

# **The Self-Representation of Primary School Teachers' Professional Identity in Madagascar**

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## **1. Introduction**

Teaching-learning theories have evolved over time, and suggest a learning mode which is more active, better focused on the student, and that takes into account social and economic environment of the student, with more sophisticated tools such as digital, which are more in line with an ever-changing socioeconomic background. These changes have triggered the evolution of teachers' social status and their professional identity.

Studying teachers' professional identity has become an independent research field since the 1990s. This leads multiple authors to dedicate their work to this topic (Knowles, 1992; Kompf, Bond, Dworet, & Boak, 1996; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Bullough & Young, 2002, Lenu a Rusa, Anca Raluca, Rebegaa & Apostola, 2013).

According to Ion (1996), professional identity is what allows members of a same profession to recognize themselves as such and to make others recognize their specificity. It implies both an internal unification and an external recognition. On the other side, Dubar (1991, 2008) defines professional identity as *"the socially recognized manners, for the individuals to identify to each other, in the context of work and employment."*

In the world of teaching, the teacher reckons he belongs to a group such as the « primary school teachers » for example. He defines himself based on the characteristics of his work, realizations and professional skills, in reference to his experience basic or continuous training, professional experiences, various positions held, and so on. His biographical professional identity is hence expressed through what he reckons he has, but also sometimes by what he wishes he has. Indeed, relating his professional life is a way of correcting and influencing how others consider him (Fleury, 2013). This biographical identity may appear as unreal and subjective to others but represents the reality of the teacher, and is therefore important (Beijaar, Meijer & Verloop, 2004). Some authors quote the career plan as a component of biographical identity.

Professional identity is built and possesses a dynamic and evolving nature. It is based on two themes: biographical identity -mentioned above- and relational identity -which relies upon social and institutional recognition. It is related to recognition of the importance of his role as a teacher by others, attraction for teaching job by others and material validation by responsible institutions (such as salary, social security). According to Brun (2008), social recognition includes four dimensions: a behavioural dimension (focused on measurable results), a subjective dimension (focused on processes), an ethical dimension (which rewards moral principles supporting the quality of relationships with others) and humanist dimension (which takes an interest in the singularity of each individual).

If a teacher's skills influence the construction of their professional identity, reciprocally, the recognition of their professional identity -in line with their own ambitions (Mead, 1934; Dubar, 1991; Tickle, 2000)- reinforces their professional skills, their well-being and their efficiency at work (Iannaccone & al., 2008, Fray & Piccouleau, 2010), i.e. their professional development (Jorro, 2009). Ricoeur (2007) associates two illustrations of this dynamic: "become capable, be recognized."

However, other examples from African countries (Pelini, 2013), as well as European countries (Iannaccone, Tateo, Mollo& Marisco, 2008), show the frailty of the balance between these two aspects of professional identity.

What about Madagascar then? In Madagascar, political crisis encouraging instability have multiplied over the last years. This country is ranked among the five poorest countries of the world<sup>19</sup> with a GDP worth about USD 401. This economical background prevails in all sectors, mainly in primary school education. Primary school teachers are very low-paid according to the Education Sector Plan or PSE (MEN, MESupReS, METFP, 2017)<sup>20</sup>. Protests seeking to improve civil service teachers working conditions are frequent. Parents hire teachers themselves – that are not always qualified – to teach in schools and, after a few years those teachers ask to be hired by MEN. Ironical anecdotes on the skills and the commitment of primary school teachers encourage parents to seek private schools for their offspring's education.

Statistical data from the Ministry of National Education over the last three scholar years allowed us to calculate the success rate of primary school final exams (CEPE) and the repetition rate for the last year of primary school.

**Table 1: A few indicators of primary school results**

Scholar Year	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016
CEPE success rate for public school <sup>21</sup> (%)	73	68	45
Repetition rate for primary school last year <sup>22</sup> (%)	24	24	27

Even if primary school achievement rate has increased from 30% to 74% between 2000 and 2009, and reached 67% in 2016 (World Bank Group, 2018), the CEPE success rate decrease, and the repetition rate for primary school last year maintain high. So, statistical data about the Malagasy educational system does not allow to argue in favour of its efficiency.

