

TEACHER EDUCATORS: Perceptions, Self-Views and Participation in a Community of Practice

Stephen Joseph and Beular Mitchell

This study utilised an explanatory sequential mixed methods design to explore the perceptions and self-views of teacher educators as they engage in a community of practice. One hundred and twelve school-based and university-based teacher educators were purposively drawn from primary and secondary schools as well as tertiary-level institutions in Trinidad and Tobago. One-way ANOVA and independent samples *t*-tests were used to analyse differences between the teacher educator groups in the first phase of the study, while structured open-ended interviews were conducted in the second phase to explicate quantitative results obtained in the first phase. Results indicate that there was a statistically significant difference in teacher educators' perceptions about themselves as members of a professional group, $F(2, 107)=4.62, p=.012$. Findings also suggest that while school-based teacher educators feel far more included in policy-making decisions at their institution than university-based teacher educators, university-based teacher educators place a higher value on professional learning activities than their school-based counterparts.

Introduction

Teacher educators have occupied a prominent place in the education landscape of Trinidad and Tobago since their emergence as a heterogeneous professional group in the mid-20th century. In the higher education sector, teacher educators are largely responsible for preparing teachers for classroom practice. These teacher educators perform several roles such as designers of curriculum, content knowledge specialists, programme and course coordinators, and supervisors of classroom teaching. They are also expected to engage in scholarly research and make presentations at conferences (Murray, Swennen & Shagrir, 2008). But teacher educators also operate in other school-based contexts as cooperating teachers and mentors who provide guidance to novice teachers and facilitate professional development of teachers at the primary and secondary level.

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Loughran (2015) accurately describes the job of teacher educators as complex and dynamic. Yet, they are often undervalued, neglected, marginalised and overlooked as a professional group (Lunenberg, Dengerink, & Korthagen, 2014; Kosnik et al., 2011). Researchers argue that this is partly because the profession of teacher educators is neither well understood nor defined (Khan 2011; Lunenberg & Hamilton, 2008; Tryggvason, 2012). There also seems to be little consensus about who is recognised and valued as a teacher educator; who recognises and values themselves as teacher educators; and whether teacher educators should be recognised at all as a professional group.

Questions about teacher educator identities are not new (Livingston, 2014). This concept of identity has been described as a socially and culturally constructed self, based on lifelong learning shaped through the interplay between personal theories of teaching, perceptions of self and social and occupational contexts (McKeon & Harrison, 2010; Berger & Luckman, 1991; Kreber, 2010). Some researchers argue that a professional identity as teacher educator is developed when teacher educators work and interact with colleagues and student-teachers in a teacher education setting (Swennen, Jones & Volman, 2010). The development of teacher educators' practice, therefore, is closely connected to the development of their professional identity (Timmerman, 2009; Ben-Peretz, Kleeman, Reichenberg & Shimoni, 2010).

In her study on *teacher educators' identity*, Izadinia (2014) analysed 52 research papers to identify challenges and tensions teacher educators experience during their induction, as well as factors which influence the development of their professional identity. Her findings suggest that generally speaking, teacher educators develop negative self-views about their professional knowledge and abilities. However, some researchers believe that very little attention is given to the professional learning needs of teacher educators (Czerniawski, Guberman & MacPhail, 2017); and a key area of challenge for new teacher educators is in the area of scholarship and research activity (Boyd, Harris & Murray, 2007).

In an attempt to understand the complexity of becoming a teacher educator, Williams, Ritter and Bullock (2012) reviewed approximately 60 first-hand accounts of the transition from teacher to teacher educator. They found that beginning teachers experience "a range of personal and professional challenges as they navigate new social and institutional contexts, grapple with multiple and at times

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conflicting professional identities, and begin to forge their own personal pedagogies of teacher education” (p. 245). Some beginning teacher educators express frustration in attempting to fit in with prevailing institutional structures and practices (Cole, 1999; Cole & Knowles, 1996; Donnell, 2010; Guilfoyle, Hamilton, Pinnegar, & Placier, 1995); while others experience loneliness and isolation in their new roles (Guilfoyle, 1995; Harrison & McKeon, 2010; Knowles & Cole, 1994; Olson, 1996). Research suggests that the formation of a teacher educator identity is also stymied by negative self-views of being vulnerable, marginalised, and powerless (Field, 2012; Murray & Male, 2005).

While issues affecting teacher educators are widely discussed in the international arena, there seems to be a deafening silence about the plight of teacher educators in Trinidad and Tobago and the wider Caribbean community. This study seeks to extend the discourse to the Caribbean region.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to examine major issues teacher educators face, as well as their perceptions about themselves as members of a professional group operating in the Trinidad and Tobago education sector. Three research questions served to focus this investigation:

1. What perceptions do teacher educators hold about themselves as members of a professional group?
2. Do university-based teacher educators and school-based teacher educators differ in their perceptions about themselves as members of a professional group?
3. In what ways do interviews with participants help to elucidate quantitative differences in the perceptions teacher educators hold about themselves as members of a professional group?

