

THE EDUCATION REFORM: A TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Teachers are the stalwart of the education system and the most significant factor affecting its success and achievements, and their commitment to the social, moral and academic education of students is therefore a prerequisite to the success of the education system as a whole. Unfortunately, teachers' professional status has declined over the years; the system and its teachers yearn for reforms as a means of adapting the system to the twenty-first century. This research examined teachers' attitudes towards the reforms, a decade after their introduction. Its goal is to discover whether the latest reforms in Israel achieved their goals and improved teachers' status? This was explored from the teachers' perspective – professional status, their perceptions of self as teachers. A New Zealand study on teachers' status notes three primary components: power, money, and fame. Teachers are considered to be of low status, despite the existence of the secondary factors in the professional aspect. They are professionally trained, skilled, and significantly impact the future of society. Nevertheless, none of these factors independently lead to a high professional status. We surveyed 359 middle and high school teachers in Israel and performed a stepwise regression analysis which revealed the presence of three explaining variables. Teacher status can thus be explained through salary, improved image, and empowerment [$F(3,296)=61.85$, $P<0.05$]. Predicting variables explained 67.8% of teacher status variance, with the most significant variable explaining teacher status variance being salary – 52.1%.

KEYWORDS: *education reform, salary teacher, status.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The media likes to point a finger at teachers when it comes to all the shortcomings of the youth of the world, from hygiene through discourse to driving habits of the young. Teachers are, more often than not, the scapegoat of parents and students, expected by the media to pursue moral values, even when budget is scarce and no reward is offered in return.

Parents, former students themselves, feel privileged to criticize the knowledge and skills of the teacher, spouting statements such as "what do they know," "no one chooses to study teaching," or "you have so many days off." They allow themselves to criticize the teacher's professional knowledge, expecting them to act as nothing more than a babysitter. This attitude peaked during the Covid-19 lockdowns: the economy came to a standstill, and the media was filled with campaigns led by stakeholders wishing to solve their personal problems – even at the expense of the health of teachers and adults who are more susceptible to contracting the virus from their students. Politicians were quick to appease the parents, regardless of teachers' needs and wellbeing.

In Israel as in the rest of the world, economic, social and technological advances undermined the position of the teacher as a source of knowledge and authority, hindering their capacity to compete with other, more attractive and financially rewarding professions. Teacher status has deteriorated

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over the years, and the education system finds itself a pawn in countless reforms. Two of the latest educational reforms were implemented in Israel – Ofek Hadash ("New Horizon") was implemented in grades 1-9, and Oz Latmura ("Power of Change") in grades 10-12. Each was officially advertised as a scheme to improve teachers' status and salaries and reshape the profession by adding individual tutoring hours to frontal teaching, upgrading students' and teachers' work environment, and expanding professional training tailored to the needs of the teacher and the school. But while the intentions were constructive, the results were tragic. The two reforms neglected the dynamic needs of teachers that result from the restructured workday, neglecting the teacher as an individual. Teachers were left without proper workstations, never mind an office. Everyone must share a teachers' lounge used for everything from lesson planning to socializing over short breaks.

The official goals of these reforms is to improve students' academic achievements and help them better incorporate into society. Three factors can be attributed to the creation of the reforms: global political and economic shifts that pressure the system to adapt; a desire to reestablish a former reality of stability; and crises that pressure the political system to 'heal the education system' but eventually suppress the reform in order to avoid expenses Gaziel (2007). It was Robinson (2011) who said, "Reform is no use anymore, because that's simply improving a broken model. What we need [...] is not evolution, but a revolution in education." A reform, said internationally renowned Professor of educational efficiency Eric Hanushek, is unnecessary; what the world needs is outstanding teachers and the reinforcing of the school as a hub for decision making. This can be achieved by attracting quality people to the education system and maintaining them with benefits such as pay raise, alongside increased autonomy for the schools Zuriel-Harari & Ben David (2011). The reform train in Israel has left the station, with the teacher as the caboose. The root of the problem remains untreated due to budgetary demands, hinting that perhaps the unofficial purpose of these latest reforms is to provide parents with nothing much more than a babysitter: when comparing a teacher's work week with that of the general labor market, particularly the public sector, one finds a differently structured week requiring more physical presence at school. This offsets all reason and the universal trend of remote work, which was common in many countries including Israel even before the Coronavirus outbreak OECD (2020).