### **Research Question:**

As a part of this work, we would like to contribute to answer the following research question: **Does the professional identity of Malagasy primary school teachers account for the**

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.afrikmag.com/classement-10-pays-plus-pauvres-monde-2017/>

<sup>20</sup> MEN: Ministry of National Education; MESupReS: Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research; METFP: Ministry of Technical Education and Vocational Training

<sup>21</sup> Success rate (%) = (number of admitted students/number of registered students) x 100

<sup>22</sup> Repetition rate (%) = (number of repeaters / number of students in primary school) x 100

### **weak performance of the current educational system?**

To address this issue, we analysed if **the self-representation of teacher' professional identity by Malagasy primary school teachers consistent with their relational identity**; in other words, we try to understand how primary school 'teachers self-pictured their profession, and how they think that society or institution pictured it. We then discussed about the imbalance between these two aspects of teachers 'professional identity that could lead to a weak performance of the educational system.

## **2. Methodology**

As part of a comparative research on "teacher professional identity", initiated by the University of Malaysia and the University of Pretoria, it was decided that other members of the C research group<sup>23</sup> have to use the same questionnaire translated to their mother tongue and to disseminate at least 200 primary school teachers of grade 3.

The common questionnaire has been circulated in 2016 to 282 teachers from primary school's first three grades. These teachers are distributed across nine regions of Madagascar: Alaotra Mangoro, Atsinanana, Betsiboka, Bongolava, Diana, Ihorombe, Itasy, Sofia, Vakinakaratra.

The MEN has recruited 20 surveyors to share the questionnaires in the context of the PAUET assessment project for the two last grades of randomly selected primary schools. We took this opportunity to ask these surveyors to give our questionnaires to first grades teachers in visited schools. These 282 teachers represent around 1.4% of teachers in primary school first three grades in the regions concerned by the survey (around 20090 teachers in total for the nine regions). With a confidence range of 95, our results may include an error rate of 5.8%<sup>24</sup> which is acceptable in our case and allows us to consider our results as representative of the nine regions considered. The questionnaires are anonymous.

The meeting has agreed that the comparative study collaboration shall make all participant countries to learn from each other and with each other, on the following features: the success and unsuccessful story, policy borrowing and practice sharing, comparing on the specific issue on Teacher Professional Identity.

So, several axes common to the C group have been covered in the questionnaire. The first section is dedicated to the professional characteristics of the surveyed (gender, professional experience, degrees). Then the questionnaire covers the language and pedagogical tools used for teaching. It asks about the reasons why the targeted teacher chose this job and the social values that he attributes to it, himself first and institutions, parents, and friends then. Next, it enquires about the teacher's opinion regarding his role, the obstacles that he faces, the solutions he foresees (protests, institutional grants), as well as his perspective about teaching and its future.

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<sup>23</sup> The Ecole Normale Supérieure (ENS) of Antananarivo is a member of this research group as well as USM, Hiroshima University, Indonesia University of Education, Naruto University of Education, University of Pretoria, Vietnam National University

<sup>24</sup> <https://fr.checkmarket.com/calculateur-taille-echantillon/>

Collected data has been entered and analysed in Microsoft Excel, its analysis then allowed to identify the contrast due to rural or urban context of the surveyed population. We have considered that the rural population consists of teachers working outside urban district i.e. countryside locations with poor living conditions (neither electricity nor running water), and where students' parents are often farmers.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1 Primary School Teachers

In Madagascar, surveyed primary school teachers consist of a slightly feminine population: 51% of the teachers are women. However, urban and rural zones are different. There are more female teachers in urban zones (78%) than in rural environments (48%). This is due to hazardous security in rural regions and difficult access that discourages women from other regions to work there. This could also be due to fewer educated women in rural environments.

Surveyed teachers have generally 10 years of professional experience but after further analysis we observed that urban zones teachers are generally more experienced, with 15 years of professional experience in average.

#### 3.2 Academic and professional degrees

Teacher recruitment process during initial trainings have significantly changed over the years, not only in terms of duration (from a few months to a few years), but also in terms of degree required at the beginning of the training (sometimes baccalaureate or first secondary school degree called BEPC).