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework for the study is informed by Wenger’s (1998) seminal book, *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning and identity*. In this work, he proposes a social theory of learning that begins with the assumption that engagement in social practice is the fundamental process by which we learn and develop our identity. Wenger (1998) provides a theory of learning in which the primary unit of analysis is neither the individual nor social institutions but *communities of practice*. This theory

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systematically explores the intersection of learning components: *community* (learning as belonging to a social group), *practice* (learning as doing in the community), *meaning* (learning as experience of the learner) and *identity* (learning as becoming). These components provide a conceptual framework for analysing learning as social participation.

Wenger's (1998) framework facilitates a better understanding of how teacher educators, as a professional group, engage in a community of practice. In this community of practice, teacher educators share a passion for teaching and learn how to do it better through regular interaction with the group (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). Wenger (1998) explains that in order for a community of practice to function, it needs to generate a shared repertoire of ideas, commitments and memories.

Methodology

This study utilised an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design which began with quantitative data collection and analysis in Phase 1. A qualitative follow-up approach was used in Phase 2 to explicate quantitative results obtained in the first phase as illustrated in Figure 1 below (Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003; Morgan, 1998). This approach provided an opportunity for greater clarification of statistical results by exploring participants' qualitative responses in a more in-depth manner (Creswell, 2012; Rossman & Wilson, 1985; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998).

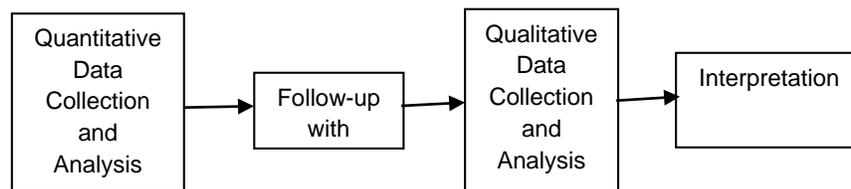


Figure 1. Explanatory Sequential Design

Participants

A purposive sample of 112 teacher educators was selected to participate in the study. These respondents were university teacher educators from three tertiary education institutions in Trinidad and Tobago as well as school-based participants who serve as cooperating teachers, mentor teachers, and senior teachers at the primary and secondary school levels. Curriculum officers and school supervisors also formed part of the school-based teacher educators selected for this study.

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Instrument

This study utilised a survey instrument with 30 items covering two of the objectives arising from the research questions outlined above. Using a 5-point Likert-type scale, respondents were required to share their opinions about major issues they face as teacher educators and their sense of identity as members of a professional group. The instrument was pilot-tested and feedback from that activity was used to improve the instrument before formally distributing the questionnaires to the research sample. Cronbach's alpha was used to measure internal consistency or reliability for 13 of the items used in the Likert scale. The result was .74, which indicates a satisfactory level of internal consistency for the items used in the scale.

Procedure and Analyses

Descriptive and inferential statistics were conducted to provide information about the sample used in the study. Frequency tables were developed for recording and tabulating demographic responses with the aid of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, Ver. 23) software. These demographic responses included questions related to gender, experience, and level (university-based or school-based). One-way ANOVA tests were also used to analyse participants' responses to Research Question 1, which asked about teacher educators' perceptions about themselves as a professional group. An independent samples *t*-test was used to determine whether there were significant differences between the means of the two groups (university-based teacher educators and school-based teacher educators) that participated in the study. These tests of significance (one-way ANOVA and independent samples *t*-test) were done on the basis of a probability of error threshold of 1 in 20, or $p < .05$.

Structured open-ended interviews were also conducted as a qualitative follow-up approach to elucidate quantitative results obtained through questionnaires employed in the first stage of data collection and analysis. Ten teacher educators were asked to respond to the following findings and themes that emerged from the quantitative analysis of participants' responses: (i) Feelings of isolation, loneliness and marginalisation (ii) Formulation of a professional identity (iii) Stress as a major feature of work life (iv) Uncertainty about professional responsibilities (v) Feeling included in professional discourse (v) Value placed on professional activities.

Results

Quantitative Findings – Phase 1

One hundred and twelve (112) teacher educators, who participated in the survey, were drawn from three universities (50.0%) and several school-based institutions (50.0%) located in Trinidad and Tobago. As shown in Table 1, the majority of participants, 64.6% (73) were females, while 34.5% (39) were males.

Frequency analysis of the data also revealed that 50.0% (56) of the respondents were veteran teacher educators with over twenty years' experience, while 24.1% (27) of the respondents were beginning teacher educators with less than ten years' experience. The remaining twenty-nine participants (25.9%) had teaching experience which ranged from eleven to less than twenty years, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Participants' Demographic Information

Demographic Variables	Categories	Freq	%
Institutions	University-based	56	50.0
	School-based	56	50.0
Gender	Females	73	64.6
	Males	39	34.5
Experience	Veteran Teacher Educators (>20 years)	56	50.0
	Developing Teacher Educators (11-20 years)	29	25.9
	Beginning Teacher Educators (<10 years)	27	24.1
Total		112	100.0

n=112

Using a 5-point Likert-type scale, with 1 representing strong disagreement and 5 representing strong agreement, participants were asked to share their opinions about major issues they face as teacher educators and the perception they hold about themselves as members of a professional group. Respondents were also asked to indicate the value they placed on a number of professional learning activities including conference presentations, participation in professional organisations and research. Table 2 provides a summary of participants' responses to the questionnaire.