But it wasn't just the work week that had changed. Wages agreements suffered a blow as well: although monthly salary did increase, hourly wages were in fact decreased. Like in every other field and organization, stability is a stalwart for employees who, naturally, fear change and the unknown, preferring to remain in a static-yet-familiar place. The reforms were therefore perceived by teachers as threatening, and their objections were partially derived from a fear of the new and unknown, a lack of proper reward, or failed attempts Fullan (2007).

This begs the question: Why would any person in their right mind choose to be a teacher? Research has shown that there are two main categories of factors that attract people to the profession. The first pertains to external factors of benefits that go beyond teaching: material reward, salary, work conditions, welfare, social rewards (public recognition), autonomy and professional leeway, the school environment and the occupational security of the job. The second pertains to internal factors, the essence of teaching which includes the desire to work with youth, to give back, share knowledge and experience, the opportunity to communicate with the younger generation, shape and impact their future as a role model, and fulfill a national-social mission. Anthony, G. & Ord, K. (2008)

Israel is home to some of the best academic institutions in the world, boasting enviable average years of education per capita and one of the highest rates of academically-certified persons OECD (2017). Conversely, school-age student achievements in standardized tests are considerably low, by international standards. The outcome can be seen in the labor market as well. On the one hand, Israel is among the most advanced nations in the world, a hi-tech hub. On the other hand, many Israelis lack the skills to compete in the modern labor market. Labor productivity in Israel is comparatively lower than most developing countries, continuously slipping in comparison to G7 countries Hazan & Tsur (2017). Hanushek and Woessmann (2015) found a weak positive

correlation between average years of education per capita and annual national growth rates; conversely, they found a strong positive correlation between quality of education as measured by achievements in international standardized tests in mathematics, science and reading comprehension, and the rate of economic growth. Due to differing qualities in teaching, one year's worth of education in one country does not necessarily equal to that of another. Woessmann (2016) claims that there school systems significantly affect the differences between student achievements among OECD countries. Ben David adds that the inequality of income and poverty rates in Israel are among the highest in the world. The combination of these two factors – low work productivity and high poverty rates – makes Israel a classic case demonstrating the importance of quality over quantity in education (Ben David, 2015).

Gruber names three key factors as the contributing factors for academic achievements: the student's cultural and homelife background and to what extent their parents can help them with their school work; extracurricular activities; and the academic experience within the education system. For the first two factors, Israeli students appear to have an advantage over their international counterparts. Their parents are educated, aware of the importance of education and are willing to put both money and time into providing students with extracurricular support. The problem lies in the academic experience within the education system, attributed to severely low discipline compared to other developed countries, in addition to overpopulated classrooms that affect the quality of teaching, and the relative failure to attract high-quality workers to the teaching profession. Improving the quality of the education system is therefore crucial for driving socioeconomic change. This goal can be achieved by striving to boost teacher status and reducing the number of students per classroom, thereby improving discipline and attracting higher quality teachers Gruber (2017).

Hoyle (2001) maintains that the teacher's position is comprised of two perspectives: external – how the teacher is perceived by society, i.e., the profession's prestige in the occupational hierarchy; and internal – how the teacher perceives themselves – the professional status, as rated by the teachers. This attitude was adopted by Hargreaves (2007), who points to the three dimensions of professional status: Professional prestige – how the public perceives the profession and rates it in comparison to other professions; occupational status – how educated populations rate different professions such as public workers, politicians, social studies researchers, educators and teachers; and occupational esteem – the public's regard of the profession by virtue of qualities such as skills and dedication. Another study on teachers' status, conducted in New Zealand, notes three primary components: power, money, and fame. Secondary influence is attributed to the extent of professional training and required expertise, and the degree of impact their career has on the lives of others. These secondary factors are not independent; rather, they are examined according to their impact on the primary components. Teachers are considered to be of low status, despite the existence of the secondary factors in the professional aspect. They are professionally trained, skilled, and significantly impact the future of society. Nevertheless, none of these factors independently lead to a high professional status, because they do not bring about power, money or fame Hall & Langton (2006). Teachers in Israel have a low status, despite the existence of the aforementioned secondary influences in their occupational framework – they acquired professional training, they are skilled, and they have a significant impact on the future of society. Yet none of these components, in itself, creates a high status because they do not pave the way to power, money or fame. A study by Gerritsen & Plug (2017) found that teachers' experience affects student achievements in the short and long term, with the greatest impact taking place in lower grades.

