Peeling Back the Layers of Teachers' Status: A Sociological and Political Analysis

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Abstract

This sociological study examines the declining status of teachers through theoretical frameworks and empirical analysis of seventeen graduate-level educators. Employing a multidimensional approach, it assesses the comparative professional standing, career motivations, systemic challenges, and policy impacts. Findings identify interconnected devaluation mechanisms, inadequate compensation, compulsory education burdens, workplace violence, media stigmatization, and faculty oversaturation, that collectively erode professional autonomy. The analysis particularly highlights how neoliberal reforms have precipitated teaching's proletarianization, transforming educators into precarious workers under market-driven logics. Through integration of local case data with international comparisons, the study reveals how administrative neglect and policy constraints exacerbate status erosion. These findings contribute to broader discourses on professional precarity and educational inequality, demonstrating the need to reconceptualize teacher value beyond economic metrics. The research underscores the urgency of addressing both material conditions and symbolic capital in teaching to reverse its declining status within contemporary education systems.

Keywords: *Capitalism, neoliberalism, proletarianization, sociology of education, sociological theories, status of teachers*

1. Introduction

The concepts of social inequality, status, class, and stratification, which are central to the field of sociology, owe much of their development to the contributions of Karl Marx, Max Weber, and later scholars who have built upon their legacies (Aydın, 2018). Weber's developed *Weberian Bureaucracy Theory* regarded professional occupations as an ideal management system to adapt to rapidly advancing industry, circumvent traditional hereditary career choices, and contribute to the functioning of nations (Ritzer, 1975). In this regard, Max Weber viewed status as a measure of how people are perceived and valued in society. He argued that social class is determined by a person's market position, including their wealth and ability to acquire it (Weber and Roth, 1978). Weber connected social stratification to class, status, and political power, considering factors like lifestyle, education, occupation, family background, and prestige (Weber, 1947). Unlike Karl Marx, who focused mainly on economic factors and saw society as divided between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, Weber highlighted the importance of the middle class while explaining the concept of status (Jones, 1975).

To offer a comprehensive definition for the concept of status, originally a Latin term meaning state of affairs or legal condition, status in the social sciences refers to an individual's or group's position within the societal hierarchy of honor and prestige, with sociology specifically addressing the placement of collectives such as communities, groups, or strata in this hierarchy (Kantzara, 2007). That is to say, status refers to an individual's or group's position, location, or rank within society, and encompasses aspects such as office, position, location, or rank (Ceylan, 2011). In this sense, status represents the place and perceived position that society assigns to an individual. In a

hierarchical structure, this position often provides prestige to the individual and can be associated with their performance and personality traits.

1.1. The Status of Teachers

While neoliberalism is often characterized as an individualistic economic philosophy that prioritizes market competition and commodification (Flavin & Thompson, 2024), it also generates new forms of collective alignment among elite actors seeking to preserve hierarchical advantages. Rather than simply eroding social solidarity, neoliberal policies reconfigure collective values, dismantling traditional forms of solidarity (e.g., labor unions) while fostering new alliances among corporate and political elites to consolidate control over public goods such as education (Davies & Bansel, 2007). The media, in turn, presents these policies to the public as being beneficial for all (Ross & Gibson, 2007). As technology advances, teachers are increasingly relegated to the status of the working class, with their labor being disciplined, displaced, and deprofessionalized. This shift undermines their autonomy, weakens their authority over their work, and concentrates knowledge and control in the hands of decision-makers (McLaren, 2003). Neoliberal policies, in this regard, transform the education system into a tool of capitalist ideology, obstructing the realization of social justice. Instead of fostering equity, education is reframed within a market-driven paradigm that perpetuates class inequalities. In this context, Marxist education can offer a compelling response, providing an effective solution to the destructive impact of neoliberal educational policies and inequalities on class structures (Aksakallı, 2025). Aksakallı (2025) advocates for critical pedagogy and collective resistance as means to counter these exploitative structures and transform education into a site of emancipatory praxis.

The teaching profession, which significantly influences the destiny of a society and largely determines the quality of education in a country, now demands specialized expertise (Hargreaves, 2009; Schleicher, 2012; World Economic Forum, 2020). Besides being a source of income, teaching is generally considered a sacred and noble profession (Lortie, 1975) and is acknowledged as one of the oldest professions in the world (Angelista, 2018). However, over the years, educational needs and expectations have changed, requiring educational content that demands expertise rather than life experiences (Ingersoll and Collins, 2018). Throughout this evolution, not only education but also the process of learning and teaching, as well as the role and status of teachers, have been transformed and teachers are expected to embrace diversity with differentiated pedagogical practices (Schleicher, 2012). So, teaching has become a profession requiring professional expertise in society. Beyond being a carrier and transmitter of acquired knowledge and experience, the teacher has assumed the role of facilitator in the learning process (Ural, 2024).

Conceptual Framework and Literature Review on the Status of Teachers

Existing scholarship on teachers' professional status consistently highlights themes of devaluation and systemic challenges across diverse educational contexts. Akyüz (2012) observes that while teachers in Turkey have historically been regarded as agents of modernization, their contemporary status remains low due to insufficient training, economic hardships, and weak institutional support. This finding is reinforced by Aydın et al. (2015), who demonstrate that Turkish teachers perceive their profession as undervalued, attributing this decline to low salaries, ineffective management policies, and diminishing societal respect.