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Table 2. Survey Items and Participants' Responses

<i>Survey Items</i>	<i>No. Strongly Disagree/ Disagree</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No. Strongly Agree/ Agree</i>	<i>%</i>
1. I feel a sense of loneliness/isolation as a teacher educator	89	80	23	20
2. I have difficulty forging an identity as a teacher educator	95	85	17	15
3. Teacher educators occupy a low status job when compared to other positions at my institution/university	66	59	46	41
4. Stress is a major feature of working life as a teacher educator	23	21	89	79
5. I feel marginalised as a teacher educator	71	63	41	37
6. I feel that I lack training on how to teach research	78	70	34	30
7. I have doubts about my ability to effectively teach student teachers	90	80	22	20
8. I am confident about my professional knowledge and skills	11	10	101	90
9. I feel uncertain about my professional responsibilities as a teacher educator	86	77	26	23
10. I get support from the learning community of teacher educators	16	14	96	86
11. I am concerned about my heavy teaching load	43	38	69	62
12. I participate in on-going professional development activities	16	14	96	86
13. Professional development activities organised by my institution often meet my professional development goals	54	48	58	52
14. I am included in the professional discourse at my institution	41	37	71	63
15. I am included in policy-making decisions at my institution	56	50	56	50
16. I place high value on professional learning activities (conference presentations; research; coaching and mentoring)	36	32	76	68

n=112

Research Question 1: What perceptions do teacher educators hold about themselves as members of a professional group?

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Hypothesis Testing - Research Question 1 was tested through the following hypothesis: Hypothesis 1: *There is no difference in teacher educators' perceptions based on teaching experience.* This hypothesis was tested using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with data from survey items 1-16.

With regard to survey item #16, a one-way between groups ANOVA was conducted to compare the perceptions teacher educators hold about themselves as members of a professional group. The analysis was statistically significant, $F(2, 107)=4.62, p=.012$ (see Table 3). Post hoc comparisons using Tukey's test indicated that the mean score for the value that veteran teacher educators place on coaching and mentoring ($M=4.6909, SD=.46638$), was significantly different than that of developing teacher educators ($M=4.3448, SD=.089745$) and beginning teacher educators ($M=4.2308, SD=.86291$). These results suggest that veteran teacher educators (more than developing and beginning teacher educators) place a higher value on coaching and mentoring as part of their practice as members of a professional group.

With regard to survey item #16, the implied null hypothesis is rejected. There are statistically significant differences in the perceptions of teacher educators (based on teaching experience) about the value they place on coaching and mentoring teachers.

Research Question 2: *Do university-based teacher educators and school-based teacher educators differ in their perceptions about themselves as a professional group?*

Hypothesis Testing - Research Question 2 was tested through the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: *There is no difference in the perceptions held by university-based and school-based teacher educators about themselves as a professional group.* This hypothesis was tested using independent samples *t*-tests with data from the survey items 9, 14, 15, and 16.

With regard to survey item #9, an independent samples *t*-test was conducted to compare the perceptions (dependent variable) of university-based teacher educators and school-based teacher educators (independent variable) regarding their professional responsibilities. The analysis was significant, $F(1, 110)=.205, p=.022$ (see Table 4). Levene's test for equality of variances showed no violations, $p=.205$. Results indicate that there was a significant difference in the perception scores for university-based teacher educators ($M=1.7857; SD=1.05683$) and school-based teacher educators ($M=2.2857; SD=1.21677$); $t(110) = -2.322; p=.022$.

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Cohen's d was estimated at 0.44, which is a medium effect based on Cohen's (1988) guidelines. These results suggest that school-based teacher educators feel more uncertain than university-based teacher educators about their professional responsibilities.

With regard to survey item #14, an independent samples t -test was conducted to compare the perceptions of university-based teacher educators and school-based teacher educators regarding the extent to which they feel included in the professional discourse at their institutions. Given a violation of Levene's test for homogeneity of variances, $F(1, 110) = 3.99$, $p = .048$, a t -test not assuming homogeneous variations was calculated. The results of this test indicated that there was a significant difference in the perception scores for university-based teacher educators ($M = 3.0893$; $SD = 1.10003$) and school-based teacher educators ($M = 3.8571$; $SD = 1.06904$); $t(109) = -3.746$; $p < .001$ (see Table 5). Based on Cohen's (1988) convention for a large effect ($d = .80$), the effect size for this analysis ($d = 0.71$) was found to be medium to large. These results suggest that school-based teacher educators feel more included in the professional discourse at their institutions than university-based teacher educators.

With regard to survey item #15, an independent samples t -test was conducted to compare the perceptions of university-based teacher educators and school-based teacher educators regarding the extent to which they feel included in the policy-making decisions at their institutions. Levene's test for equality of variances showed no violations, $p = .217$. Results indicate that there was a significant difference in the perception scores for university-based teacher educators ($M = 2.4464$; $SD = 1.18965$) and school-based teacher educators ($M = 3.6250$; $SD = 1.12108$); $t(110) = -5.395$; $p < .001$ (see Table 6). The effect size for this analysis ($d = 1.02$) was found to exceed Cohen's (1988) convention for a large effect ($d = .80$). These results suggest that school-based teacher educators feel far more included in policy-making decisions at their institution than university-based teacher educators.

