

**Evaluating the Effectiveness of 2019 Education Reforms
in Increasing Teachers' Status in Kazakhstan**

by

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to evaluate the effectiveness of state programs, introduced after 2019, that were implemented to increase teachers' status in Kazakhstan. Using UNESCO's recommended definition of teachers' status as an indicator of value and appreciation that teachers receive in society, we then analyze 5 main factors that influence it: level of autonomy, amount of compensation, workload, opportunities for professional growth and entry requirements in the field. Through a comprehensive survey of more than 2 thousands teachers from all across Kazakhstan, we were able to identify teachers' perception of these factors and their effect on status, gaining valuable insight into their view on state reforms. Even though teachers generally approved of the reforms, especially for increasing the monetary compensation, many mentioned that state efforts have been futile in other directions. Additional interviews with individuals in the field of education gave a 'voice' to teachers' responses, providing us with a conceptual understanding of survey results and detailed information on their opinions. This research has significant implications for policy-makers who can use our findings to evaluate the effectiveness of said state programs and use them for future policy considerations.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The sphere of education takes a prominent role in the policy-making of most countries, as it is a key to the future economic and social development of the nation. Currently, the education sector in Kazakhstan is undergoing a series of modernizations and changes in organizational structure, educational content, and teacher training following the standards of developed countries. In his study, Hoyle (2001) defines teacher status as "people's perceptions of a given profession in relation to its position in the hierarchy of professions." He adds that teacher status is a complex, multifaceted concept and it's usually impacted by several factors including salary, academic freedom, continuing professional development and other factors.

The quality of education, professional development of teachers, and their engagement in decision-making and research are closely related to teachers' status in society (positive perception/ negative perception) (Verhoeven et.al, 2007). The factors mentioned above, vital for teachers, highlight the teachers' status and play an important role in high quality and equity in the educational sphere. Moreover, from observing the role of the teaching profession in Finland, South Korea and Singapore, we can see that teachers' high status in society positively affects students' performance (Burns and Darling-Hammond, 2014).

1.1 Background and problem statement/ importance

In Kazakhstan, before the adoption of the "Teacher Status" project in 2019, model laws were enacted, including the "Teacher Status" law of December 4, 2004, No 24-13, and the "Education Worker Status" law of November 6, 2006, No 27-13. Despite the existing regulatory framework, the status of teachers is insufficiently regulated at the legislative level, does not meet societal demands, fails to address modern challenges, and consequently

requires a more comprehensive and precise definition of the professional and social status of teachers, regardless of the ownership forms of educational organizations.

According to statistics from the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan for the 2018-2019 academic year, the number of teachers leaving the education system exceeded the number entering it after graduating from universities. Specifically, during the 2018-2019 academic year, educational institutions hired 10,226 young specialists (7,251 graduates of higher education institutions, 2,975 graduates of colleges), while 12,154 teachers left the education system.

In 2018, 289,851 teachers were working in schools across the country (117,907 in urban areas and 171,944 in rural areas), with a demand for teaching staff totalling 5,267 individuals. According to statistics, the average monthly salary in the education system for the year 2018 amounted to 102,900 tenge, which was lower than the average salary in the agricultural sector (97,900 tenge).

Another crucial point is that the passing score for obtaining a state grant for pedagogical specialities is the lowest, which predisposes the choice of speciality not to the best graduates of schools. The average score for grants in pedagogical specialities in 2018 was 78–84 out of 140 possible points (the lowest score among specialities). Moreover, most students (70-80%) enrolled in pedagogical specialities on a fee-paying basis with an even lower score of 50.