**Figure 1: Surveyed primary school teachers' degrees (N=282)**

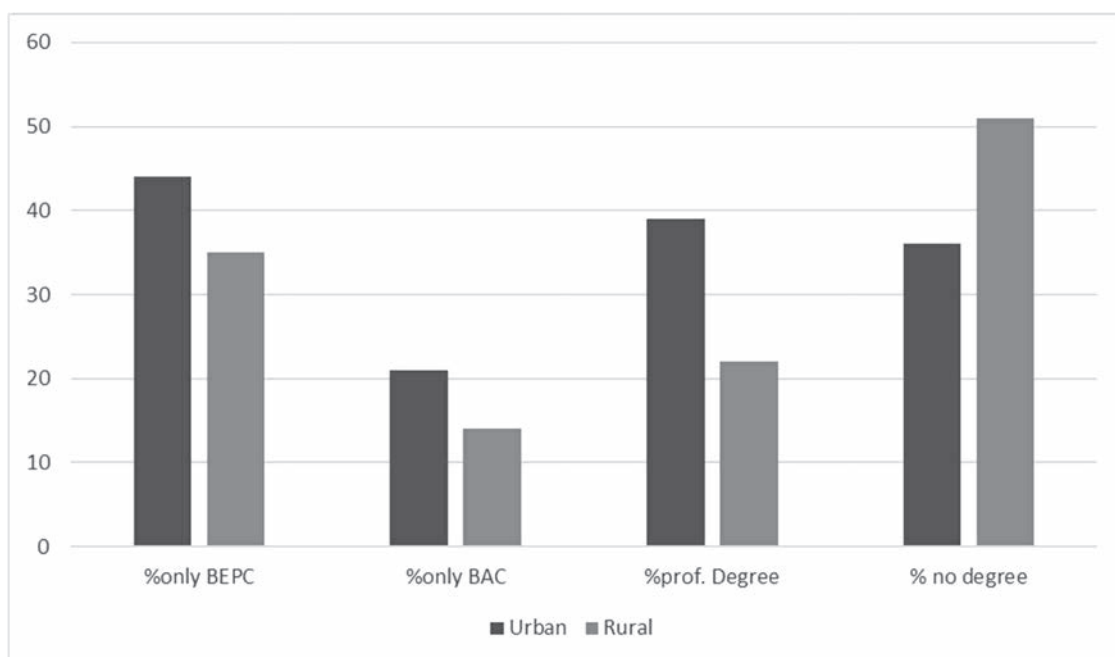
Around a quarter of surveyed teachers (23%) have had an initial professional training in addition to holding an academic degree: baccalaureate, or first secondary school degree (BEPC).

Some teachers only hold a first secondary school degree (22%), or their baccalaureate (16%) without having had any professional training.

Even if less than a third of these teachers (27%) report holding no degree at all, in practice, this percentage is higher because other teachers (20%) did not answer the question about the degrees they held. So, we estimate that around half of the teachers in primary schools have no

degree at all. In fact, if no qualified individual is assigned by the responsible institutions, parents and even local officials often recruit acquaintances some of which have been to school but did not obtain a degree. For parents, this is "better than nothing."

The following figure highlights the discrepancies between urban and rural communities regarding academic level and professional training of primary school teachers.



**Figure 2: Teachers' degree in urban and rural communities (N for urban communities = 38; N for rural communities = 244)**

Rural zones are the least privileged, the proportion of teachers holding a degree and the proportion of teachers having had an initial training is the lowest. The proportion of teachers without any degree at all is the highest.

In urban zones as well as in rural zones, most teachers holding degrees but lacking an initial training have never achieved their secondary school studies.

### 3.3 Language skills

Malagasy is the teaching language recommended by the law for the first three years of primary school in Madagascar. French language is used for scientific subject during the following years.

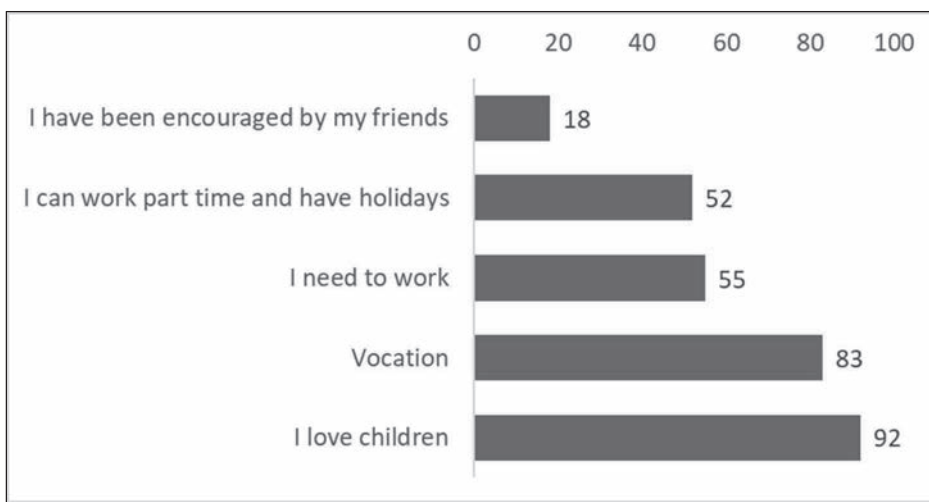
However, results highlight that about a quarter of teachers in rural environment use local dialect for teaching *versus* 16% in urban environment. It is worth outlining that according to the teachers, students learn better by the use of their local dialect (Sihanaka, Tanosy, etc), their mother tongue. That practice becomes difficult when the teacher works in a region other than his own. This explains why about half of teachers (55%) use the official Malagasy language when teaching.