With regard to survey item #16, an independent samples t -test was conducted to compare the perceptions of university-based teacher educators and school-based teacher educators regarding the value they place on professional learning activities such as conference presentations. Given a violation of Levene's test for homogeneity of variances, $F(1, 109) = 4.75$, $p = .031$, a t -test not assuming homogeneous variations was calculated. The results of this test indicated that there was a significant difference in the perception scores for university-based teacher educators

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($M=3.8929$; $SD=.88787$) and school-based teacher educators ($M=3.4727$; $SD=.95945$); $t(108) = 2.393$; $p= .018$ (see Table 7). Cohen's d was estimated at 0.45, which is a medium effect based on Cohen's (1988) guidelines. These results suggest that university-based teacher educators place a higher value on professional learning activities such as conference presentations than school-based teacher educators.

With regard to survey items 9, 14, 15 and 16, the implied null hypothesis is rejected. There are statistically significant differences in the perceptions of university-based teacher educators and school-based teacher educators about themselves as a professional group.

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Table 3. Differences in Perceptions among University-based and School-based Teacher Educators about the value they place on Coaching and Mentoring

Teaching Experience	N	Mean	SD	SE	95% CI for Mean		F	df	Sig
					Lower	Upper			
0-10 years	26	4.2308	.86291	.16923	3.8822	4.5793	4.629	2,107	.012
11-20 years	29	4.3448	.08974 5	.16665	4.0035	4.6862			
>20 years	55	4.6909	.46638	.06289	4.5648	4.8170			
Total	110	4.4909	.72625	.06925	4.3537	4.6282			

Survey Item 16= I place high value on professional learning activities (coaching and mentoring)

* Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 4. Differences in Perceptions among University-based and School-based Teacher Educators about their Professional Responsibilities

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.	Std. Error Diff.	95% Confidence interval of the Difference		Cohen's d
								Lower	Upper	
Equal variances assumed	1.627	.205	-2.322	110	.022	-.50000	.21537	-.92680	-.07320	0.44
Equal variances not assumed			-2.322	107.885	.022	-.50000	.21537	-.92690	-.07310	

Survey Item 9= I feel uncertain about my professional responsibilities as a teacher educator

* Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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Table 5. Differences in Perceptions among University-based and School-based Teacher Educators about feeling included in the Professional Discourse

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.	Std. Error Diff.	95% Confidence interval of the Difference		Cohen's d
								Lower	Upper	
Equal variances assumed	3.999	.048	-.3746	110	.000	-.76786	.20498	-1.17408	-.36164	0.71
Equal variances not assumed			-.3746	109.910	.000	-.76786	.20498	-1.17408	-.36163	

Survey Item 14= I am included in the professional discourse at my institution

* Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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Table 6. Differences in Perceptions among University-based and School-based Teacher Educators about feeling included in Policy-making

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.	Std. Error Diff.	95% Confidence interval of the Difference		Cohen's d
								Lower	Upper	
Equal variances assumed	1.543	.217	-5.395	110	.000	-1.17857	.21844	-1.61147	-.74568	1.02
Equal variances not assumed			-5.395	109.615	.000	-1.17857	.21844	-1.61148	-.74566	

Survey Item 15= I am included in policy-making decisions at my institution

* Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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Table 7. Differences in Perceptions among University-based and School-based Teacher Educators about the value they place on Making Conference Presentations

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.	Std. Error Diff.	95% Confidence interval of the Difference		Cohen's d
								Lower	Upper	
Equal variances assumed	4.755	.031	2.395	109	.018	.42013	.17542	-.74568	.76780	0.45
Equal variances not assumed			2.393	108.015	.018	.42013	1.7554	-.74566	.76808	

Survey Item 16= I place high on professional learning activities (conference presentations)

* Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Qualitative Findings – Phase 2

In keeping with the explanatory sequential mixed-methods design adopted by this study, a qualitative follow-up approach was used in Phase 2 of the research to elucidate quantitative results obtained in Phase 1. The use of structured open-ended interviews provided an opportunity for greater probing and clarification of statistical results discussed in the first Phase of the study. With regard to Research Question 1: (*What perceptions do teacher educators hold about themselves as members of a professional group?*) the following three issues were further explained in the interview sessions:

1. Feelings of Isolation, Loneliness and Marginalisation

Descriptive statistics showed that 80.0% of respondents denied feeling isolated or lonely, while 63.0% disagreed that they felt marginalised as teacher educators. However, when asked to explain why the majority of teacher educators do not experience loneliness and isolation, this is what one teacher educator had to say:

The group of teacher educators existing in the Trinidad and Tobago context is a small one belonging to 5 institutions which offer teacher training. I have realised that many of the persons work at more than one institution (full-time and a part-time course here and there) and so persons are familiar with each other.... Many of the teacher educators in the system have also worked with each other as teachers at the primary or secondary level of education so that persons, generally, are familiar with each other.

One veteran teacher educator indicated:

Most teacher educators have connections with various organisations, educational institutions, and professional associations. These organisations provide support for teacher educators in terms of knowledge and professional activities such as educational research. Most teacher educators are employed in a School of Education at a University or at a Teachers' College. These institutions require a collaborative effort from employees in planning, implementation and assessment of students' work, thus the educational milieu in which teacher educators function reduces the opportunity to experience loneliness and isolation.