Most importantly, there were two main improvements regarding the status of teachers in Kazakhstan during the past 3 years: the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan «On the status of a teacher» and the «State Program for the Development of Education and Science for 2020-2025». The main directions of the «State Program for the Development of Education and Science for 2020-2025» included: increasing the level of competition, ensuring the high status of teachers, and modernizing the professional development of teaching. According to

the program, teachers are to have extensive material support, social guarantees and encouragement from the government. The proposed legislation titled "On the Status of Teachers" in the Republic of Kazakhstan comprises 21 articles outlining regulations applicable to educators across various educational levels: preschool, primary, technical and vocational, post-secondary, specialized, institutions for special education, facilities for orphans and children without parental care, extracurricular education for children, as well as in educational methodological offices. A "teacher" is defined as an individual with pedagogical and/or professional qualifications in the relevant field, engaged in teaching, educating students or pupils, providing methodological support, or organizing educational activities. A notable feature of the proposed law is the requirement for employers to ensure that teachers are provided with adequate conditions for their professional duties, as stipulated by the labour laws of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Henceforth, the rights of teachers in conducting their professional duties are outlined for the first time, including the freedom to select teaching resources, materials, and other instructional tools aligned with the educational program; engagement in collaborative efforts for developing educational programs, curricula, methodological resources, and other elements of educational practice, as well as textbooks, educational methodologies, and teaching aids; discourse on matters aimed at enhancing educational quality, encompassing those pertinent to the operations of the educational institution; opportunities for undertaking internships through the international "Bolashak" scholarship program, aimed at sustaining and enhancing professional competencies, subject to the regulations set forth by the legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Moreover, the program stipulates that teachers are entitled to an allowance for the master's or doctorate degrees that they have, for the title of the "Best teacher" awarded by the ministry and for their students' achievements at international scientific competitions.

However, despite the attempts to raise the status of teachers in Kazakhstan, the teacher's status remains problematic (Kirichok, 2022). This is exacerbated by the fact that there is no research on the effectiveness of the programs aimed at improving the teachers' status and little is known about the exact reasons for their ineffectiveness. Moreover, researchers like Kirichok (2022) report that despite the high number of graduates in pedagogy, the shortage of staff in schools is still a pressing problem in Kazakhstan, 20 years after the first policies aimed at solving the problem were introduced. The researcher also notes the lack of proper mechanisms for attracting highly qualified teachers, low admission requirements and powerlessness in staff retention. All of the listed above increasingly confirm the presence of unresolved problems that prevent the change of the level of prestige and status of the teacher in the society of Kazakhstan.

1.2 Research objectives/questions

The purpose of our research is to evaluate the effectiveness of the "State Program for the Development of Education and Science for 2020-2025" on teachers' status, tools that were used in achieving policy goals and whether they were successful or not. In addition, our research aims to analyze the perceptions of teachers regarding the status of the teaching profession in the country.

The following research questions are central to this project:

1. To what extent did the education reforms succeed in increasing teachers' status?
2. What are the most prominent factors that affect teachers' status?

Teachers play a crucial role in developing human capital. This notion is pretty straightforward given the fact that they are responsible for educating generations of students who will make up the future workforce of the country. Hence, it is important that it is the motivated, highly qualified and well-educated people who become teachers, which is hardly

the case if teachers feel like their status is low and their work is undervalued. The 2019 "State Program for the Development of Education and Science for 2020-2025" tries to address this issue and ensure that teaching becomes a prosperous and respected career path. As this is a relatively new policy and COVID-19 disrupted the educational process for two years, little research has been done on its effectiveness.

This paper aims to investigate this gap and find out if the Ministry of Education was able to correctly identify teachers' pressing needs and address them in the new program. By understanding teachers' views on their status and evaluating if the policy was beneficial, we would be able to make recommendations on additional ways to improve their standing in society. Increasingly positive perceptions among teachers about their status along with newcomers' better qualifications and attitudes towards the job will be perceived as positive indications of the effectiveness of the reforms.