Continuous training in French have been carried out as stated by 77% of the teachers, but

around half of the teachers in rural zones (51%) and more than a third in urban zones (39%) still face difficulties. Didactical tools whether in French language (96%) or in Malagasy language (74%) are non-existent or lacking.

### 3.4 Why choosing to be a primary school teacher?

After we enquired about the differences regarding the reason that they chose to teach in rural and urban zones, it appears that the choice of the profession does not depend on the location of the school.



**Figure 3: Reasons for choosing the teacher profession**

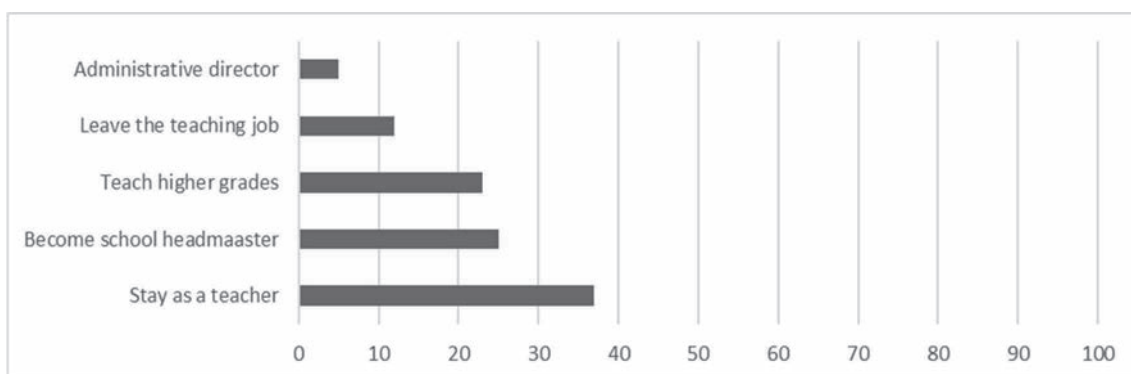
The first reason leading the majority of teacher to choose the occupation is because they love children (92%). Most of them (83%) still identify the occupation as their vocation.

The above graph shows that whether it is a vocation or not, setting aside their love for children, teachers appreciate the advantages of the occupation such as the ability to work part-time and holidays. Those who state that they do not have this vocation seem to have been encouraged by their friends or relatives

### 3.5 What about the future?

When they are asked whether they would make the same choice if they had to do it all over again, most teachers (91%) did not regret their choice and assert that they would do it all over again. After checking, we have observed that with a few exceptions, these teachers are those who have stated that the primary reason that led them to choose their job is their love for children.

The teachers are asked about how they would see themselves in the next 10 years.



**Figure 4: Teachers' projection in the next 10 years**

After ten years, half of these teachers wish for a promotion, in the form of a transfer (23%) into higher levels (secondary school, high school, etc.) or in the form of a designation as school headmaster (25%). Less than the half (37%) would like to stay as a teacher. Only one tenth of these teachers consider quitting teaching system in ten years.

### **3.6 Government recognition of primary school teachers**

Government recognition has been analysed through teachers' comments on their perception, their working conditions (salary, career management, infrastructure and tools available, school environment, training provided, etc.) as well as their relationship with the headmaster and the local officials. The results are presented below.

#### Teachers' working conditions

The majority of interrogated teachers (89%) feel respected by the government. They consider that their school offers a good working environment (90%), and that it is well structured (89%).