Comparative studies further illustrate broader global trends. Bourdon et al. (2007) reveal that in francophone Africa, the expansion of contract-based teaching has increased educational access but simultaneously eroded teacher status through precarious employment conditions. Similarly, Çiftçi and Özcan (2014) link Turkey's low teacher status to socio-economic factors, arguing that inadequate wages and poor working conditions impede professional development. Other research, such as Demirtaş and Nacar (2018), emphasizes the paradoxical idealization of teachers as moral figures despite systemic neglect in practice. Internationally, teaching is frequently categorized as a "semi-profession" (Ingersoll & Collins, 2018), lacking the autonomy, compensation, and prestige associated with fields like medicine or law. Eaude (2023) similarly contends that neoliberal policies have deprofessionalized teaching by eroding educators' autonomy, reducing them to functionaries tasked with enforcing externally imposed standards. This process not only diminishes professional judgment and creativity but also reinforces elite control over education systems. By standardizing curricula and pedagogy, neoliberal reforms enable policymakers and dominant actors to align schooling with broader political and economic agendas. Hargreaves (2009) further notes that teacher status varies significantly across nations, shaped by factors such as salary levels, public perception, and professional trust. Nevertheless, as Linton (1936) underscores, teachers remain fundamental to cultural transmission, even when their societal standing is diminished.

Recent studies confirm persistent challenges. Meirkulova (2021) finds that while teacher candidates in Turkey and Kazakhstan initially view the profession positively, practicing teachers report declining status due to excessive workloads, low pay, and eroding societal respect. Özoğlu et al. (2013) and Ünsal (2018) further demonstrate how bureaucratic control, negative media portrayals, and deteriorating working conditions undermine Turkey's

traditionally "sacred" perception of teaching. Symeonidis (2015) concludes that while teacher status is generally "average" worldwide, it is declining in many regions due to austerity measures and privatization trends. Collectively, these studies reveal a persistent disconnect between the perceived importance of teachers and their actual professional standing, underscoring the urgent need for systemic reforms to restore their societal value.

This study distinguishes itself from prior research by offering a critical sociological and political-economic analysis of teachers' declining status, employing a multidimensional theoretical framework to examine the impact of neoliberalism. While existing literature, such as Akyüz (2012), Aydın et al. (2015), and Özoğlu et al. (2013) identifies key factors like low wages, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and shifting societal perceptions in Turkey, this research advances the discourse by theorizing these issues as systemic consequences of neoliberal policy shifts. Drawing on Marxist critiques, including Braverman's concept of proletarianization and Bowles and Gintis's correspondence principle, this study argues that teacher deprofessionalization is not incidental but a deliberate outcome of market-driven educational restructuring a perspective largely absents in prior Turkish scholarship. Moreover, this study integrates qualitative data from graduate-level educators with cross-national comparisons (e.g., Taiwan's high teacher status versus Turkey's mid-tier positioning), providing a more nuanced analysis than single-context studies such as Meirkulova (2021) or Çiftçi and Özcan (2014). It also addresses under-researched dimensions of teacher devaluation, including workplace violence, media stigmatization, and the precarity of contract-based employment, issues overlooked in works like Demirtaş and Nacar (2018), which focus on idealized teacher roles, or Ingersoll and Collins (2018), who frame teaching as a "semi-profession" without examining its economic subjugation.

The study's policy recommendations further differentiate it from prior literature. While Symeonidis (2015) and Hargreaves (2009) advocate broadly for improved salaries and professional autonomy, this research proposes concrete interventions, such as psychological evaluations in teacher hiring, quotas for education faculties, and a critical reassessment of Turkey's Teacher Profession Law, linking solutions directly to anti-neoliberal labor justice. By applying Nancy Fraser's theory of redistribution-recognition parity, the study bridges the gap between material conditions (e.g., wages) and symbolic capital (e.g., societal respect), a synthesis missing in earlier scholarship. Ultimately, this article reframes teacher status as a contested domain shaped by political-economic forces rather than merely a reflection of individual or cultural perceptions. It challenges passive narratives of decline (e.g., Ünsal, 2018) by demonstrating how neoliberalism actively devalues the teaching profession, a contribution that calls for rethinking teacher advocacy in terms of systemic resistance rather than incremental reform.

Notably, it is valuable to highlight the research conducted by Aydın et al. (2015), who categorized the factors influencing the prestige and status of the teaching profession into professional and non-professional reasons. Among the professional factors contributing to the low status of teaching are low salaries, challenging hiring conditions, the overall low educational level of society, a reluctance to choose teaching as a career, inadequate teacher quality, privileges granted to parents, insufficient advocacy for teacher rights, and excessive societal demand for teachers. Non-professional factors include media influence, the unsuitability of teachers' traits, and the low value and respect accorded to teachers by society. The framework proposed by Aydın et al. (2015) is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1.

Factors Determining the Status of the Teaching Profession
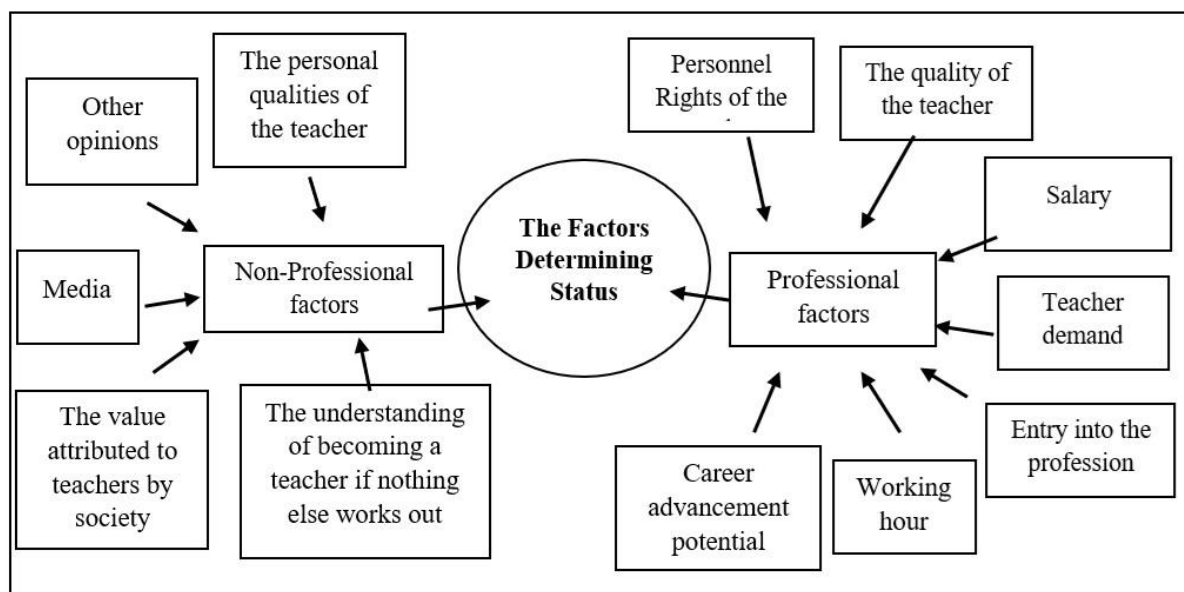
The education system, shaped by economic, social, and cultural factors, plays a crucial role in determining the status of teachers (Apple, 1998, Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Giroux, 1988; Leppert, 2020). Within this intricate framework, teachers are both molded by the system and often perceived as low-status figures, a phenomenon that can be explained through a range of theoretical perspectives. For instance, Ivan Illich's (1971) theory of *Deschooling Society* emphasizes that schools have evolved into mechanisms that train individuals to serve as compliant labor for the economic system (Panizzon, 2013). Here, Illich (1971) argues that schools confine individuals to narrow frameworks of their potential, and because teachers are part of this restrictive system, their status is similarly diminished. On the other hand, Jean-François Lyotard's *Fragmentation Theory* in the context of postmodernism highlights the clash of multiple narratives and value systems in education. Lyotard (1984) suggests that with the collapse of grand narratives in the postmodern era, the role of teachers has become fragmented and unclear, and their societal function is no longer defined. Moreover, Bowles and Gintis' (1976) *Correspondence Principle* draws attention

