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# Development, Evolution, and Implementation of Teachers Professional Standards: A Systematic Review of the Literature

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***Abstract***

*The publication of examination scores from the Programme for International Students Assessment and the associated public discourses on which countries perform excellently and which ones do not have raised questions about teacher quality across the globe. Professional Teaching Standards have been suggested, designed, and implemented worldwide in varied shapes. Some have argued that Teachers' Professional Standards increase teacher quality, which translates into an improvement in students' learning achievement. Professional Teaching Standards are viewed by many as part of the solution to the current deficit in global education and learning. This paper, therefore, examines the evolution, development, implementation and impact of Professional Teaching Standards on the learning outcomes of students. The desk research design was employed for the study, enabling the researchers to review local and international policy documents, journals, textbooks, newspapers, conference papers and manuals for secondary data. The study established that most countries use results from Prigramme for International Students Assessment to vindicate their educational efforts. However, mixed findings were recorded on the impact of Professional Teaching Standards on the country's Programme for International Students Assessment ranking. The study recommends the incorporation of Professional Teaching Standards into Initial Teacher Education programs; application of technology in teacher education and professional development; Programme for International Students Assessment examinations for initial teachers; and the need to develop professional standards purposely for educational administrators and managers.*

**Keywords:** Teacher Professional Development, Teachers Professional Standards, Programme for International Students Assessment, Teacher Education, Initial Teacher Education.

## 1.0 Introduction

The status of teachers is a complex and ongoing concern, influenced by both tangible factors like work conditions and intangible elements such as respect and recognition. As the role of teachers evolves, with increasing demands to teach in multicultural classrooms, integrate special needs learners, and utilize technology, the use of Teacher Professional Standards (TPS) becomes crucial for maintaining professionalism and quality in education. Initiated by the US government in 1946, the TPS movement aimed to enhance the teaching profession. However, debates persist regarding their relevance, format, and implementation, with concerns about their impact on teacher autonomy and professional development, and a lack of empirical evidence in some countries about their effectiveness in improving teaching quality.

Since the 1990s, professional standards for teaching (TPS) have sparked extensive discussion about their goals and applications. In her 2003 paper, *Teacher Professional Standards: Controlling or Developing Teaching?* Australian scholar Judyth Sachs critiqued these standards, highlighting their potential to improve teacher performance, elevate the profession's status, and support ongoing professional development. However, Sachs raised concerns about whose interests these standards serve, their impact on teachers, and their adaptability to evolving educational needs. She framed TPS within a tension between certification and control. Others, such as Tang, Cheng, and So (2006), see TPS as quality assurance tools, while critics like Hammond (1998) and Hargreaves (1998) caution against overly technical approaches that neglect the emotional and relational aspects of teaching. Despite differing views, TPSs are widely adopted globally, and this paper critically examines their evolution, implementation, and influence on education quality and lifelong learning.

## 2.0 Literature Review

### 2.1 An Overview of the Concept of Teachers' Professional Standards (TPS)

The professional standards for teachers as defined in the literature vary from one country to another. In some countries, they are referred to as "teacher standards", "teaching standards", and "teacher professional standards" (Sachs, 2016). Although these concepts are complementary, Sachs points out that there are disparities between them. Teacher standards are the required levels of competence for certain teachers, either for admission into the field or for monitoring ongoing performance. The teaching profession, not specific teachers, is the focus and purview of teaching standards (Sachs, 2016). According to CEPPE (2013), there are four main goals associated with teaching standards: 1. support the enhancement of teacher performance; 2. certify teachers who have entered the teaching profession or have attained a certain status as teachers; 3. evaluate teacher performance; and 4. evaluate and accredit teacher training institutions.

Teacher Professional Standards (TPS) outline the professional knowledge, attributes, attitudes, values, skills, and competencies required for teachers to excel in their roles. Designed collaboratively with experts and practitioners, TPS aims to inspire professional growth, enhance teaching quality, and improve student learning outcomes. They provide a framework for defining excellence in teaching, promoting reflective practices, and planning professional development. TPS serves as both a guide for effective teaching and a platform for meaningful discussions on improving educational practices. By establishing clear expectations, they foster consistency and accountability while encouraging teachers to refine their impact on students' learning experiences.

While proponents view TPS as tools for clarity and professional growth, critics argue they can be used to impose rigid controls on the profession. Sachs (2005) distinguishes between regulatory

standards, which focus on accountability and compliance, and developmental standards, which emphasize lifelong learning and student-centered approaches. Similarly, Ingvarson (2002) identifies standards as professional values, representing shared ideals and quality benchmarks, or as measures requiring robust definitions, evidence, and criteria for assessing teaching quality. Despite these varying perspectives, TPS universally reflects a vision of what teachers should know and achieve, offering a balance between defining professional excellence and supporting continuous improvement in teaching practices.