The findings of this research will be of great benefit both to academics and policy-makers in the educational sphere. Scholars have long argued that certain factors like social benefits and workload affect the status of the teaching profession, but an accurate evaluation of how these factors play out in conjunction with each other and over time, after the implementation of specific policies, is still missing. This research could shed some light on this relationship, possibly revealing which factors and to what extent are deemed important by teachers while evaluating real policy implications. As for policy-makers, data gathered from teachers who experienced the effects of the "State Program" firsthand is valuable in evaluating the effectiveness of the policy. The numerical data gathered from surveys could reveal bigger, possibly overlooked, trends and findings from interviews could help understand these trends and provide valuable insight into how policies are implemented in the real world.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review consists of 3 sections. To have a ground for discussion, we will first define the concept of status and teacher's status more specifically. Then, by reviewing indicators specified in previous literature, we will address what indicators are going to be analyzed in our research. Lastly, we will narrow our focus towards literature about teachers' status in Kazakhstan and the theoretical framework.

2.1 Defining the concept

The meaning of the term "status" is uncovered in various kinds of literature. As defined by Turner (2001), the term "status" derives from the notion of "position" in Latin and usually relates to the reputation of a person within the community. He further defined this term as the rank of a human being inside of the society which might be constructed using different types of individual characteristics and it usually refers to the dignity of a person. The German sociologist Weber used the term "status" to describe processes in social categorization (Gerth and Wright Mills, 1991). He explained the term "status" as "status groups". This relates to groups of people who share common interests and preferences in consumption and job occupations. Unlike class, which is primarily based on economic factors such as wealth, status is determined by social factors such as occupation and cultural capital. Weber argued that status and class are not always aligned and can sometimes conflict with each other. For instance, a person may have high social status due to their prestigious occupation, but low economic status if their income is modest. (Giddens, 1991, Hockey and James, 2004)

Another famous philosopher Karl Marx primarily emphasized class struggle and economic factors in his analysis of status. Status, within the Marxist framework, is typically understood in terms of the social and cultural hierarchies that emerge from class relations.

Individuals or groups may have different levels of status based on their position within the class structure and their access to economic resources. However, Marxists argue that status distinctions are ultimately rooted in economic inequality and serve to reinforce class domination (Wright and Perrone, 1977).

The above explanations are helpful in grasping the position of teachers as a certain "status group". In the special Recommendation of UNESCO regarding the status of teachers, the term status was defined both in relation to the responsibilities of teachers and the validation which was given to their efforts (Mutluer & Yüksel, 2019). In addition, recognition within the society, working environment and money earnings were on the list of characteristics which contribute to the status of the teachers. Apart from that, Everton et al. (2007) mentioned that the perception of teachers' status within society significantly changed over time since now the status of teachers can be described as "less independent and usually shaped by the views of politicians rather than teacher themselves".

Everton et al (2007) differentiate between the professional prestige of teaching (the place teaching has in a hierarchy of jobs), the professional status of teaching (whether certain groups of society such as researchers, civil servants, legislators and others would perceive teaching as an occupation) and professional esteem of teaching (the level of respect that the general public has towards teaching profession as a result of the personal traits that its practitioners are thought to bring to their primary duties). Goker and Gunduz (2017) pointed out some characteristics which shape the social position of educators. They suggested that factors such as teachers' compensation relative to other occupations, the readiness of parents to let their kids choose the teaching profession in the future, validation and recognition from both parents and children towards teachers and the amount of trust of parents in the field of education affects the public status of teachers. It is considered that the socio-economic environment in which teachers function, the stability of work, the payment, possibilities for

career growth, level of autonomy and training that teachers get at their work are all closely tied to the status of teaching (Unsal, 2018).

Therefore, teachers may be less motivated to demonstrate their finest characteristics and abilities if they are under the influence of a poor image of the teacher in society, which has a direct effect on the quality of their teaching process (Carlo et al, 2013). Besides, a low level of prestige in teaching occupation usually leads to such trends as a lower socio-economic class of teachers, the dominance of women in this field, the lack of shortages in labour and preoccupation and the low level of education among newly hired teachers (Fwu & Wang, 2002).

Despite seemingly diverse and unrelated explanations of status by different authors, they all, essentially, strongly associate teachers' status with an appreciation of their profession. In this regard, we will operate with UNESCO and ILO recommendations of 1966 on the definition of teachers' status that encompasses a broad range of factors that mostly focus on the level of appreciation of their work: "the expression 'status' as used in relation to teachers means both the standing or regard accorded them, as evidenced by the level of appreciation of the importance of their function and of their competence in performing it, and the working conditions, remuneration and other material benefits accorded them relative to other professional groups".

