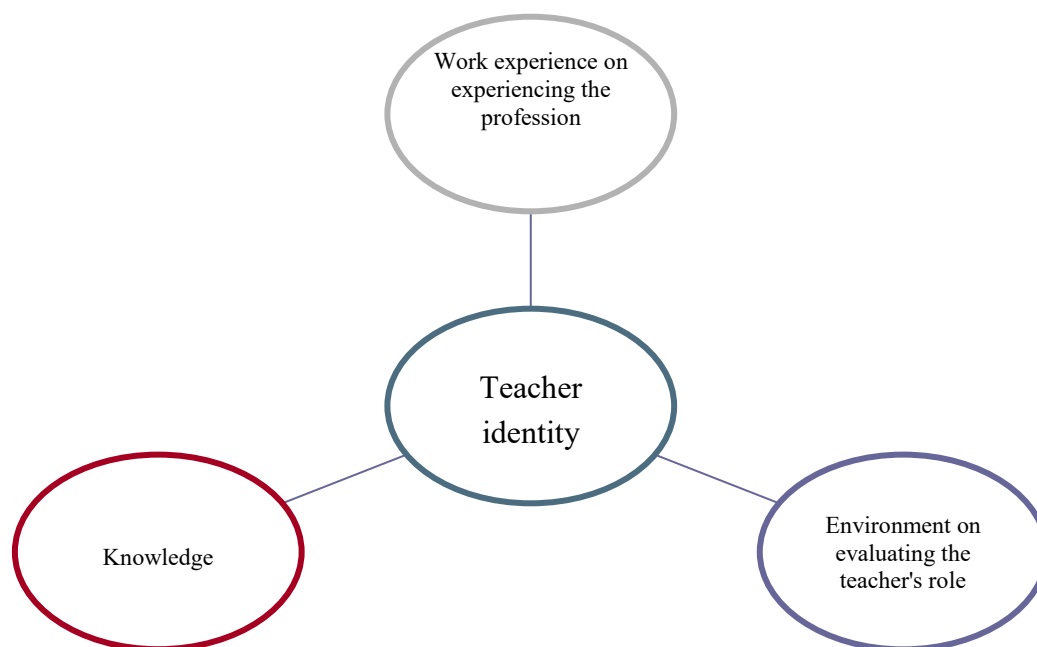


Figure 2. Teacher identity

## 6 Conclusion

The study provides a more in-depth view of the experience of teachers' identity at a vocational college in Slovenia. The study results show that at the beginning of their professional career, with little professional experience, teachers feel inexperienced, which changes from sovereignty to competence as their professional experience increases. Thus, professional



experience has different effects on perceptions of the teaching profession, and thus on professional identity, depending on how many years of professional experience they have. In terms of professional identity, knowledge is most important to teachers, followed by communication and personality traits. Teachers believe that the environment influences them by evaluating the role of the teacher, with teachers initially feeling scepticism about the environment and perceiving support of the environment as their professional experience increases, which affects their professional identity.

The study contributes to the recognition of the teaching profession at a vocational college in Slovenia and identified different practices of experiencing the teaching profession. It also highlighted the importance of not only getting to know teachers but also self-knowledge, through which teachers can constantly grow and develop. As a result, the quality of the educational process and the cultural and educational level of society also increase. In this way, the study contributes to universal excellence.

This study sheds light on a teacher's experience of professional identity in a higher vocational school and the self-recognition or appreciation of the profession. Experiencing the teaching profession provides guidance for educational organisations to improve the situation and provide academic guidelines for teachers to increase the profession's visibility and contribute to a better educational process. Namely, one of the most critical assets of organisations is their employees. The teacher is first and foremost the one who, through recognising their identity, role, purpose and experience, informs the environment and society about the value of their profession. This increases the value of the educational process and, consequently, society's educational and cultural level. The study is limited to literature research conducted in this field since 2010 and accessed databases. The research covers a smaller sample of teachers in the southeast of Slovenia but at the same time opens the possibility of conducting further research on a larger sample covering the entire Slovenian territory. The higher education teachers from vocational colleges included in the study cover different professional fields to cover the broadest possible view of the topic, to take into account different experiences, personality traits, different approaches, opinions of the teachers themselves about the role of teachers in relation to the professional field they cover; each professional field has its own characteristics in teaching.

