Teachers as ‘Powerless Elites’: Emotions and Transformative Learning— a Refined Profession in an Era of Digitalisation and Artificial Intelligence

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Abstract
Teaching is an art and a process embedded with emotions. From past till present, the role of school teachers have changed immensely depending on the needs of students in each era. School teachers have always been expected to be the ones who bring out and nurture skills in students, which are considered as productive and useful for the development of societies. For instance, the idea of 21st century skills, etc (Chalkiadaki, 2018). At the same time, since the pandemic when schools across the globe have undergone school suspension and emergency remote teaching, whether or not the teaching profession still plays the same indispensable role in education has become questionable. Other existent problems such as lack of novice teachers and the concerning phenomenon of teachers burnout that has been observed across educational contexts have added weights to the issue at hand. As a matter of fact, teachers are arguably powerless elites under the drastic changes in both the macro environment and the micro environment. The rapid development and reliance on artificial intelligence and digitalisation accompanied in the current educational movements have in fact brought many unknowns and challenges to teachers, especially on how they perceive their own professional identities. This research is qualitative based and makes use of focus group study, through analysing the dialogue amongst five school teachers who teach in five different schools in Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan. The dialogue analyses an exploration on how school teachers themselves have contradictory views regarding whether the profession can be and will be replaceable by artificial intelligence in the future. The findings include i. school teachers have mixed feelings about the complete reliance of digitalisation in the classroom; ii. they see a deeper meaning in teaching and think it is an irreplaceable profession; iii. they could also experience self-doubt regarding the changes in their roles in the classroom. It is therefore recommended that teachers’ view and perception be taken into account before education systems completely shift to digitalisation, or to employ artificial intelligence, as teachers also expressed concerns regarding the potential negative effects that such a phenomenon could have on students’ cognitive development, socio-emotional development and the development of empathy.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence; digitalisation; education; teachers’ emotions; students’ emphatic development