2.2 Indicators defining teacher's status

It is important to focus on what kind of indicators are used by researchers to define teacher status. There is a consensus among existing literature that there are several universal factors that negatively affect teachers' status in society: low salary, high workload and associated work-life imbalance, lack of incentives and support, minimal entry requirements and low decision-making capacities (Duisembekova, 2013; Everton, 2007; Sahito and

Vaisanen, 2019; Sirota and Elfahel, 2019). Therefore, policies that aim at improving teachers' status, and simultaneously their teaching effectiveness (Usupova and Abdyraeva, 2022), inevitably focus on these factors. The success of these policies hence depends on the policymaker's ability to effectively pinpoint 'weak links' and devise policies that will strengthen them. However, there is also evidence that suggests that differences in aspects outside of policymakers' control might play a role in the perception of teachers' status. Duisembekova (2013), for example, argues that lack of proper infrastructure (heating, sewage), limited access to information and additional home liabilities (looking for cattle) negatively affect teachers' status and effectiveness in rural settings. At the same time, their colleagues in urban centres do not encounter these problems often. Another factor that may have some effect on how teachers are perceived is the observer's ethnic background. Everton (2007, p. 253) found that Indians in the United Kingdom were almost two times more likely to view teaching as an attractive career, compared to those who described themselves as 'white British'. Even though he does not give an explanation for this discrepancy, one might suppose that there are cultural differences at play. Hutchings (2002) claimed that gender stereotypes also play a role when people make decisions about people's status: since teaching is a female-dominated field, people view its status as lower. At the same time, he argued that "male subjects have more male teachers and higher status". Similarly, gender roles might induce women to choose teaching as a career, because Everton's (2007) data showed that twice as many women chose "working with children" as a reason to positively view teaching prospects when compared to men. As teaching is still a female-dominated career in Kazakhstan, it is important to be aware of possible confounding effects that it may have on the occupation's status.

Additionally, Poppleton et al. (1994) and Poppleton (1999) noted that policies, school evaluation, training of teachers, standards of curriculum, recruitment, and retention have an

impact on teachers' satisfaction with teaching and indirectly affect their status in society. A similar argument is made by Bih-Jen Fwu and Hsiou-Huai Wang (2002) who found that reform in the school curriculum enhances the professional development of teachers, and will increase their status.

A meta-study conducted by Symeonidis (2015) focused on educational policy changes spanning the past decade, while also assessing teachers' perspectives on these changes. As indicated by his research findings, elevating salaries, enhancing working conditions, and raising entry criteria led to an enhanced perception of teachers' status within their communities. Conversely, various studies categorized the factors influencing teacher status into two distinct groups: professional and non-professional. For example, Unsal (2018) and Mutluer and Yuksel (2019) listed professional factors, such as problems with employment, career opportunities, salary, and education policies. At the same time, the image of teachers in the media, personal characteristics and educational level are considered non-professional factors.

Based on our review of available data on potential indicators that might affect teachers' status, we were able to identify 5 most frequently mentioned factors associated with high teacher status: high autonomy (in the form of academic freedom), fair compensation (social benefits and guarantees), adequate workload (including low out-of-class responsibilities), high level of education (and opportunities at professional development) and high entry requirements (with transparent procedures). Probing our respondents' opinions about what these factors mean for them and the teaching profession, in general, will help to understand how state programs can target teachers' status more effectively.

2.3 Teacher status in Kazakhstan

Duisembekova (2013) confirms that the status of teachers and professional training was at an unsatisfactory level in Kazakhstan before comprehensive policies aimed at improving teacher status were introduced. Most notably of that period, the SWOT-Analysis of the education policy of Kazakhstan, which relied on interviews with 15 education experts in 4 regions of the country, showed that the status of teachers is low due to the socio-economic situation and parents' attitudes is the reason why schoolchildren did not respect their teachers in 93% of the cases (Aikenova, 2014).