to the way schools' function to produce individuals who align with the needs of the capitalist system. In this framework, teachers are seen merely as tools to produce workers suited to the labor market, a perspective that further erodes their social value. Howard Becker's (1963) *Labeling Theory* also provides valuable insight, asserting that both teachers and schools are labeled by society. When teachers label students as successful or unsuccessful, they become subject to similar labels. Becker suggests that society's perception of teachers as either heroes or failures demonstrates how their status is largely defined by these societal labels.

Beyond these theories, it is essential to consider the contributions of Paulo Freire, one of the leading figures of critical pedagogy, particularly in his work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire (1970) argues that teachers, as authoritarian figures, do not represent societal values. Instead, he contends that education has become a tool that suppresses the potential for social change, particularly among the oppressed classes. In this light, teachers are viewed as representatives of oppressive power, which undermines their societal respect. Similarly, in *The Crisis in Education*, Hannah Arendt (1961) discusses the problem within the educational system, asserting that teachers have lost their societal significance in this environment. Arendt argues that education, which should serve as a means of reproducing society, fails to perform this function, thereby diminishing the societal role of teachers. Finally, Nancy Fraser's *Theory of Justice* (1998) suggests that educational inequalities further erode the social roles of teachers. Fraser (2009) highlights that these inequalities contribute to the economic and social marginalization of teachers, underscoring the need for a more just educational system to elevate their societal standing. Taken together, these diverse theoretical perspectives offer profound insights into the societal, economic, and structural causes behind the low status of teachers.

The low professional status of teachers has been supported in the academic literature. Mills (1951) referred to the teaching profession as the *proletariat of the professions*, considering it as the largest group of workers shaping the future. This proletarianization, as discussed by Mills, is reflected in the diminishing control teachers have over their working conditions and the formulation of educational policies without their involvement, which can lead to a weakening of their intellectual and critical abilities (Pavlidis, 2023). Supporting this view, Braverman (1974) argues in *Labor and Monopoly Capital* that the work of teachers has become increasingly mechanized and standardized, limiting their creative independence. He asserts that the education system is shaped by capitalist interests, and teachers function merely as labor in this system. Unlike workers who directly produce goods, teachers' role is not limited to production but involves making significant contributions to the formation and development of personality. In other words, teaching is an intellectual and cultural activity that shapes the personalities of both students and teachers, and the outcome of education is not solely the production of labor, but rather the overall development of students' personalities (Pavlidis, 2023).

The inclusion of these theoretical references serves to establish the conceptual foundation for analyzing teachers' declining status through multiple critical lenses. Each theorist was carefully selected to address distinct dimensions of our study: Illich's (1971) deschooling concept reveals institutional constraints on teacher autonomy; Lyotard's (1984) fragmentation theory explains postmodern challenges to professional authority; Bowles and Gintis (1976) demonstrate education's role in economic reproduction; while Fraser's (2009) justice theory connects material conditions to recognition politics. These frameworks collectively enable us to examine how neoliberal reforms operationalize systemic deprofessionalization across economic, cultural and political spheres. The outcomes of this theoretical integration are threefold. First, it provides

historical depth, showing how contemporary issues reflect longstanding structural tensions in education systems. Second, it creates an analytical matrix that reveals intersecting mechanisms of status erosion that would remain invisible through single-theory approaches. Most importantly, this multidimensional framework allows us to develop context-specific policy recommendations that address both material working conditions and symbolic professional capital, moving beyond generic solutions to propose targeted interventions that acknowledge the complex realities of teachers' professional lives in neoliberal education systems.