### 2.2 Impact of TPS on Students' Academic Performance

Research offers mixed findings on TPS's effectiveness. Kriewaldt (2008) found no significant link between TPS and professional learning among Australian teachers, whereas Mulcahy (2012) demonstrated that improved standards enhanced geography teachers' instructional methods through reflective practices. Similarly, Kyriakides and Creemers (2011) emphasized the need for TPS-aligned teaching, involving interactive techniques, consistent feedback, and creating supportive classroom environments. Earlier studies by the same authors underscored the importance of interactive classrooms where teachers engage students actively through questioning and discussion. These findings suggest that TPS can guide effective teaching strategies, fostering environments conducive to learning.

In contrast, studies from Ghana reveal challenges in TPS implementation. Ananga (2021) found limited adherence to National Teaching Standards (NTS) among tutors and student-teachers in Ghanaian colleges, highlighting gaps in practice. However, Dassah and Yelletuo (2022) reported positive impacts of NTS on student-teachers' practices, suggesting potential benefits when standards are effectively implemented. Despite these insights, research on TPS's impact on

Ghanaian students' learning outcomes remains scarce, underscoring the need for further exploration to fully understand the role of TPS in diverse educational contexts.

## 3.0 Methodology

### 3.1 Research Design

A research design provides a framework for data collection and interpretation, shaping the validity and reliability of findings while guiding the choice of research approach (Bryman & Bell, 2003; Kwame, 2024). This study utilized a desk research design, which gathers and analyzes secondary data from sources such as journals, policy papers, reports, textbooks, and newspapers. Desk research is a cost-effective and time-saving approach that offers a comprehensive overview, a solid theoretical foundation, and readily available data (Amoah & Owusu, 2024). By prioritizing efficiency and accessibility, this design enabled the researchers to conduct a thorough analysis using pre-existing information.

### *3.2 Sampling*

Sampling is a technique of choosing a significant number of elements from the target population (Sekaran, 2003). The understanding of the properties of the sample helps a researcher to be able to generalize these properties for the entire population (Eshan, 2017). Saunders et al categorized sampling into two main strands, namely; representative or probability sampling and judgmental or non-probability sampling. In this study, 5 policy papers/documents, 10 online published journals, 2 textbooks, 2 newspapers, 6 conference papers and 6 manuals for educational actors on TPS were sampled and analyzed for secondary data to complete this report.

### *3.3 Criteria for Sample Size Determination*

The main criteria used to select the journals, newspapers, policy documents, manuals as well newspapers for this research were that, the title, specific sub-themes and the content of the

document should be related to TPS for it to be included in the study. The secondary data from the above documents published online which were not related to the research goal and themes were excluded from the research. All documents used to mine data for this study were published online and on open-access platforms and therefore the authors did not need to obtain permission from the copyright owners before using the information from them for this research. This notwithstanding, all documents used have been properly cited and fully acknowledged throughout this study.

## 4.0 Results

### 4.1 Global Context and Trends of TPS

Many countries across the world have developed and implemented TPS with the conviction that the standards will raise the quality of teaching and transform teaching as a profession with the ultimate aim of improving the learning achievement of students. Table 1 below provides an illustration of TPS in some countries.

**Table 1:** Professional Teaching Standards in some Selected countries

| Country | Existence of National Standards for Teachers | Number of Standards |
|---|---|---|
| Australia | Yes | 7 |
| Brazil | No | |
| Canada | No | |
| Chile | Yes | |
| China | No | |
| England | Yes | 8 |
| Ethiopia | Yes | 5 |
| Finland | No | |
| Korea | No | |
| Liberia | Yes | 5 |
| Egypt | Yes | 5 |
| Norway | No | |
| New Zealand | Yes | 7 |
| Singapore | Yes | 4 |
| South Africa | Yes, in progress | 10 |
| Philippines | Yes | 7 |
| USA | Yes | 5 |
| Ghana | Yes | 7 |
| Kenya | Yes | 7 |
| Japan | No | |
| South Korea | No | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Malaysia | Yes | 3 |

(Source: OECD, 2013)