Similarly, Khokhotva (2018) noted that teachers in Kazakhstan struggled due to the lack of necessary resources in schools, such as materials for classes, the absence of proper heating systems and low salaries for a long time. Moreover, Tastanbekova (2020) noted that low salaries caused the unpopularity of this profession among fresh graduates and contributed to ageing and feminised labour in the educational sphere. The authors also agree that the status, prestige and self-esteem of teachers are affected by high turnover, low level of salary, and decreased level of authority.

The study by Tastanbekova (2020) compared the salary of teachers with other occupations for the period 1998-2017 in order to define teachers' status. Results showed that teachers' salaries were higher by 6% than the agricultural sector, which is considered the lowest-paid sector in the country. In comparison with the mining sector, which has the highest salaries in Kazakhstan, teachers' salaries can get up to 250% lower on average. Since the literature suggests that salary is an important factor in determining teachers' status, one might wonder how much of a negative effect these discrepancies can have on their perception.

Another study by Kirichok (2022) focused on the "State Program for the Development of Education and Science for 2011-2020" and attempted to assess the

effectiveness of state policy on ensuring teacher status in Kazakhstan. The researcher conducted 50 interviews with teachers from state schools in Almaty city and assessed the effectiveness of the policy relying on their responses. 87% of teachers responded that the low level of qualification of teachers caused the low status of teachers.

This literature review shows that the teachers' status is identified by pay, perception of profession, job autonomy, career advancement, professional development, status within the educational system, and public perception. Despite the government's actions to make education a priority and ongoing efforts, and policies, there have been some challenges to the status of teachers in Kazakhstan. Since the literature on the topic of teacher status in Kazakhstan is limited by the period before the "Law on teachers' status" and "State Program for the Development of Education and Science for 2020-2025" were introduced, and no research has been conducted on their effects, this paper will aim to close this gap and assess the current status of teachers in Kazakhstan.

3. METHODOLOGY

Since our research focuses on the effect of the 2019 state program, it is necessary to gather data on how teachers' perceptions changed after the introduction of the program. The study will employ both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis.

3.1 Data

Introduced policies are mostly aimed at teachers in public schools who might have previously struggled with poor working conditions, so teachers from private and semi-private schools (like Nazarbayev intellectual schools, Bilim innovation lyceums, etc.), whose working environment might have already been better compared to their colleagues from public schools, were excluded from the study. Moreover, since our objective is to compare teachers' experiences before and after the introduction of the policy, our respondents must

have enough work experience to be able to reflect on their pre-2019 status. Hence, we plan to interview teachers who have been working at least for 3 years at the moment of policy implementation.

As was already mentioned, several sources suggest that age, gender, and ethnicity might play a role in how teachers perceive their status. Therefore, these factors were accounted for as possible confounding variables. On top of that, we differentiated between teachers from cities and villages, as there is evidence that suggests that teachers in distant, labour-intensive rural communities might not feel the effect of state policies as much as their urban counterparts.

3.2 Methods

Surveys. We surveyed teachers to identify the changes in their perception regarding status and define statistically significant trends that can shed light on what factors and to what extent affect the teacher status. The survey contains more than 3000 responses in Kazakh and Russian languages and the data collected will be used to expand on our understanding of general trends and variables that teachers themselves see as important to their status. To check the hypotheses, teachers' perception of their status is considered as a dependent variable. Independent variables are the 5 factors mentioned in the literature review (level of autonomy, amount of compensation, workload, professional development and entry requirements) that supposedly most affect the teachers' status. Starting with the first section on demographic variables (like age, gender, nationality and education level), the survey includes 5 sections that pertain to teachers' opinions on aforementioned factors after the implementation of the policy. For example, they are asked to answer questions on salary satisfaction levels after 2019 and if changes in other factors affect teachers' perceived status. Respondents were able to answer along the 'strongly disagree' - 'strongly agree' dimensions,

allowing for a nuanced understanding of the effects of government policy. A total of 58 questions related to teachers' status were asked in the survey.