Another veteran teacher educator added:

Familiarity with faculty might decrease feelings of loneliness and isolation. Also too, they may already be members of professional organisations or unions where they have networks that help to

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mitigate the effects of moving into new career paths or survival in existing careers as teacher educators. Especially in smaller communities/societies, educators tend to know each other and can discourse about educational matters.

Citing her personal experience, this developing teacher said:

With reference to my working environment, I think it has to do with the close proximity of the lecturers to one another. Also, there is generally a sense of amiability among the staff members... There is also a fair amount of interaction that takes place on a social level, where lecturers chat about campus and public affairs when there is down time.

This university-based teacher educator suggested that:

Teacher educators do not experience loneliness and isolation because they are always fully occupied with one task or the other that is very time consuming, – plan lectures, teach, mark assignments, deal with students' issues, meet deadlines, supervise practicum and conduct research.

2. Formulation of a Professional Identity

Analysis of data in the Phase 1 revealed that the majority of respondents have no difficulty forging an identity as teacher educators. In an attempt to explain how teacher educators formulate a professional identity, this is what one participant had to say:

Identity formation for teacher educators emerge from the roles played. They are an extension of the roles that the traditional teacher has performed. It is now perceived that we merely need to reproduce ourselves through our student-teachers.

Another teacher educator with over 10 years' experience proffered:

Teacher educators also go about formulating professional identities by interfacing beyond the classroom through workshops, conferences, writing and publications. This is also done by the meeting of minds with other lecturers and sharing best practices.

This participant suggested that professional identity is enabled through involvement in research activities. This is what she said:

A most significant method of formulating a professional identity for teacher educators resonates in the engagement of educational

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research. Engaging in educational research provides the opportunity for teacher educators to interact in a professional manner with other personnel in the field of education as they conduct interviews, present research papers at educational conferences and publish their research studies in educational journals.

3. Stress as a Major Feature of Work Life

Survey findings in Phase 1 showed that 82.0% of teacher educators believed that stress was a major feature of their work life. When asked to describe ways in which stress formed part of their work life, this is what one veteran teacher educator had to say:

Most universities require not only engagement in teaching but also research and community service. In addition, modelling is an important part of what teacher educators are expected to do. Balancing all of these presents a situation that generates stress because of simultaneous demands. If an educator wishes to make a difference and fulfill responsibilities in a manner that is fair to everyone and ensure that standards of teacher preparation are upheld in a way that benefits the children who are in the system, then not knowing the extent to which one's work is truly making a difference becomes a greater stress than any physical one. For me, classroom teaching, research and community service are not very stressful because over the years I have found a way to organize so that I can be reasonably satisfied that I have done my best for the prospective teachers with whom I work. The stress comes from the lack of progress in areas where I have no control – the slow pace of changes in organizational structures - both institutional and societal - to move teacher education forward and to make teaching a force that would impact and achieve the changes that society needs; a feeling that we are moving backwards and a questioning of the impact of what we do as teacher educators.

Another participant stated:

The role of teacher educator is multi -faceted. Meeting those demands can be stressful. In addition, the process of meeting the demands of the role in many instances competes with the demands of one's personal life.

One participant admitted:

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I enjoy what I do but when I am required to teach six different courses in one week (for an entire semester), that is madness. It means that every evening I am preparing (content, materials, suitable activities) for another course, and on some days two courses. There is not a night of rest during the week. In addition, I have assignments related to these courses to mark (at least two per course, some have 3 assignments) and the work contract also requires the completion of community work and research (presentation at conferences, publishing of papers in refereed journals) and the upgrading of qualifications. I am involved in all of the activities outlined to fulfill the demands of my contract BUT I find that the demands are inhumane.

Echoing similar sentiments, this participant remarked:

Exhaustion! Stress forms a major part of my work life because of all the demands. There are not enough hours in the day to complete all the tasks I have to accomplish, even though I manage my time wisely. This results in fatigue as well as feeling anxious and sometimes overwhelmed. I cannot find time for research activities.

This is how one developing teacher educator summed up his experience:

- 1) *Unpredictable unfolding of challenges on a daily basis to satisfy increasingly difficult teaching schedules. Overload of time demands for classroom preparation of many different courses*
- 2) *Reduced time for cooperative/collaborative planning, research-based activities and community service tasks because of challenges faced in 1)*
- 3) *Extremely large classes providing limited opportunities for one to one feedback/mentoring opportunities with individual students. Completing assessment requirements and mandates which lean more heavily on 'assessment of learning' rather than on formative activities.*
- 4) *Reduced time for development of personal self- recreational and leisure activities as well as time for family-based activities in light of the fact that most planning takes place during off-duty time at home.*
- 5) *Difficulty in acquisition of basic physical/technical resources to enhance teaching*

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- 6) *Recognition that it is difficult to enhance the professional dispositions of student-teachers who are faced with similar challenges of time constraints etc. as faced by teacher educators.*

With regard to Research Question 2: (*Do university-based teacher educators and school-based teacher educators differ in their perceptions about themselves as a professional group?*) the following three issues were further explained during the interviews:

- 1. *Uncertainty about Professional Responsibilities***

Inferential statistics in Phase 1 suggested that school-based teacher educators feel more uncertain than university-based teacher educators about their professional responsibilities. Comments obtained from interviews further explained why this might be so. One participant offered this explanation:

Their mandates to carry out duties are sometimes arbitrarily assigned and withdrawn depending on administrators' record of successes and beliefs rather than by fixed policy. Their professional responsibilities are not as clearly spelt out as daily activities as university-based teacher-educators and there is much overlap and conflict in personal and professional responsibilities among themselves and other members of staff. The issue of job specifications of each individual school-based teacher educator may be a 'grey area' that is not properly defined.