Countries such as Australia, England, Germany, the USA, and New Zealand have implemented Teacher Professional Standards (TPS) to improve teaching quality, while nations like Japan, South Korea, and China have not. New Zealand introduced TPS in 2006 as a requirement for teacher registration to enhance teaching and learning. The UK also uses TPS to refine teacher skills, pedagogical practices, and professional attitudes. Japan, a consistent leader in global education rankings, achieves success without TPS through high expectations, selective teacher training, and targeted funding, although its reliance on PISA outcomes has sometimes led to policy shifts toward market-driven, teacher-centered education. Meanwhile, the USA has a state-specific TPS system, but evidence linking it to improved student outcomes is limited. China emphasizes teacher collaboration and professional development through practices like group action research, though their impact on student performance remains unclear. In contrast, Singapore has integrated TPS into its education system, guided by a structured competency model to foster critical thinking, content mastery, and innovative teaching. These diverse approaches highlight the varying strategies nations use to maintain high educational standards.

Finland, another regular top occupier in PISA examinations since its inception in 2000 has no TPS. In reaction to their students' outstanding performance in the 2009 PISA surveys, the OECD discovered that it was due to their approach to teacher creativity, innovation, and development that played a significant role in their sustained educational success (Bagshaw, 2016). Consequently, some countries have looked to Finland to find out the factors responsible for their success so they could emulate best practices. Sahlberg (2011), in his book, *Finnish Lessons: What Can the World Learn from Educational Change in Finland?* Discovers that their road to success began with a

softer approach than has been adopted elsewhere, and reliance on their teachers with a high level of professional knowledge from a high degree of training (Sahlberg, 2011). To qualify as a teacher in Finland, a prospective applicant must have a Master's degree, which must be related to teaching and learning (Sahlberg, 2011). Teachers have been given a greater level of trust and autonomy to discharge their role as professionals. School inspectors occasionally visit schools which is completely different from the heavy-handed accountability practices used in the UK and the USA (Tuinamuana, 2011).

Australia has long integrated Teacher Professional Standards (TPS) into its education system, starting in the 1970s with initiatives like Queensland's 1974 teacher registration to elevate teaching quality and professional status (Aspland, 2006). The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) has since spearheaded efforts to improve student learning outcomes through high-quality teaching, culminating in the establishment of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST) in 2011. Developed after extensive stakeholder consultations, APST serves as a quality assurance framework to enhance teaching practices and positively impact student achievement (Timperley, 2011). APST outlines four career stages—Graduate, Proficient, Highly Accomplished, and Lead—each defined by the same seven teaching standards to guide teachers' professional development and support their growth at every stage of their careers (AITSL, 2013).

**Table 2:** Australian Professional Standards for Teachers Domains and Standards

| **Professional Knowledge** | | **Professional Practice** | | | **Professional Engagement** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Standard 1** | **Standard 2** | **Standard 3** | **Standard 4** | **Standard 5** | **Standard 6** | **Standard 7** |
| Knowledge about students and how they learn | Knowledge about the content and how to teach it | Design and implement effective teaching and learning | Create and maintain safe and supportive learning environment | Assess, provide feedback and report students learning | Engage in professional learning | Engage with professional colleagues, parents and community |
| Standard 1.1-1.6 | Standard 2.1-2.6 | Standard 3.1-3.7 | Standard 4.1-4.5 | Standard 5.1-5.4 | Standard 6.1-6.4 | Standard 7.1-7.4 |

Source: Adapted from Call (2018)

Within Australia, universities had to align their programs with the ATPS (Walkington, 2009). For accreditation purposes, universities must ensure that their graduates are better trained to meet the labor market's demand. AITSL's accreditation position paper (AITSL, 2015) makes a strong case that the current TPS demands a firmer and more unilateral approach to demonstrating a positive impact on students' learning achievement. Two stages of accreditation for all Australian initial teacher education programmes were suggested, with the dominant underlying feature being that the APST forms the 'backbone of accreditation' (AITSL, 2015). The introduction of the APST at the undergraduate level has an ongoing impact on education policy across all jurisdictions and all Australian education stakeholders (Mockler, 2015). AITSL has ensured that teacher training universities are duty-bound to guarantee that preservice teachers have been well-trained to interact professionally with the APST before entering the teaching profession.

Ghana's education strategic vision prioritizes improving student learning outcomes and delivering high-quality, lifelong education for all. Central to this vision, the Education Sector Plan (2018-2021) fosters continuous improvement and learning throughout the education system (Ministry of

Education, 2019). In response to calls for unifying diverse teaching standards across teacher training institutions and professional development programs, Ghana introduced the National Teaching Standards (NTS) in 2017. Developed through extensive consultation with national and international documents and stakeholders—including the Ghana Education Service, teacher unions, and universities—the NTS aims to standardize and enhance teacher education nationwide. Reviewed in 2024, these standards provide a unified framework to ensure consistency and excellence in teacher preparation and practice, driving progress in the nation's educational goals.