Interviews. A total of 7 interviews were conducted: 4 teachers, an expert in the field of education, a high-ranking government official and a school principal were recruited. Participants were asked open-ended questions about their (1) reasons for choosing the teaching career, (2) overall work experiences, (3) their own perceptions of teachers' status, (4) opinions about what affects the status and (5) 2019 government reforms. Interviewees were given the option to choose to answer questions either in Kazakh or Russian languages. All the essential requirements regarding the privacy and confidentiality of respondents were considered. As state policies introduced after 2019 aim to increase teachers' status and better their working environment overall, respondents' answers were used to track changes in their perceptions and get insight into their understanding of what a teacher's status means. Moreover, interview results were used to interpret the findings of the survey, giving a better understanding of the relationship between dependent and independent variables.

3.4 The ethics of the study

Our research was conducted in accordance with the ethical norms of academic research. Oral consents were obtained from our participants and they were informed about the purposes, potential benefits, harms and data-handling processes of our study. All respondents chose to retain their anonymity. Interview recordings were used only for research purposes and only authors of the study were able to access them.

To avoid potential biases in teachers' responses, questionnaires were clearly labelled as a part of the master's degree thesis project, unaffiliated with any government agency. Moreover, the survey was completely anonymous and respondents' email addresses were not

gathered. We believe that a comparatively small number of respondents from other regions is still enough to make generalizable claims about regional differences.

4. FINDINGS

A total number of 3295 responses were collected from teachers all across Kazakhstan. 2437 (74%) of them were filled in the Kazakh language, while the remaining 858 (26%) were filled in the Russian language. While no statistically significant differences among responses in Kazakh and Russian languages were revealed, the two groups exhibited notably different views regarding reforms, which will be discussed later. After eliminating teachers with less than 6 years of experience, who accounted for about 20% across both groups and cleaning the data (kindergarten tutors, non-teacher respondents, etc), a dataset of 2498 responses was retrieved.

Table 1. Demographic distribution of the respondents

Age groups	Kazakhs	Non-Kazakhs	Total
25-34	355	30	385
35-44	822	68	890
45-54	697	92	789
55+	382	52	429
Total	2,256	242	2,498

Unsurprisingly, 87.6% of the respondents (2188 individuals) were female, providing evidence in support of the claims about the "female nature" of the teaching profession in Kazakhstan. When it comes to teachers' ethnicity, data provided in Table 1 might suggest that 90% of teachers in school are ethnic Kazakhs, which is higher than the national average of 70% (Bureau of National Statistics, 2023). However, it is important to note that our sample is not representative, considering that Western and Southern regions of Kazakhstan, which have a

higher proportion of ethnic Kazakhs, are overrepresented in our responses, as can be seen from Table 2.

Table 2. Regional distribution of the respondents

	Western	Southern	Eastern	Northern	Central	Total
Rural	828	96	65	83	111	1,183
Urban	320	768	48	79	100	1,315
Total	1,148	864	113	162	211	2,498

The high number of respondents from these regions can be explained by the fact that we were able to contact two regional education departments during the data collection process and they agreed to distribute the questionnaire among their local schools. Interestingly, an almost equal number of rural and urban respondents filled the survey, 47.4% and 52.6% respectively, despite that the share of rural population in Kazakhstan was 38.2% in 2023 (Bureau of National Statistics).