Researchers are divided as to the significance and centrality of salary over other components such as work conditions, public perception, degree of teacher influence and contribution, and the public's perception of the occupation's prestige compared to other occupations. The latter is affected by numerous factors including professional prerequisites, education and skills, the financial resources allotted to the industry, salary and work conditions, benefits affiliated with the occupation, degree

of social impact, independence and involvement in decision making, and the public's opinion of the occupation's significance Ben-Peretz (2009).

Compared to other professions on an international scale, salary is considered a major gauge for teacher status evaluation, seeing as there is a distinct correlation between employee salary and output. Thus, if an employer wishes to attract more high quality applicants and improve the output of existing employees, they must be prepared to pay a higher fee; to that end, an employee who wishes to receive a higher salary should improve their output. Hall & Langton (2006) also note the three prerequisites – power, money, and fame – through which the profession is gauged, opining that no other component could result in a high professional status.

The majority of education employees in Israel are affiliated with the official government education system. Their salaries should therefore be compared to that of equally academically educated employees of similar training in public service. According to the MACHAR rating relying on data from the Ministry of Finance, average monthly salary for full-time educators in 2018 was 12,846 ILS, while average monthly salary for MACHAR employees in 2018 was 15,642 ILS Ministry of Finance, (2020). Even after the reforms supposedly increased teacher salaries, it is still 18% lower, on average, than that of MACHAR employees. In this neoliberal age, where professional status is determined in part by the height of one's salary, low pay may be one reason for the belittlement of the teaching profession.

The literature reveals that improved student performance in international tests would increase work productivity and expand the skills required by the modern labor market. Classroom size should be reduced and the teacher's status improves. Teacher status is a relative term, and must therefore be compared to the social status of other professionals. To that end, one must examine teachers' perceptions of self and how they are perceived by others. The following parameters may link between personal resources, social contribution and social rewards. Professional prerequisites such as professional training acquired and owned by the teacher, or shortage of specialized teachers; allocated technologies and finances; work conditions and affiliated benefits: The better these are, the more prestigious the profession becomes. The teachers' target audience can also affect their professional status: matriculation exams carry great significance to students and their parents, consequently driving up the appreciation their teachers receive compared to their colleagues in lower grades. The contribution of teachers and the teaching profession manifests in the success of the system: students' achievements and the system's ability to prepare its graduates to the labor market and general society. Failure in local or international exams is therefore seen as offensive to the system's societal contribution and to teacher status. Lastly, imbalanced public opinion is also an influencing parameter. The public acknowledges the significance of teaching as an occupation, but this acknowledgement does not translate to work conditions and benefits.

2. STUDY RATIONALE

Often After a decade of reforms designed in part to improve teachers' status, mend the issue of low scores in international tests and repair the unbalance among students in Israel, it can be safely said that improving the quality of the education system is a key tool for driving change. This would require emphasizing attention and discipline education, in part by reducing class sizes, consequently attracting more quality teachers to the field Gruber (2017). In reality, classroom sizes are not getting any smaller. Such a change would require plenty of time and finances, such that would not be allocated even during the height of Covid, when smaller classrooms would have had significant health ramifications. In order to isolate the aforementioned variables and because teachers are those who eventually carry the burden of teaching, teachers' presence as active drivers of change is a crucial condition for driving the correct, radical change throughout the education system Slant (2011).

Which brings us to the burning question: In the wake of ten years, what are teachers' stances on the Israeli education reforms?

3. RESEARCH QUESTION

The study aspires to find out whether the latest reforms in the Israeli education system their goals and improved teachers' status? This questioned was explored from the teachers' perspective – i.e., how teachers rate their profession – and from the non-teaching public, i.e., the occupation's prestige in the professional hierarchy Hoyle (1969; 2001). In their comprehensive study on the perceptions of teachers' status in New Zealand, Hall & Langton (2006) noted three primary components of influence: power, money, and fame. Secondary influence is attributed to the extent of professional training and required expertise, the degree of impact their career has on the lives of others, discipline, smaller classrooms and more. These secondary factors are not independent; rather, they are examined according to their impact on the primary components. Despite the existence of at least some of the secondary factors in the professional aspect – teachers are professionally trained, skilled, and significantly impact the future of society – they are still considered to be of low status, even after the reforms.