**Table 3:** National Teaching Standards for Ghana

| **Professional Values and Attitudes** | | **Professional Knowledge** | | **Professional Practice** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Standards 1** | **Standard 2** | **Standard 3** | **Standard 4** | **Standard 5** | **Standard 6** | **Standard 7** |
| Professional Development | Community of Practice | Knowledge of Educational Curriculum and Policies | Knowledge about Learners | Knowledge of how to manage the learning environment | Knowledge about Teaching and learning | Knowledge on assessment |

Source: National Teaching Council (2024)

Ghana's National Teaching Standards (NTS) are categorized into three key areas: *Professional Values and Attitudes, Professional Knowledge,* and *Professional Practice,* comprising seven standards. These include professional development, community of practice, curriculum and policy knowledge, understanding learners, classroom management, effective teaching and learning strategies, and assessment knowledge. While these standards aim to prepare teachers for the complexities of modern education, Ghana lacks specific professional standards for headteachers or principals, and data correlating NTS with student performance in PISA exams is unavailable. Teaching in Ghana is recognized as a demanding intellectual profession, necessitating rigorous preparation and adherence to high standards through a standardized Initial Teacher Education (ITE) curriculum designed to integrate theory and practice effectively. However, challenges

remain. Some Ghanaian teachers perceive the NTS as overly technical and demanding, highlighting the need for additional training to clarify their roles and responsibilities in implementing these standards.

Kenya's Vision 2030 agenda prioritizes transforming the nation into a knowledge-based economy by investing in human capital, with a focus on employing, developing, and maintaining highly qualified educators. Recognizing the link between quality teaching and economic growth, Kenya has adopted measures to professionalize the teaching profession, ensuring instructors meet global best practices. The Teachers Service Commission (TSC), empowered by the Constitution of Kenya and guided by the TSC Act of 2012 and the Code of Regulation for Teachers (CORT), plays a central role in regulating and managing the profession. To advance this vision, the TSC has implemented comprehensive teacher professional development programs anchored in Teaching Professional Standards (TPS). These standards are integral to enhancing quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. By aligning teacher management with global best practices, Kenya continues to invest in its educators, positioning them as pivotal contributors to the nation's educational and economic transformation. Table 4 presents the results of Kenyan Professional Teaching Standards.

**Table 4:** Kenya Professional Teaching Standards

| **Standard 1:** | **Standard 2** | **Standard 3** | **Standard 4** | **Standard 5** | **Standard 6** | **Standard 7** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Teacher Promotes Professionalism throughout their Career | The Teacher has Pedagogical Content Knowledge and understanding of competency - based Curriculum and how to implement it. | The Teacher has knowledge on assessment and reporting | Teacher Knows how to Create and Support Inclusive Education Practices | The Teacher Knows and Promotes Comprehensive School Health and Safety | The Teacher has Knowledge of Financial Literacy Skills | The Teacher Knows and Promotes Instructional Leadership and Administration |

Source: Adopted from Macharia (2019)

The Kenya Professional Teaching Standards (KePTS) were developed through extensive consultation with teachers and key stakeholders to ensure their relevance and endorsement by educators. Published in the 2016 Teacher Professional Development (TPD) policy framework, KePTS outline a comprehensive set of competencies—knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values—that are designed to improve teacher quality and enhance student outcomes. The standards are structured across six career stages, with each stage defining seven TPS, accompanied by descriptors to guide teachers in developing the necessary competencies. This initiative represents a major step toward creating a cohesive, nationwide approach to teaching standards, aimed at achieving optimal student learning outcomes and improving the overall quality of education in Kenya.

## 5.0 Recommendations

To enhance teacher education, Teacher Professional Standards (TPS) should be integrated into teacher education programs, with clear curriculum requirements for student teachers. Beginning teachers must engage with TPS as part of their practice, rather than as an additional task. Technology-based resources, such as social media, digital portfolios, and reflective journals, can support the sustainable interaction of student teachers with TPS by fostering active participation in the learning process. Additionally, to maintain international standards, student and practicing teachers should take the Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA) examination, with the development of relevant assessment items and improved evaluators' capacity to assess TPS effectively. Finally, UNESCO and other international organizations should guide countries in designing clear, credible education plans and harmonized TPS for both teachers and educational administrators, ensuring clear targets and responsibilities.

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