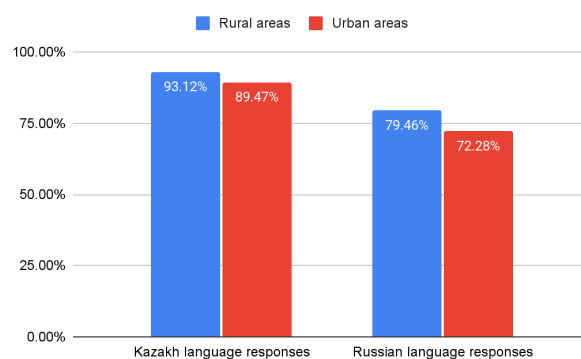
Table 3. Respondents' educational background

Education level	Work experience				Total
	3-6 years	7-12 years	13-20 years	20+ years	
School diploma	13	39	81	178	311
Prof. college	43	29	40	49	161
Bachelor's degree	277	438	613	805	2133
Master's degree	58	49	57	112	276
Doctoral degree	0	0	2	6	8
Total	391	555	793	1,150	2,889

To account for a possible change in trends among people joining the teaching profession in recent years, we included the data for teachers with 3-6 years of experience, who have been removed in other calculations, in Table 3. As can be observed, most of the teachers (74%) who filled out the survey had a bachelor's degree, with the smallest percentage of teachers having doctoral degrees. Interestingly, the newer cohorts of teachers seem to be more

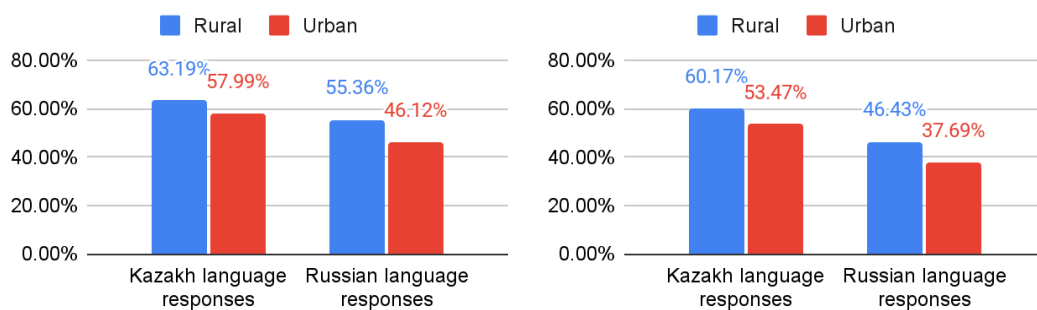
educated than their ‘older’ counterparts. The number of teachers with only a school diploma has been decreasing, from 15.5% for the most experienced group to just over 3% for the least experienced. At the same time, the number of master’s degree holders increased, from less than 10% to almost 15% for the same groups. So, as the table suggests, a more educated cohort of people has been joining the teaching profession in Kazakhstan in recent years. This corresponds with statements from several interviewees (Interview 1, 3, 5, 6) who stated higher entry requirements led to an increase in the level of education among young teachers. Given that 2019 reforms have adjusted teachers’ salaries to account for higher education levels, we might expect to see more doctoral degree holders among teachers in the coming years. Moreover, as the entry requirements for the field have also increased, we expect to see a higher number of bachelor’s and master’s degree holders in the future as well.

To understand teachers’ perception of status and the possible effect that overall job satisfaction might have on it, we asked teachers to report on their job satisfaction levels. Despite that no significant correlation exists between these two variables, indicators reveal interesting differences among teachers. According to Graph 1, it can be seen that teachers from rural areas report higher levels of job satisfaction for both groups (responses with "Very Good" and "Good" answers were coded as positive responses). Interestingly, the main difference was not between rural and urban teachers, but between Kazakh and Russian-speaking respondents.



Graph 1. Positive job satisfaction rates among teachers

The contrast seems stark - the difference in job satisfaction between the most and least satisfied groups was more than 20% of their respective responses. One possible explanation of this finding could have been higher levels of policy implementation effectiveness in areas with a majority Kazakh population. However, despite that the share of Kazakh/Russian respondents was different according to the region, the highest being in the North (48.15%) and the lowest in the Western (15.94%), the difference in satisfaction persisted when surveys were accounted for according to their share of Kazakh/Russian respondents. Job satisfaction levels for Kazakh-speaking respondents ranged from the lowest of 90.2% in Southern Kazakhstan to 95% in Eastern Kazakhstan. At the same time, Russian-speaking respondents were least satisfied in the Central parts of the country (70.69%) and most satisfied in Eastern Kazakhstan (75.76%). A similar trend was observed when accounting for other factors like age, ethnicity, sex and type of school (gymnasium/lyceum/ordinary). This indicates a lower level of job satisfaction among Russian-speaking teachers overall.