Teaching, one of the oldest professions, faces global challenges such as low status and internal difficulties, which require urgent attention and potential solutions (Ingersoll & Collins, 2018). This issue extends beyond Turkey, affecting many developing countries worldwide. Teachers frequently report low morale, diminished respect for their profession, limited involvement in decision-making, and being viewed as passive followers rather than active educators (Özoğlu et al., 2013). As the Varkey Gems Foundation (2018) asserts, the quality of education can never exceed the quality of its teachers, emphasizing the urgency of this issue. Therefore, understanding the factors contributing to the low status of teaching and implementing appropriate solutions to restore its value is essential for the future of education. Grounded in educational and sociological literature, this research draws on relevant theoretical frameworks to examine the perceived undervaluation of teachers in society. By integrating academic and broader perspectives, it offers a nuanced analysis of the factors shaping teachers' societal status. Unlike prior work, the analysis extends beyond local contexts, comparing findings with international data through an impartial literature review. Additionally, it investigates understudied issues, including challenges faced by private school and contract teachers, compulsory education policies, teacher selection exams,

recruitment difficulties, and the implications of the Teacher Profession Law (TPL) on professional standing. The study addresses two central questions: How do teachers perceive the status of their profession, and what solutions do they suggest to enhance it? The findings aim to inform future research and contribute to ongoing academic discourse on the teaching profession.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

The study adopts a qualitative approach to evaluate the factors determining the status of teachers in the context of teachers' views the case study design is well-suited for in-depth exploration of complex phenomena within their real-life contexts, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2018). This methodology allows for a comprehensive understanding of the current trend in the status of teachers and the critical role of teachers within the education system. This methodological approach was particularly suited to the research aim of exploring how teachers with postgraduate education navigate the relationship between theoretical knowledge and practical classroom application. By allowing for in-depth, flexible responses, this method facilitated rich data collection aligned with the study's exploratory purpose.

2.2. Data Collection Tool and Data Analysis

In this study, a semi-structured interview form was developed by the researcher considering the research problem and sub-problems, taking into account the literature review and expert opinions. The researcher developed an interview form after a thorough review of theoretical knowledge to collect data relevant to

the research problem. The perspectives of postgraduate-educated teachers were initially gathered through an extensive review of the literature, followed by the incorporation of expert insights. Subsequently, a semi-structured interview form was meticulously developed and administered to participants on a voluntary basis. Prior to data collection, informed written consent was duly obtained from all individuals involved. Notably, the interview form was specifically designed to elicit qualitative data that closely aligned with the overarching research objectives. Accordingly, a comprehensive data analysis framework was established, drawing systematically from both the underlying conceptual framework and the questions embedded within the qualitative data collection instrument. Inductive content analysis, following the criteria set by Lincoln and Guba (1985), was employed to ensure the reliability of data collection, interview analysis, coding, and result evaluation.

Additionally, the methodological rigor was ensured in the manuscript through application of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) trustworthiness framework. Credibility was established via member checking, with five participants reviewing and validating preliminary findings. Transferability was enhanced through thick description of institutional contexts, enabling readers to assess potential applicability to other settings. Dependability was maintained through comprehensive documentation of coding decisions and analytical processes. This multifaceted approach to ensuring research quality supported the generation of nuanced insights while maintaining methodological transparency. The study's design capitalized on participants' dual expertise as both academic researchers and practicing educators, yielding particularly valuable perspectives on the research problem.

2.3. Participants

The research sample comprises 17 teachers who are currently pursuing master's and doctoral degrees in education sciences and are employed in public schools across various socio-economic regions of Turkey. These teachers volunteered to participate in the study, selected for their in-depth understanding of field-related challenges and their capacity to analyze the status of teachers from both academic and practical perspectives. Purposeful sampling, a common approach in qualitative research (Patton, 2002; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013), was employed in the selection process. The study specifically sought teachers with expertise in educational sociology, particularly in areas related to teacher status and policy, and who were actively engaged in graduate-level studies. However, no eligible participants from private schools meeting these criteria were available during the research period.

The sample size of the research is determined through principles of data saturation (Guest et al., 2006). Thematic patterns reached saturation by the 15th interview, with two additional confirmatory interviews conducted to verify emerging findings. This sample size is consistent with established qualitative research standards that prioritize depth over breadth, particularly when examining information-rich cases (Patton, 2002). Participants were purposively selected to maximize variation across teaching levels and specializations, with particular attention to factors influencing teacher status and policy implementation. This sampling strategy ensured representation of diverse perspectives from professionals uniquely situated at the intersection of advanced academic training and public-school teaching.

3. Findings

The findings of this study, which examines the status of the teaching profession, reveal five distinct themes.

3.1. Reasons for Choosing the Teaching Profession

Teaching occupies a paradoxical position in society: while nearly everyone experiences education firsthand, making it one of the most familiar professions, its complexities are often overlooked (Hall & Langton, 2006). Despite ranking among the top ten career preferences for 15-year-olds in PISA surveys, teaching's appeal has steadily declined, from 5.5% of students expressing interest in 2006 to just 4.2% by 2015 (OECD, 2018).

Here are the views of individuals who became teachers thanks to the teachers who entered their lives: "I decided to become a teacher thanks to my teacher" (T1)."… the presence of teachers whom I could take as an example influenced me" (T4). "Meeting and becoming a student of teachers whom I met over time that I was very lucky since middle school' (T10). As seen teachers attributed their reasons for becoming teachers to the admiration and respect they felt for their own teachers. Here are the thoughts of teachers who chose this profession for these reasons:

> In the conditions of that days, concerns about employment, and the pressure of society and family on those who did not pass the university entrance exam had narrowed down my options. Therefore, teaching would relieve me in meeting the expectations of society and my family. For these reasons, I had also included teaching fields among my choices. (T15)

> The graduation from a teacher training high school, relatively better salary and retirement benefits in those years compared to now, job security after appointment, and regular and defined working hours have led me to choose this profession. (T16)

As seen, teachers coded as T15 and T16, expressed that they became teachers due to job security, retirement benefits, flexible working hours, earning income, and economic pressures.

Additionally, teachers participating in the research indicated that their entry into the teaching profession was often involuntary and marked by a lack of prior experience. When asked why they became teachers, their responses included: "Completely coincidental" (T11); "As a result of the exam" (T12); and "The inadequacy of educated examples around me and my lack of knowledge about other professional groups had an effect" (T17). As observed, teachers coded T3 and T11 noted that they entered the profession by chance, while T12 indicated that the results of the exam were sufficient for admission to the education faculty. Teacher T17 expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of serious guidance provided after graduation. This situation suggests that the teachers involved in the research currently experience dissatisfaction with their profession. While this discontent is evident in Turkey, similar sentiments are noted internationally. For instance, a study conducted by the MORI Social Research Company in the UK revealed that one-third of teachers considered leaving the profession within their first five years. Additionally, 33% stated they would not choose to become teachers again, and 56% reported a decline in morale and motivation after starting their teaching careers. Furthermore, 56% attributed their decreased motivation to workload and unnecessary paperwork, while 39% felt overwhelmed by the need to take excessive initiative. Additionally, 35% expressed fatigue from working in a target-driven environment, and 31% cited issues related to student indiscipline (2002).