Another teacher educator suggested:

This may be due to perceptions about the status of university lecturers. While society generally views teaching as a noble profession, there is a sense of categorization and the status which accompanies each level. This perception is also held by the professional, who measures his/her position by the scale of upward mobility and the prestige attached to each level.

Another participant indicated that it is easy for one to understand why school-based teacher educators are more uncertain than university-based teacher educators about their professional responsibilities. She indicated:

There needs to be more collaboration between the universities and the schools. The school-based educators (representatives like head of principals' associations or the school supervisors and curriculum officers) need to be part of meetings in which decisions are taken about the expectations of teachers in training and new teachers (teachers in general) in the schools. These persons

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should be encouraged to be part of conferences where information on teacher education and innovations in teaching is shared and encouraged to express their needs as school-based educators. Further, teacher training institutions can establish posts for persons who will visit the schools on a regular basis and share what is happening in their institutions with teachers and how they (school-based teacher educators) are expected to support.

This veteran teacher educator concluded:

Many school-based teacher educators feel that they lack the competencies to offer professional development to prospective teachers. Many of them are of the belief that they are not au courant with the latest development regarding the principles of teaching and learning. While they have the experience of managing their charges in the classroom, they believe they do not possess the knowledge and skills to adequately mentor the prospective teachers.

2. Included in Professional Discourse

Quantitative findings in Phase 1 suggest that school-based teacher educators feel more included in the professional discourse at their institutions than university-based teacher educators. When asked to explain why this might be so, this is what one veteran teacher educator had to say:

It is perhaps not unexpected that in a smaller locality with staff meetings and heads of departments who have meetings with their departments, or in principal's meetings that school-based educators would feel more included than those at universities where the governance structure is different and there is a larger faculty as distinct from an administrative body whose conversations about professional matters might be concentrated and limited to a few at the top and disseminated to those at the bottom.

Another participant agreed that:

There are greater opportunities for professional collaboration within schools and within the school system than within the tertiary education system which operates in silos.

This teacher educator offered this explanation:

I think this is because the school-based lecturers are generally at the same level of education as their peers, including head of departments

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and principals. Additionally, because there are not so many different levels, there is not much distance between the teacher and the principal. However, at the university level, the average lecturer may be more removed from major decision-making processes. Also, many of the decisions are made at the level of the board and president areas and offices are far-removed from the actual teaching centres.

Notwithstanding earlier comments, one veteran teacher educator questions the type of professional discourse that occurs at the level of the school. She said:

It depends on what that professional discourse is about – whether it speaks to ‘teaching’ or ‘teacher education’. I’ve often wondered at whether lines are blurred, and everything falls into the realm of ‘teaching’ as a generic concept. At universities, there may be the disposition towards the unblurring of those lines especially where persons may have been exposed to the breadth of the field.

3. Value Placed on Professional Learning Activities

Inferential statistics in Phase 1 suggested that veteran teacher educators place a higher value (than beginning teachers) on coaching and mentoring as part of their practice as members of a professional group. This is what one respondent said:

This can be because the veteran teacher educators, through their experiences, understand the value of sharing best practices to the younger generations. They understand that content knowledge is not all that is required to be effective teachers. Also, teaching is reflective of the generational changes in society and in order for there to be a smooth flow, the previous generation has to pass on the tricks of the trade. They will also be able to see pitfalls that may not be apparent to the younger educators, who might think they are up to the task.

Another participant provided further explanation:

Veteran teacher educators would have grown and developed in contexts of coaching and mentoring. They understand that teaching is not theoretical and while prospective teachers can be exposed to professional training, the ability to function in a classroom can be challenging. The coaching and mentoring part of a teacher preparation experience allows new teachers to understand the demands of the teaching process while having important support and examples to work with in the contexts.

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Mentors and coaches are normally persons who have mastered the implementation of all facets of the teaching process and who are willing to support new learners. They provide immeasurable opportunities for development to the new teachers.

One veteran teacher educator stated:

As in many if not all professions, insights come with years of experience and beginning teachers might still be operating on the belief that telling students is more valuable than showing them how, or that providing information is better than facilitating learning. It may be a consequence of how they were taught, and some may also feel that they need more time to really develop into a model, mentor or someone who possesses the qualities to coach. The uncertainty might be influencing the value they place on coaching and mentoring.

Echoing the sentiments of her colleagues, this teacher educator of over 20 years added:

I believe veteran teacher educators understand the essence of professional development. They perceive the crafting of teachers as their prime responsibility. Beginning teacher educators may need primarily to focus on becoming a teacher educator, that is, to acquire the skills of andragogy.

This participant summed it up this way:

Veteran teacher-educators really believe that they are required to reproduce themselves as models.