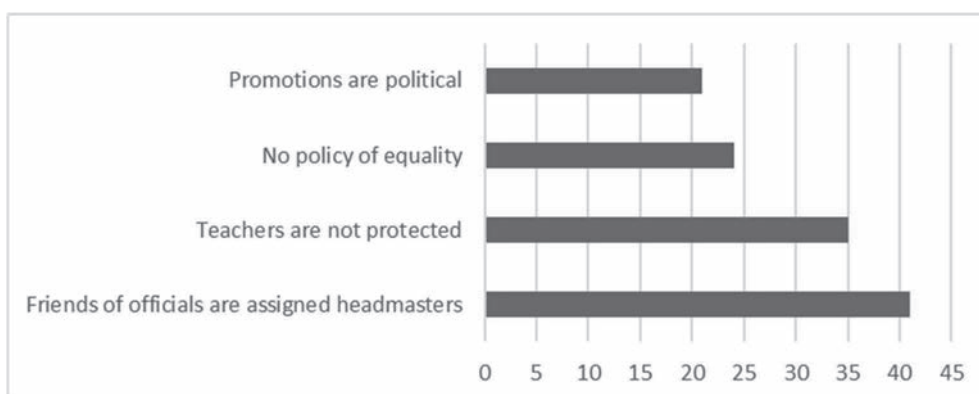
According to 89% of these teachers, the school yard is spacious but the bad quality of the infrastructure (electricity, classrooms, blackboards, notebooks and other tools) forms a hurdle for 87% of them.

The most important problem for teachers is the insufficient tooling (quoted by 82% of them). The school infrastructures do not comply with the standards, and the lack of equipment does not allow smooth professional development. They think that using ICTs could bridge the gap but the lack of opportunities to use digital in their school is a major obstacle (81%).

Nearly half of the teachers (46%) mentioned that classrooms are small but are overcrowded. This problem is also considered as an obstacle (76%).

#### Career management and promotions

Most teachers (78%) no longer hope for a possible improvement of the educational system. This lack of trust is reflected in their career management:



**Figure 5: Doubts relating to career management**

A significant proportion of teachers estimate that the local and political authorities are unfair to them and favour people they know, their friends or political peers, at the expense of trained teachers. This could be the reason of misunderstandings with local officials, that are considered as an obstacle for more than a third of surveyed teachers (41%). Therefore, they no longer hope for either a promotion (72%) or an opportunity to continue their studies (75%).

#### Value given by the government

The majority of teachers complain about their insufficient pay (90%) while two thirds consider they have a heavy workload (64%). Only about half of them (51%) view their salary as a source of motivation. Teachers recruited by parents earn about 180,000 Ar. (USD 50). Civil service teachers earn about twice this amount but this is still insufficient to ensure a decent living for their families. Primary school teachers are very poor, they feel they have the right to demand for a pay rise even through a strike (95%).

The quality of continuous trainings is valued by the majority of teachers (89%). Unfortunately, such continuous trainings are insufficient (88%) and do not address the needs of two thirds of them (69%), although they are valued by the government.

In a nutshell, about a third of the teachers (32%) claim that the government does not help them to improve their know-how and they are not well respected (27%). This vision of the system contradicts the existing relationships with the school's headmaster.

### **3.7 Value given at micro level**

The first actor in a primary school is the headmaster.

#### Value given at school by headmaster (micro level)

In practice all teachers respect them (96%) and consider that they are competent (90%). They feel helped by their headmaster in terms of content and refresher training (94%), classroom management (91%) and thus they feel supported in their development (89%). The teachers feel well respected within the school (88%).



The teachers trust in their headmaster management skills (87%) but deplore the scarcity of official instructions (84%). The differences of opinion regarding school management may form an obstacle to their professional development.

The teachers also mention that headmasters do not sufficiently enforce school discipline towards them (50%). This represents an obstacle to the students' learning although the headmaster often calls teachers to order when required (83%).

#### Atmosphere between teachers

However, the atmosphere in the schools is impaired by the insufficient communication (73%) and disagreements (76%) between teachers. These are considered by about three-quarters of them (73%) as obstacles to their development.

### **3.8 Recognition of the society**

Most teachers state that they are highly valued by the society (91%), especially by their family (94%). Around two-thirds of them (61%) play an advisor role for their students' family. Thus, problems at school are less frequent as families are relatively calm (69%) and students are disciplined (79%).

Indeed, the « good » teacher culture is still persistent for most teachers (88%) and is the reason why they agree that most teachers in primary school should be men. Only about a third of them (37%) think that men should not teach during the three first years of primary school. Less than half of the teachers (40%) even think that having female teachers can cause difficulties for headmasters. This could be linked to their absence because of their kids' illness, pregnancy, breastfeeding, etc.

Even if less than a half of the teachers (41%) work in a multicultural society, most of them (84%) do not see social differences as an obstacle. According to them, students easily adapt themselves to different cultures (79%), but less than half of the teachers (42%) find that difficult and a quarter of them (26%) stated that they were not prepared for that.