Motivations for entering the profession vary widely, ranging from idealistic convictions and inspirational role models to pragmatic considerations like job security, flexible hours, or economic constraints. While many teachers report

strong alignment between their personal identity and the profession (scoring 3.94/5 on idealism), others describe their entry as involuntary or ill-prepared, leading to early dissatisfaction. This pattern extends beyond Turkey; in the UK, a third of teachers contemplated leaving within five years, citing overwhelming workloads, bureaucratic demands, and waning motivation (MORI Social Research Company, 2002). Cross-national PISA data further reveal that fewer than 2% of students in countries like Austria, Estonia, and Italy aspire to teach, a trend linked to perceptions of teaching as low-prestige caregiving rather than a dynamic profession (Fwu & Wang, 2002). These converging trends underscore the urgent need to examine the systemic and cultural factors eroding teaching's status and viability as a career choice. So, teacher education programs should cultivate hope through strategies that strengthen agency (self-efficacy) and pathways (problem-solving skills), ultimately improving retention and motivation in the field (Eren, 2014).

3.2. Comparing the Other Occupations with the Professional Status of Teachers

3.2.1. A Profession with Lower Prestige: Teachers in this research overwhelmingly perceive the teaching profession as discredited and stripped of respect, with some describing it as *worthless* or at *rock bottom*. This sentiment reflects a broader belief among educators that the profession's societal value has deteriorated, with many arguing that other public sector roles command greater esteem. However, empirical studies present a more nuanced picture. Davis and Smith (1996) note that in Turkey, teaching occupies a mid-tier status, below professions like medicine, law, and engineering but above roles such as policing or clerical work. Similarly, the Varkey Gems Foundation (2018) ranks teachers below doctors and lawyers yet still within a respected professional tier. Akyüz (2012) attributes teachers' perceived low status in Turkey primarily to economic

constraints, a concern echoed by participants in this study, who also cite weak collective advocacy and insufficient legal protections as key contributors to the profession's declining prestige.

3.2.2. A Profession with Higher Respect: Although most teachers in the study lament the profession's declining status, a minority adopt a more measured stance, cautioning against sweeping comparisons with other fields and highlighting certain favorable aspects. While these perceptions reflect Turkey's specific context, global trends paint a divergent picture. In Taiwan, for instance, teaching commands exceptional prestige and job satisfaction, a distinction rooted in cultural, historical, and policy-driven support for educators. State-backed initiatives have solidified teachers' societal standing, with international rankings placing Taiwanese teachers 9th and 10th among 26 professions, significantly higher than the global averages of 15th and 17th. Consequently, over 80% report high professional satisfaction and well-being (Fwu & Wang, 2002), underscoring how structural and cultural frameworks can elevate the profession's status.

Building on the Taiwanese case, Hill's (2006) comprehensive Marxist analysis reveals how neoliberal education reforms, particularly liberalization, privatization, and marketization, have produced remarkably consistent patterns of teacher proletarianization and professional devaluation across diverse national contexts. The United States exemplifies this trend through voucher systems, charter schools, and creeping commercialism that collectively undermine public education while increasing teacher attrition rates and deteriorating working conditions. Parallel developments emerge in England and Wales, where privatization schemes and the casualization of teaching labor have diminished union power, depressed wages, and intensified workloads. Similarly, Pakistan's expanding private education sector has exacerbated social inequalities

through the systematic underpayment of teachers and exclusion of impoverished students. Latin American nations demonstrate comparable patterns, with privatization disproportionately benefiting wealthier students and weakening teachers' collective bargaining power. A phenomenon particularly evident in Chile's voucher system, which has exacerbated educational stratification without corresponding improvements in learning outcomes. Even in comparatively egalitarian contexts like Canada and Norway, reforms have led to workload intensification and the erosion of centralized labor protections, while South Africa's fee-based system has institutionalized educational inequality. Crucially, Hill (2006) demonstrates that these geographically disparate manifestations of teacher deprofessionalization and deteriorating working conditions reflect not isolated policy failures, but rather a coordinated global capitalist project that subordinates educational quality to profit motives. This systemic analysis underscores the urgent need for coordinated resistance through teacher unionization and policy interventions aimed at reclaiming education as an equitable public good rather than a market commodity.

3.3. The Role of Economic Conditions in Determining Social Status

Teacher salaries are a key issue in discussions about the profession's status. Due to variations in income based on factors such as education, school type, and years of service, it is difficult to establish a uniform standard (Ingersoll & Collins, 2018). Many teachers lament their low wages, believing that these inadequate salaries contribute to the diminished respect for the profession. This issue can be critically examined through a Marxist lens, which emphasises the economic dimensions of teachers' status and situates it within the broader role of education in social reproduction. In Schooling in Capitalist America (1976), Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis argue that the education system in capitalist societies perpetuates social inequalities by producing individuals who fit the

needs of the labor market, teaching values such as discipline, obedience, and work ethic (Labaree, 1989). In this context, teachers are seen as low-level agents within the system, transmitting these values without having a direct influence on societal production. Bowles and Gintis's Correspondence Principle and theory of Economic Devaluation suggest that the low status of teachers is linked to their role as both workers and *cogs in the machine*, contributing to their marginalization in society.