This is what one participant had to say in response to the assertion that university-based teacher educators (more than school-based teacher educators) place a higher value on professional learning activities such as conference presentations:

I think this is true because they are more in an environment that facilitates and encourages such activities. In the primary and secondary school, hardly anyone even mentions doing research and attending conferences. I certainly never heard it discussed when I taught at those institutions.

Another participant stated:

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For school-based teacher educators, conference presentations have no currency in their day to day lives, except maybe for those who aspire to roles outside of schools. One's job/career, one's value at the school level is not dependent on it. It may be different for university-based teacher educators whose positions and advancement in the academy are perceived as greatly dependent on the regularity with which such activities are engaged in.

Finally, one participant offered this explanation:

Their own daily classroom practice is heavily shaped by professional learning activities such as teacher collaborative work on tasks, resource personnel, conference presentations to enrich research-based knowledge of educational concepts. Teacher education institutions are charged with the responsibility of developing the professional knowledge, pedagogical skills and dispositions of teachers within all subject areas and hence all that they deliver must enhance the idea of professional learning and the evolving teacher. They would be more inclined to hinge their teaching on application of the latest research in education and as such professional learning activities will be accorded a higher value.

Research Question 3: In what ways do interviews with participants help to elucidate quantitative differences in the perceptions teacher educators hold about themselves as members of a professional group?

This research question is answered by way of a *Joint Display* at Table 8, which provides a summary of qualitative responses to significant quantitative results emerging from the study. The *Joint Display* illustrates how the qualitative structured interview approach adopted in Phase 2 helped to elucidate quantitative findings obtained through survey questionnaires in Phase 1 of the study.

Table 8. Joint Display of Quantitative and Qualitative Results

Quantitative Results	Qualitative Results	How Qualitative Approach helped to explain Quantitative Results
1. The value that veteran teacher educators place on coaching and mentoring	Veteran teacher educators place a higher value on coaching and	In the structured open-ended interviews, participants further explained that the

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<p>($M=4.6909$, $SD=.46638$), was significantly different than that of developing teacher educators ($M=4.3448$, $SD=.089745$) and beginning teacher educators ($M=4.2308$, $SD=.86291$).</p>	<p>mentoring than their counterparts.</p>	<p>formation of a professional identity comes from the roles they play as teacher educators. Mentoring and coaching are two such roles considered to be important to members of the professional group of teacher educators.</p>
<p>2. There was a significant difference in the perception scores for university-based teacher educators ($M=1.7857$; $SD=1.05683$) and school-based teacher educators ($M=2.2857$; $SD=1.21677$); $t(110) = -2.322$; $p = .022$ about their professional responsibilities.</p>	<p>School-based teacher educators feel more uncertain that university-based teacher educators about their professional responsibilities.</p>	<p>Qualitative follow-up interviews highlighted the need for clearer role identification of school-based teacher educators who generally comprise a large group of individuals with varying roles and responsibilities. However, the professional responsibilities of university-based teacher educators are usually clearly established and documented as part of their obligations to the university.</p>
<p>3. There was a significant difference in the perception scores for university-based teacher educators ($M=3.0893$; $SD=1.10003$) and school-based teacher educators ($M=3.8571$; $SD=1.06904$); $t(109) = -3.746$; $p < .001$ about feeling included in the professional discourse at their institutions.</p>	<p>School-based teacher educators feel more included in the professional discourse at their institutions than university-based teacher educators.</p>	<p>While some of the persons interviewed felt that there are greater opportunities for professional collaboration within schools than in the tertiary education sector, others are more skeptical about the type of discourse that occurs at the level of the school where professional roles and responsibilities are sometimes blurred.</p>
<p>4. There was a significant difference in</p>	<p>School-based teacher educators feel far more</p>	<p>Because school-based teacher educators are</p>

<p>the perception scores for university-based teacher educators ($M=2.4464$; $SD=1.18965$) and school-based teacher educators ($M=3.6250$; $SD=1.12108$); $t(110) = -5.395$; $p = <.001$ about feeling included in policy-making decisions at their institutions.</p>	<p>included in policy-making decisions at their institutions than university-based teacher educators.</p>	<p>performing leadership roles as senior teachers, it seems more likely that in the school-based context they will be included in policy-making decisions unlike their counterparts who operate in a context where policy formation resides at the level of the university board with inputs from a few professors who may or may not be teacher educators.</p>
<p>5. There was a significant difference in the perception scores for university-based teacher educators ($M=3.8929$; $SD=.88787$) and school-based teacher educators ($M=3.4727$; $SD=.95945$); $t(108) = 2.393$; $p = .018$ about the value they place on professional learning activities such as conference presentations.</p>	<p>University-based teacher educators place a higher value on professional learning activities such as conference presentations than school-based teacher educators.</p>	<p>The question of professional identity of teacher educators also came to the fore in relation to participation in professional learning activities such as conference presentations, workshops, research, and other scholarly activities.</p>

Discussion

This study explored the perceptions and self-views of teacher educators as they engaged in a process of developing their practice and formulating an identity as members of a professional group. Three main questions were examined: (1) What perceptions do teacher educators hold about themselves as members of a professional group? (2) Do university-based teacher educators and school-based teacher educators differ in their perceptions about themselves as members of a professional group? (3) In what ways do interviews with participants help to elucidate quantitative differences in the perceptions teacher educators hold about themselves as members of a professional group?