It is possible to further explore a particular topic in a larger sample through focus groups where interaction among the participants themselves is possible. If these are informed by years of professional experience, additional differences in the experience of teaching relative to professional experience may be revealed.

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## **Povzetek:**

### **Doživljanje poklicne identitete pri učiteljih na višji strokovni šoli**

**Ozadje in izvirnost:** Na kakovost učnega procesa na višjih strokovnih šolah vpliva tudi zavest doživljanja učiteljeve identitete. Pomembno je ozvestiti, kako identiteta učitelja vpliva na njihovo osebno identiteto in posledično na zadovoljstvo z izbranim poklicem. Namen članka je prispevati k večji prepoznavnosti poklica učitelj na višji strokovni šoli v Sloveniji, prepoznati različne prakse doživljanja učiteljskega poklica in dobiti vpogled v morebitni razkorak med teorijo in prakso. Pomembno ni le spoznavanje učiteljev, ampak tudi samospoznavanje, s pomočjo katerega učitelji lahko nenehno rastejo in napredujejo. Večina izbrane tematike se je posvetila novemu zornemu kotu, in sicer se je osredotočila na zavedanje, da s prepoznavanjem značilnosti identitete učitelja in učiteljskega poklica ter njegovega doživljanja pomembno prispevamo k večji prepoznavnosti poklica učitelj.

**Metoda:** Za raziskavo smo uporabili različne študije, ki temeljijo na vsebinski analizi različnih člankov iz obstoječe literature tujih in domačih avtorjev. Opravili smo polstrukturirane intervjuje in dnevniški zapis, na temelju kvalitativnega pristopa smo naredili analizo le-teh, pri tem smo uporabili določanje pojmov 3. reda in tematsko mrežo.

**Rezultati:** Ugotovljeni rezultati raziskave kažejo, da učitelji na začetku svoje profesionalne poti doživljajo neizkušenos, ki s pridobivanjem delovnih izkušenj prehaja od suverenosti do kompetentnosti. Delovne izkušnje vplivajo na dojetje učiteljskega poklica in s tem poklicne identitete. Pri slednji je učiteljem najpomembnejše znanje, nato komunikacija in osebne lastnosti. Učitelji so prepričani, da okolje vpliva nanje z vrednotenjem učiteljeve vloge, pri čemer učitelji na začetku zaznavajo skeptičnost okolja, z večanjem delovnih izkušenj zaznavajo podporo okolja, kar vpliva na njihovo poklicno identiteto.

**Družba:** Učitelj je v prvi vrsti tisti, ki s prepoznavanjem svoje identitete, vloge, poslanstva in svojega doživljanja okolju in družbi daje vrednost svojemu poklicu. S tem dviguje vrednost izobraževalnemu procesu in posledično dviguje izobraževalni in kulturni nivo družbe.

**Omejitve/nadaljnje raziskovanje:** Omejili smo se na domače in tuje raziskave, ki so bile že izvedene na tem področju. Raziskava zajema manjši vzorec učiteljev jugovzhodne Slovenije. Ponuja nadaljnje raziskovanje dane tematike na širšem vzorcu v okviru fokusnih skupin, kjer je omogočena interakcija med samimi udeleženci; če se jih oblikuje glede na leta delovnih izkušenj, se lahko pokažejo dodatne razlike v doživljanju učiteljskega poklica glede na delovne izkušnje.

**Ključne besede:** učitelj, osebnost, identiteta, kompetence, učiteljeva vloga, samospoznavanje poklica, značilnosti in cenjenost poklica, prepoznavnost poklica.

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