The teachers participating in this research predominantly voiced dissatisfaction regarding the economic circumstances of their profession, articulating their concerns with statements such as: "Teachers who spend an average of 20 years trying to enter the classroom and have to navigate stages that some find absurd should also have their financial situations truly rectified" (T2). Another teacher stated, "The biggest problems related to status are the low salaries of teachers and the unequal pay for those performing the same job at the same school; it is unjust to offer different salaries" (T8). As observed, teachers identified by codes T2 and T8, lament the low salaries of educators and attribute the diminished status of teaching to these inadequate wages. A particularly noteworthy point is made by the teacher coded T13, who indicates that teachers in private schools receive less respect from both parents and students, further illustrating the complexities surrounding the perceived value of the teaching profession.

> Teachers' salaries should be increased. There should be a significant increase without forgetting that every profession is nurtured by teachers. Unfortunately, the low status of teachers is strongly felt by teachers working in private institutions. Families and students here, unfortunately, do not respect teachers. (T13)

Teachers in the study directly connected their professional dissatisfaction to both financial compensation and perceived social standing, viewing these factors as critical determinants of motivation and as disruptors of social equity.

This disparity is particularly pronounced in private institutions, where educators frequently receive lower wages and inadequate retirement benefits compared to their public sector counterparts, despite serving more affluent student populations. Such conditions have reignited debates about the appropriateness of corporate management in education, challenging the notion that schools and universities should operate as profit-driven enterprises (Hill, 2022).

All teachers in the research agree that adequate economic support is essential for maintaining a respected position in society. These concerns align with Fraser's *theory of justice*, which emphasizes the need to address both economic and identity-based justice (Fraser, 1998, 2009). While Fraser's theory primarily addresses the socio-economic challenges faced by ethnic minorities, it provides valuable insights into social justice. One of her key critiques is the increasing focus on identity-based justice without integrating it with economic justice. In the teaching profession, while teaching is often viewed as a revered vocation, the unequal distribution of material resources underscores the failure to achieve true social justice.

3.4. The Major Issues in the Teaching Profession

3.4.1. Issues Arising from Legislative and Regulatory Frameworks

Teachers in the study expressed concerns about the instability and bureaucratic interpretations that hinder sustainability and continuity in education. They believe that political dynamics and policymakers' actions are the primary causes of these problems.

In reference to this matter, the teacher coded T12 remarked, "There should be a concept of free education. There is too much instability in the education system, and attention should be paid to bureaucratic interpretations that affect our credibility" (T12). This educator highlighted concerns regarding sustainability

and continuity within the education system, asserting that the primary causes of these problems are political dynamics and the actions of policymakers Teachers have raised critical concerns regarding regulations, rights, and legal matters, emphasizing the need for enhanced teachers' rights, better professional development, and solutions to classroom challenges. They also point to the burden of excessive regulations, lack of protective law, reduced creative autonomy, and insufficient social benefits.

The impact of these political forces and the critique of legal frameworks can be understood through Ivan Illich's (1971) theory of the *descholing society*. Illich argues that legal regulations within the school system narrowly define teachers' roles, concentrating power in the hands of administrators, bureaucratic structures, and the state. Illich (1973) stresses how such constraints limit teachers' ability to educate creatively and freely, advocating for the removal of this control. If teachers become mere bureaucratic tools of the state, issues like low wages and declining respect for the profession are likely to be further exacerbated. These issues also resonate with Paulo Freire's critique in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), where he argues that the *banking education model* stifles teachers' creativity and critical thinking, reducing them to mere transmitters of standardized knowledge and undermining their status. In response, the *Teacher Profession Law*, implemented in 2022 in Turkey, aims to elevate teaching by improving teachers' economic and professional standing (İş and Birel, 2022). The law introduces titles such as *expert teacher* and *head teacher* based on factors like seniority, education, and exam results, offering improvements in salaries and status. However, this law has been widely criticized by teachers and the public.

Teachers' views on the *Teacher Profession Law*, which perhaps most significantly influences and determines their status, and which is being

attempted to be implemented in Turkey. All the teachers participating in the research either criticize the teacher professional law or make suggestions regarding the law. According to them, it is necessary to consider the opinions of teachers in preparing this law (T1, T5, T14), this law will demotivate a newly appointed teacher (T12), the titles of expert teacher and head teacher given by this law do not affect student success (T6), the titles of teachers should be equal, and the updated law should be protective of teachers (T13), the law should support professional development and the measurement system should be updated again (T14), the titles of expert teacher and head teacher should be given to teachers based on their seniority (T15), and they believe that the intended law is prepared as a mere formality (T16). In this frame, teachers argue that their views should have been incorporated in the law's creation and advocate for equal titles, more protection, support for professional development, and an updated measurement system. They also believe the law's current structure is a mere formality. This criticism aligns with Hannah Arendt's view in *Between Past and Future* (1961), where she asserts that education should remain independent of politics and warns that increasing bureaucracy in education reduces teachers' prestige and roles.

Teacher Selection Exam Issue: Teachers have identified systemic flaws in the national examination process for educator selection, particularly criticizing the reliance on university entrance exams as inadequate for a profession of such societal importance.

Teacher T15 has drawn attention to the national exams conducted for teacher selections in the education system:

> The most significant problem in the teaching profession begins with university entrance exams. A more selective approach is necessary in the selection of a profession that will play a critical role in shaping society. Completing the university process and passing

> the KPSS exam (Exam for being a civil servant) are prerequisites for becoming a teacher. However, along with professional competence, psychological health should also be a criterion in the selection process. Another problem that arises is the quality of the teacher training process. Therefore, establishing a comprehensive teacher training program and implementing competency frameworks will be an important step. (T15)

The teacher with the code T15 believes that the exams taken by prospective teachers after university are not sufficient for selecting teachers, particularly in assessing individuals' psychological well-being.

While current requirements mandate university completion and success on civil service exams, these measures fail to evaluate two critical dimensions: psychological readiness and comprehensive pedagogical training. Educators emphasize that the existing assessments overlook mental well-being as a core professional competency, while also highlighting deficiencies in teacher preparation programs. They argue for more rigorous, holistic evaluation criteria that address both professional capabilities and psychological fitness for the demands of teaching.

Compulsory Education and Discipline Issues: Educational challenges primarily originate from systemic deficiencies in policy design and implementation (Henshall et al., 2023).