4. RESEARCH MODEL

The literature reveals that the following factors could improve teachers' status; these will be used as our indicators for exploring the research question:

- a. **Improved training process** – Extended training for pre-service teachers and professional training seminars for acting teachers.
- b. **Teacher empowerment** – Involve teachers in decision making; delegate authority; form teaching teams; change the hierarchic organizational structure.
- c. **Teacher promotion.**
- d. **Improved pay grade** – teachers' low salary is perceived as a key factor in their low standing. It is recommended to associate financial compensation with student achievement and performance.
- e. **Improved physical work conditions.**
- f. **Media perception** – how teachers are portrayed by the media.

The study hypotheses are: H1- H6

1. There will be a positive correlation between improved training processes and teachers' perception of their status.
2. There will be a positive correlation between teacher empowerment and teachers' perception of their status.
3. There will be a positive correlation between teacher promotion and teachers' perception of their status.
4. There will be a positive correlation between improved pay grade and teachers' perception of their status.
5. There will be a positive correlation between improved physical work conditions and teachers' perception of their status.
6. There will be a positive correlation between teachers' media image and teachers' perception of their status.

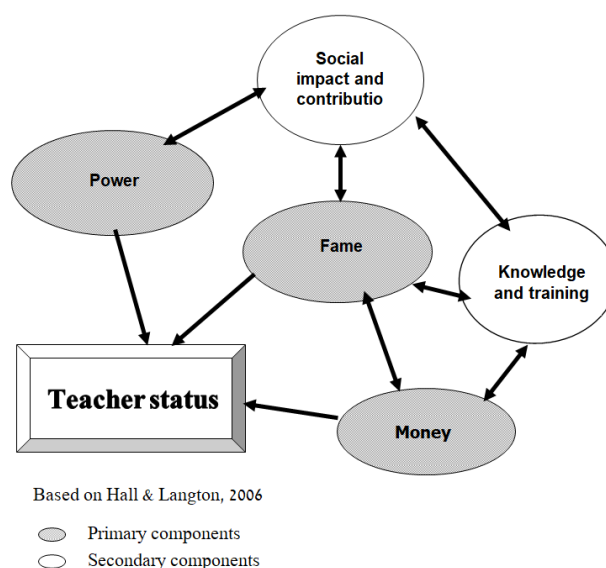


Figure 1. Research model

5. RESEARCH POPULATION AND METHOD

We used a convenience sample comprised of all teachers who consented to participate in the study. This may create some bias in the results, we performed a Shapiro-Wilk test for normalcy, from the test it was obtained that the sample reflects the whole population. The study involved 359 teachers from 26 different schools participated in the study: 27% male and 73% female. Of the 359 participants, 39.9% are high school teachers, while 60.7% teach in middle and elementary schools. Average years of employment – 17.4, $SD=8.7$. 40.7% of the sampled participants are specialized teachers, 33.9% homeroom teachers, 3.4% specialized grade coordinators, 5.1% vice principals, and 1.7% school principals. Participants were asked to fill in a 61-item questionnaire designed to reveal their level of work satisfaction, motivation and its drivers. In addition to demographic details, participants were asked about their attitude towards the school attributes, their feelings towards their current occupation, and their perception of teacher/teacher and teacher/management relations. Questionnaire consistency and reliability $\alpha=0.83$. Statements were divided into 6 categories measuring teachers' perceptions of their improved status following the reforms.

6. FINDINGS

H1 A positive correlation will be found between improved training processes and teachers' perception of their status. **Rejected.**

A weak, significant negative correlation was found between improved training processes and teachers' perception of their status ($r_p = -0.174$, $p < 0.05$). The findings indicate that there is a converse relationship between improved training processes and teachers' perception of their status: the more training and seminars teachers are required to participate in, the more inferior they feel.

H2 A positive correlation will be found between teacher empowerment and teachers' perception of their status. **Confirmed.**

A significant positive correlation was found between teacher empowerment and teachers' perception of their status ($r_p = 0.28$, $p < 0.05$). The findings indicate that there is a direct correlation between teacher empowerment and teachers' perception of their status: the more empowered teachers feel, the better they perceive their status.

H3 A positive correlation will be found between teacher promotion and teachers' perception of their status. **Confirmed.**

A significant positive correlation was found between teacher promotion and teachers' perception of their status ($r_p = 0.17$, $p < 0.05$). The findings indicate that there is a direct correlation between teacher promotion and teachers' perception of their status: the greater the promotion, the better they perceive their status.