### **3.9 Biographical identity**

#### Teachers' behaviour

Teachers enjoy their job (91%). All of them stated that they are punctual (100%) and a very few admitted being often absent (9%).

#### Teachers' role

Teachers are concerned about their students' issues and about the possible origins of their failure. They see themselves as counsellors (61%), well placed to advise parents.

According to 95% of the surveyed teachers, their main issue is the lack of interest that parents give their children's studies. The children of impoverished families (for 91% of teachers) and the orphans (for 88% of teachers) have also educational problems.

### Training and hands-on skills

Most teachers (82%) think that their experience as students helped them significantly in their job. They also feel like their education was fairly good (99%).

Among teachers who have had initial professional training (23%), almost all of them (except 2 out of 23) state that it helped. It seems that around three-quarters of teachers without professional training, which represents about three-quarters of the target population (77%), would like to have any.

Around a fifth of the target audience (21%) considers initial training was useless. This consists mainly of teachers who do not have any degree. They claim that if they have been able to teach without any training, it is not something necessary, since « either way, students still succeed ». These teachers wish they had more significant continuous training in order to reinforce acquired experience, especially since most teachers consider continuous training is of good quality (89%) and valued by the system (85%).

## **4. Discussion and Conclusion**

This study has clarified some elements of the identity building of teachers in the first three years of primary schools in nine regions of Madagascar.

Those teachers have poor professional and academical qualifications. More than 79% of them have not benefited from an initial training, and more than a third does not hold any diploma. The official teaching language is not mastered by most teachers despite the training provided, and didactical tools are insufficient both in this tongue and in their mother tongue.

However, the teachers have a high regard for their personal and professional value and consider their experience as students, then as teachers, can bridge their training gaps, although partially. In addition, as some teachers who hold no degree stated: « their students still succeed ». they consider that they are doing their job correctly (punctuality, commitment). They are well respected by their friends and relatives, and see themselves as examples, which help building their positive biographical identity.

At the micro level, the professional recognition and help of the headmaster improve the working condition of these teachers and allow them to carry out their professional activities. Despite any disagreement between colleagues, it appears that mutual respect exists within the team and that school management is well accepted.

Nonetheless, headmaster and teachers are under regional authorities' control, which teachers do not trust because of their so-called excessive politics and favouritism. Many of them no longer hope for a possible promotion or even any possible continuation of their studies. Moreover, working conditions are in general tough because the system does not provide with the infrastructure and tools they need, and the overcrowded classrooms force them to work hard but with very low pay.

Therefore, teachers' self-esteem as role models well respected by the society is inconsistent with the actual value the government give them through the working equipment. They like their job but often need take it upon themselves to do it.

Our results pointed of a very positive biographical identity: teachers love their job and esteem themselves as role models well respected by the society; according to them, they are able to succeed even without training. But they are aware that even if they are appreciated by their headmaster, the government does not give importance or value to the teacher profession. So, their relational identity and their biographical identity are out of phase.

The construction of one's identity is dynamic and it is done through a back and forth between self-esteem and relationship with the society. « Identity conflicts » might be caused by this uneasiness currently lived by teachers. It can harm their professional balance and lead them into a vicious circle. Even if they feel respected by their headmaster and the parents, society's negative opinion of teachers' role and its negative opinion of the government that allows access to this profession to people without degree or training, could negatively impact the development of their skills and thus contribute to tarnish their image even more. According to Pelini (2013) these conflicts could lead the teacher to maintain or change their identity.

If the individual considers the pleasure of teaching as more important than vocation, maintaining their identity will reflect in an increased commitment to their profession, an engagement in this "noble, but difficult" job.

But if the ideal job is considered as insufficient and disregarded from a socioeconomical point of view, the individual will question their teaching situation, and view it as a deviation from their self-accomplishment. Then, the change of identity will reflect in a conscious or unconscious detachment from their profession, i.e. demotivation, especially if the teacher can't quit for financial or administrative reasons. This will inevitably translate into a decline of already alarming results.

To a large extent, the Education Sector Plan or PSE (MEN, MESupReS, METFP, 2017) addresses the identity issues of teachers. But what about its actual implementation? Indeed, most teachers consider that a change is needed (99%) but about half of them no longer hope in a possible change (41%). To us, this appears like a warning sign that institutional officials need to reflect on, as stated by Dewey (1967), "education is the fundamental method for social progress and reform of the society."

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