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Descriptive statistics were used to provide simple summaries of teacher educators' perceptions about themselves as a community of learners. Frequency analysis of the data revealed that the majority of respondents had similar views regarding their feelings of isolation, loneliness and marginalisation; formulation of a professional identity; and stress as a major feature of work life. For the most part, these respondents expressed positive self-views which augur well for the formation of a teacher educator identity. Conversely, Field (2012) and Murray and Male (2005) found that the formation of a teacher educator identity is often stymied by negative self-views of being vulnerable, marginalised and powerless. But this was not the case in this study. Responses from structured open-ended interviews clarified why teacher educators held such positive self-views. Interviews with participants confirmed that, in the Trinidad and Tobago context, teacher educators generally operate in a collegial environment, where they interact with each other beyond the classroom, in workshops and other settings to share best practices. This degree of familiarity with members of the learning community helps to mitigate feelings of loneliness and isolation.

In her study on *teacher educators' identity*, Izadinia (2014) found that generally speaking, teacher educators develop negative self-views about their professional knowledge and abilities. In contrast, findings from this current study reveal that 90.0% of the participants were confident in their professional knowledge and skills. This level of confidence augurs well for positive identity formation which, as one participant stated, emerges from the role teacher educators play as members of a professional group.

When teacher educators' responses were analysed using one-way ANOVA tests, findings for the first research question revealed one significant difference in the perceptions teacher educators hold regarding coaching and mentoring of teachers $F(2, 107)=4.62, p=.012$. Post hoc comparisons using Tukey's test indicated that the mean score for the value that veteran teacher educators place on coaching and mentoring ($M=4.6909, SD=.46638$), was significantly different than that of developing teacher educators ($M=4.3448, SD=.89745$) beginning teacher educators ($M=4.2308, SD=.86291$). When comparing the three groups of teacher educators, the results suggest that veteran teacher educators place a higher value on coaching and mentoring activities than the beginning and developing teacher educators. This is not surprising because generally speaking, veteran teacher educators seem more confident about their professional knowledge and skills, given their many years of experience, learning and engagement in what Wenger (1998) refers to as a community

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of practice. Participants in the interviews further explained that the formation of a professional identity comes from the roles they play as teacher educators. Mentoring and coaching are two such roles.

The second research question explored differences in perceptions which university-based teacher educators and school-based teacher educators held about themselves as a professional group. Results from independent samples *t*-tests revealed that school-based teacher educators feel more included in the professional discourse at their institutions than university-based teacher educators; and that they also feel far more included in policy-making decisions at their institution than their university-based counterparts. As reported in the interviews, these results are understandable given the different contexts within which both groups function. School-based teacher educators, for example, function in an environment where they are leaders functioning as senior teachers, mentors, curriculum officers and school supervisors. These individuals are usually part of the decision-making process at their institutions. University-based teacher educators generally operate at the level of the classroom, instructing students, engaging in practicum, as well as supervising graduate research. This puts many teacher educators outside of the decision-making loop in the university system.

Results from independent samples *t*-tests also suggest that while school-based teacher educators feel more uncertain about their professional responsibilities than their counterparts, university-based teacher educators tend to place a higher value on professional learning activities such as conference presentations. These findings support earlier assumptions made by Loughran (2015) and Murray, Swennen and Shagrir (2008), who suggest that while in general, teacher educators perform multiple, complex and dynamic roles, university-based teacher educators are the ones expected to engage in scholarly research and make presentations at conferences. Unlike their school-based counterparts whose roles are not always well-defined, job tenure for many university-based teacher educators is based on a performance appraisal system that rewards those who participate in research and other professional learning activities. This situation gives credence to arguments which suggest that the profession of teacher educators is not well understood and defined (Khan, 2012; Lunenberg & Hamilton, 2008).

Conclusion

This study explored varying perceptions teacher educators hold about themselves as members of a professional group. Results of the study

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showed a departure from generalisations made in earlier studies—that teacher educators are neglected, marginalised and overlooked as a professional group. Quite the opposite, teacher educators in this study reported positive self-views about their professional knowledge and abilities. Unlike other findings, the majority of teacher educators in this study do not feel a sense of loneliness and isolation. Rather, they participate in on-going professional development activities and make contributions to the professional discourses at their institutions. However, issues regarding heavy teaching loads and stress in the workplace remain a major concern for all teacher educators in the study, regardless of where they operate.

Limitations/Delimitations

The study was delimited to teacher educators – those persons who teach teachers at the tertiary level, or those who engage in mentoring and coaching teachers at the school-based level. Also, because the researcher depended on his judgement in selecting participants, there may have been some vulnerability to errors in judgement by the researcher. While the sample selected for the study showed an equal number of persons belonging to the university-based and school-based groups, over 60% of the university-based teacher educators came from one tertiary institution.

Further work

1. There is need for further investigation into the development of teacher educators' practice in Trinidad and Tobago
2. The larger issue of teacher professional identity also requires further investigation to determine the extent to which teacher educators see themselves as members of a community of practice with shared understandings, goals, and commitments
3. Further research needs to be conducted on the perceptions held by other persons operating outside the learning community of teacher educators, to determine how they view teacher educators as a distinct professional group.

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