Problems originating from students are fundamentally rooted in the functioning and implementation of the education system. In this section, the views of teachers coded T2 and T13, who address issues related to students and the problems created by compulsory education, are discussed.

> First and foremost, schools should be removed from the status of daycare centers and effectively designated as educational institutions so that teachers can feel like educators. In this regard, those who are not engaged in learning should be prevented from being present at school, and individuals who exceed the boundaries of studenthood should be immediately removed from the school premises, with teachers

having a say in this matter. Education should be perceived as a societal necessity, and this mandate should be substantiated; compulsory education should not be superficial but genuinely obligatory. (T2)

Serious planning should be undertaken, and individuals should be educated accordingly. Vocational high schools should be improved, and students who fail a certain year should not be compelled to continue schooling; after a certain period, schooling should not be obligatory. Unfortunately, in this regard, we also question our teachers, as to how illiterate students manage to progress to high school, but we must not overlook the pressure on our teachers in this matter. (T13)

T2 coded teacher highlighted that discipline issues caused by students have turned schools into daycare centers, yet teachers lack the authority to intervene. This teacher believes that the loss of the teacher status can be resolved by removing such students from schools. On the other hand, T13 coded teacher expressed dissatisfaction with compulsory education, pointing out that the obligation for some students to attend school results in teachers having to deal with illiterate students in later stages. This teacher emphasized that it is unfair to label teachers dealing with such students as unsuccessful and underscored the need for planning in this regard. On the other hand, teachers with T9 and T15 codes expressed concerns about the increasing desire for freedom among students today, indicating that a group of students is growing up who follow everything their parents say and lack a sense of responsibility. They stated:

Regulations should be enacted that assign responsibility to students and make them accountable for their mistakes. (T9)

The disciplinary processes are inadequate for students who are handed everything on a silver platter, such as freedom in dress code and free distribution of course materials. While we constantly try to win over these students, unfortunately, it leads to losing other students. Teachers have been stripped of all authority. Even when we change classrooms, we face complaints. (T13)

First and foremost, the principle of student testimony being the basis should be abolished. When accusations against teachers are proven to be false, severe penalties should be imposed. (T15)

As observed, teachers complain about the lack of students' sense of responsibility and insufficient sanctions for students (T9, T13). Teachers also lament that the increase in opportunities provided to students has negative consequences, leading to the neglect of teachers' rights and students being more powerful than teachers in the eyes of the law (T13, T15).

Teachers argue that compulsory education requires redefinition, shifting schools from functioning as childcare facilities to institutions prioritizing academic rigor. This transformation necessitates removing disengaged students and those no longer meeting enrollment criteria to allow educators to focus on their core mission. Vocational education also demands reform, particularly regarding automatic grade progression, which forces underperforming students through the system without adequate mastery. Concurrently, educators observe troubling behavioral trends, including excessive student entitlement, diminished accountability, and overreliance on parental influence. Such dynamics are exacerbated by an imbalance of power, where expanding student privileges, particularly in legal contexts, erodes teacher authority. Additionally, participants emphasise the urgent need for comprehensive anti-violence measures addressing both physical and psychological harm. The current failure to ensure school safety or hold perpetrators accountable creates unsustainable working conditions, further undermining the education system's effectiveness.

Employment Issue: A critical issue in education requiring legislative attention is the difficulty in appointing teachers due to the excessive number of universities, particularly faculties of education. Teachers argue that quotas should be implemented in universities, limiting enrollment in education faculties, as the disproportionate number of graduates to available positions creates significant challenges. They believe the expansion of education faculties undermines

teacher quality, and teacher appointments should align with the number of graduates.

3.4.2. Problems Arising from Managers and Teachers

Teachers in the study attribute the low status of the profession to school and institution administrators. They highlight administrative incompetence, bullying, excessive paperwork, discrimination, and restrictions on extracurricular activities. Teachers expect administrators to show empathy and provide support, yet administrators, feeling empowered to evaluate and direct teachers, may exert undue pressure on them (Ingersoll & Collins, 2018; Oldfield & Ainsworth, 2021). Additionally, teachers often criticised their colleagues, suggesting that some have failed to develop pedagogically, are disconnected from teaching values, and lack the necessary personality traits for the profession.

3.4.3. Problems Arising from Society's Perspective

Teachers in the study highlight a negative societal perception and media portrayal of the teaching profession, which contributes to its declining status. Teachers participating in this study contend that such perceptions contribute to a decline in the professional status of teachers, exacerbated by the widespread assumption that the public understands the profession better than practitioners themselves. This phenomenon, coupled with unsolicited societal critiques, further erodes respect for the teaching profession (T8). Additionally, respondents highlight the need to mitigate negative portrayals of teachers in the media (T14), arguing that diminishing respect discourages highly qualified individuals from pursuing teaching careers (T16). Consequently, they stress the importance of implementing a rigorous selection system to ensure the recruitment of competent and dedicated educators (T15).

Teachers argue that society often believes it understands the profession better than those who practice it, and the resulting suggestions undermine respect for teachers. Teachers also call for restrictions on negative views and labeling in the media. These neoliberal policies play a significant role in shaping the negative perception of the teaching profession in the media, reinforcing this image by presenting it as a field devoid of value and benefit, where individuals who fail in other professions end up (Dotta et al., 2025).

This influence is supported by Howard S. Becker's Labeling Theory (1963), which asserts that labeling individuals as ineffective or unsuccessful harms their professional motivation and status. Media portrayals of failing schools reinforce negative stereotypes, diminishing teachers' respect, particularly in underperforming schools (Bernburg, 2009). As a result, teaching is increasingly seen as an easy or failure-prone career. The inability of teachers to meet modern societal needs, exacerbated by media influence, aligns with Jean-François Lyotard's argument in *The Postmodern Condition* (1984). Lyotard posits that the shift from universal principles to relativism and individual perspectives in the postmodern era has eroded teachers' authority, weakening their status. Furthermore, Ivan Illich's *Deschooling Society* (1973) contends that societal misperceptions of educational institutions have led to teachers being viewed as oppressive figures, further diminishing their status (Panizzon, 2013).