H4 A positive correlation will be found between improved pay grade and teachers' perception of their status. **Confirmed.**

A significant positive correlation was found between improved pay grade and teachers' perception of their status ($r_p = 0.72$, $p < 0.05$). The findings indicate that there is a direct correlation between improved pay grade and teachers' perception of their status: the more they are paid, the better they perceive their status.

H5 A positive correlation will be found between improved physical work conditions and teachers' perception of their status. **Rejected.**

A very weak, significant negative correlation was found between improved physical work conditions and teachers' perception of their status ($r_p = -0.003$, $p < 0.05$). The findings indicate that there is no correlation between improved physical work conditions and teachers' perception of their status: An improved work environment would not affect teachers' perception of their status.

H6 A positive correlation will be found between improved pay grade and teachers' perception of their status. **Confirmed.**

A significant positive correlation was found between teachers' portrayal in the media and teachers' perception of their status ($r_p = 0.36$, $p < 0.05$). The findings indicate that there is a direct correlation between teachers' portrayal in the media and teachers' perception of their status: the better they are portrayed, the better they perceive their status.

In order to find the explaining variables for teacher status (dependent variable) and the 6 independent variables – improved training (professional training seminars for acting teachers), teacher empowerment (involve teachers in decision making; delegate authority; form teaching teams; change the hierarchic organizational structure), promotion, improved pay grade (teachers' low salary is perceived as a key factor in their low standing), improved physical work conditions and media image – a multistep stepwise regression analysis was performed. The analysis reveals that three explaining variables were introduced into the model, and that teachers' status can be explained by improved pay grade, improved media image and empowerment [$F(3,296) = 61.85$, $P < 0.05$]. Predicting variables explained 67.8% of teacher status variance, with the most significant factor being pay grade (52.1%). The second variable – media image – contributed 12.9%, and the third variable – promotion – contributed 2.8% to the overall variance explanation.

Table 1. Regression analysis findings: teachers' status

Predicting variable	B	β	t	Cumulative R ²
Improved pay grade	-0.811	-0.655	-15.24	0.521
Media image	3.18	0.195	4.46	0.129
Promotion	-0.198	-0.079	-2.1	0.028

7. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Building on the literature, our findings reinforce Hall & Langton's idea of the three primary factors of power, money and fame. Our study too incorporated these factors: the first variable – pay grade (52.1%) – is equal to Hall & Langton's money factor. The second variable – media image – (12.9%) is equal to Hall & Langton's fame factor. The third variable – promotion (2.8%) is equal to Hall &

Langton's power factor. The other variables were not included in the model. Subsequently, in order to increase work productivity, the state must first and foremost improve teachers' salary and place it at the top of the public sector pay level.

This study points to the problematic assumption that teachers' status is unrelated to their salary. Stakeholders are constantly searching for solutions that avoid the inevitable – significant pay raise. This should be accompanied by a shift in the teachers' media image, with the overarching goal of improving work performance in Israel.

Assuming that teachers' status is not expected to change in the near future, and in order to increase motivation in all teachers, the state must focus on improving teachers' public image and raising their salaries. Different specialties warrant different salaries; a math teacher should not be paid the same as a PE teacher.

This study did not account for teachers' professional capabilities, complexity of activity or any professional analysis of the work they perform.

The sample consisted solely on teachers who agreed to cooperate, for whatever reason. This could cause a certain bias; nevertheless, attitude and satisfaction are commonly accepted tools in academic and organizational research.

We conducted a convenience sample by directly approaching teachers, bypassing the Ministry of Education. Participants were told that the study is confidential and that neither their names nor the name of their school would be disclosed. Participants were made fully aware that we did not approach the Ministry of Education in pursuit of approval.

From the research literature emerges, an improvement in student performance on international tests will increase labor productivity and expand the skills required by the modern labor market.

Therefore, the status of the teacher, which is a relative term, needs to be improved, and it is not enough to compare teachers' salaries to what is acceptable in the public sector, so it is worthwhile to continue researching:

- 1 How teachers are perceived by society and by other professionals.
2. Effect of change in the method of payment of salaries for teachers, by seniority and by required professions.
3. The effect of reducing the number of trainees in the class on student achievement.
4. Appoint a special employee in each school who will be responsible for the discipline of the students.
5. The relationship between the reduction of the teacher's working hours and the students' achievements.
6. The connection between increasing the salary and reducing the teacher's working hours and the joining of quality new teachers into the education system

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