At a global level, where neoliberalism has taken hold of education, we have witnessed an increase in the precarity of the academic workforce, the rise of proletarianization, growing inequalities in salaries and working conditions within the education sector, cuts to school budgets, the introduction of performance-based pay, and a decline in teachers' autonomy over curriculum and pedagogy. This has been accompanied by escalating workloads, rising stress levels, stricter disciplinary regulations, and a notable erosion of teachers' democratic rights (Hill, 2022).

3.5. Recommendations of Participating Teachers in the Study

Teachers participating in the research propose several key recommendations to improve the education system: aligning teacher recruitment with graduate numbers to ensure balanced employment opportunities; incorporating psychological evaluations in hiring processes; implementing fair recognition and reward systems while avoiding disproportionate blame on educators; revising the Teaching Profession Law to establish transparent, performance-based career progression; increasing salaries and upgrading school facilities to enhance working conditions; supporting ongoing professional development; and selecting school administrators through merit-based processes with strong anti-bullying protections, all aimed at creating a more stable, supportive, and effective educational environment

4. Conclusion and Discussion

This study examined the social and economic status of teachers, systemic challenges in education, and measures to enhance the profession's prestige. Findings indicate that, except in some Southeast Asian countries, teaching suffers from low societal standing, a perception shared by both participants and international research (UNESCO, 2024). Teacher dissatisfaction stems from inadequate salaries, precarious working conditions, and limited career progression, factors that deter talented candidates and undermine educational quality (Özoğlu et al., 2013; Symeonidis, 2015; Ingersoll & Collins, 2018).

Participants' views on professional status were predominantly negative, with only two of seventeen teachers rating it favorably. This aligns with global trends where teaching is often perceived as stagnant rather than aspirational (Hall & Langton, 2006; Gök & Okçabol, 1998). Dissatisfaction is exacerbated by heavy

workloads, contract instability, and insufficient compensation, key drivers of attrition (Symeonidis, 2015; Meirkulova, 1921). Structural issues further compound these challenges, including flaws in the Teaching Profession Law (TPL), which neglects teacher input and fails to link specialist titles to student outcomes. Additionally, compulsory high school education forces teachers into disciplinary roles, while oversaturated education faculties exacerbate unemployment among graduates (Bourdon et al., 2007; Freire, 1970). These systemic problems reflect a broader deprofessionalization trend, echoing critiques by Illich (1971) and Labaree (1989) about standardized education's reductive impact on teaching.

Economic disparities further diminish the profession's status. No participant rated their income as 'good', corroborating studies linking low teacher salaries to reduced societal respect (Çiftçi & Özcan, 2014; Varkey Gems Foundation, 2018). Teachers earn significantly less than peers in other professions, reinforcing the Correspondence Principle's assertion that education perpetuates labor market inequalities (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Fraser, 2009). Nancy Fraser's (1998) critique of identity politics underscores the need to address economic inequities to achieve social justice for teachers. However, while higher salaries are demanded, research suggests financial investment alone does not guarantee better outcomes (Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Schleicher, 2018; Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Effective resource allocation, rather than sheer expenditure, is critical.

According to findings of this research, it is seen that the negative media portrayals and policy neglect further erode teacher prestige. Studies reveal that teachers feel undervalued by governments and misrepresented as underworked and overpaid (MORI, 2002; Lyotard, 1984). Such stereotypes align with Becker's (1963) labeling theory (Bernburg, 2009), which highlights how negative stereotypes shape professional identity. Declining authority is

exacerbated by rising classroom violence and administrative burdens (Ünsal, 2018; Hall & Langton, 2006; Fwu & Wang, 2002), reflecting a broader collapse of traditional respect for educators in postmodern society (McLaren, 2003).

Despite these challenges, teaching remains a vital profession. Yet, 88% of participants viewed it as low-prestige, citing weak legal protections, poor leadership, and societal ignorance (MORI, 2002; Hill, 2009). Global comparisons reveal stark contrasts: while Turkey ranks moderately in teacher respect (Varkey Foundation, 2018), neoliberal policies have commodified education, reducing teachers to a "proletariat of the professions" (Mills, 1951; Apple, 2001). Standardization and high-stakes testing have further eroded autonomy, transforming pedagogy into rote instruction (Braverman, 1974; Pavlidis, 2023).

This analysis has demonstrated how neoliberal education reforms across global contexts systematically facilitate the proletarianization of teachers, eroding their professional autonomy and reducing them to deskilled laborers under capitalist control (Pavlidis, 2023; Hill, 2005). As evidenced in diverse settings, from the privatization-driven attrition in the U.S. and U.K. to the fee-based stratification in South Africa and Pakistan, market-oriented policies degrade teachers' status through casualization, performance metrics, and union suppression, aligning education with capitalist accumulation rather than democratic ideals (Hill, 2006). A Marxist lens reveals these trends as structural features of capitalist exploitation, where education functions as an ideological apparatus reproducing class inequality while masking oppression under meritocratic narratives (Aksakallı, 2025). The collective findings underscore the urgency of resisting these reforms through emancipatory pedagogies and labor solidarity to reclaim education as a public good and site of critical praxis (Hill, 2006; Pavlidis, 2023).

To counter this decline, policymakers must prioritize sustainable reforms, addressing economic inequities, enhancing professional autonomy, and fostering societal respect. Strengthening teacher motivation is essential for democratic and socio-economic progress (Ross & Gibson, 2007; Eren, 2014), while integrating hope-building strategies in training can improve retention. Without systemic change, the profession's status and educational quality will continue to falter.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Acknowledgments

There are no individuals or institutions that have contributed to the article.

Ethical Committee Approval

This study received ethical approval from the Ankara University Ethics Committee (Decision No: 265, Date: 04.10.2024).

Financial Support

No financial support was received for the conduct of this study.

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