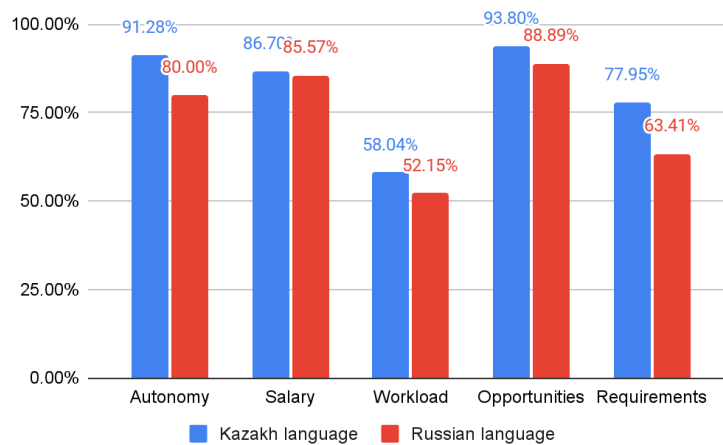
Graph 2. Increase in respect among students (left) and parents (right)

Our survey also asked teachers to indicate if they agree, disagree or are unsure about the claim that "In recent years, respect for teachers among students has increased". A similar question was asked about parents' respect. As can be seen from Graph 2, the difference between Kazakh and Russian-speaking teachers is evident again. The difference in rural and urban teacher's perceptions was also more pronounced. It is important to note that the question was about the change in students' and parents' respect, not the overall respect levels.

Interestingly, while only around 10% of both Kazakh and Russian-speaking teachers reported that respect among students has decreased, the numbers for perceived reduction in parents' respect are higher - 17% and 30%.

4.1 Reform effect across professional factors

To gauge teachers' perception of status, we first asked teachers to rate factors of (1) high teacher autonomy, (2) high amount of monetary compensation, (3) low levels of out-of-classroom workload, (4) availability of opportunities for professional development and (5) high entry requirements on how important they believe them to be for the high status of the teaching profession. Their answers are presented in Graph 3.

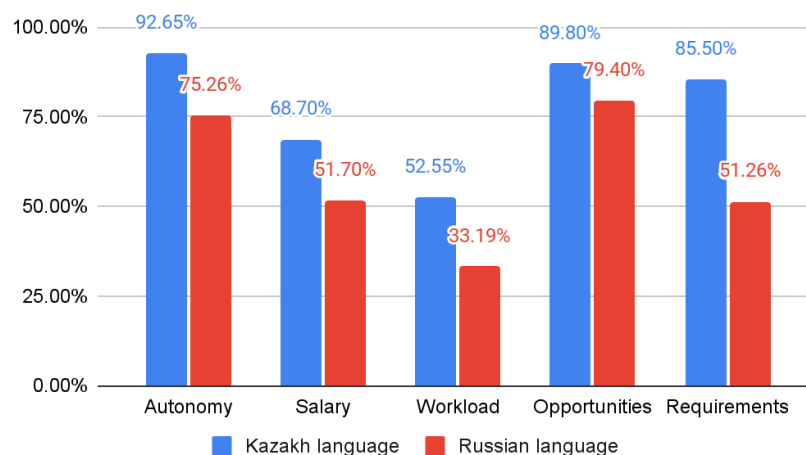


Graph 3. Perceived importance of factors of interest

The availability of professional development opportunities was stated to be important by the highest number of teachers for both language groups. Similarly high levels of importance were prescribed to autonomy and salary. Surprisingly, almost half of the respondents reported that a lower workload is not important to teachers' status. Given the extensive government focus on putting an end to the practice of involuntary participation of teachers in different events and teachers' own reports of such practices (Interview 1, 2, 5, 6, 7), this finding may be surprising to many specialists in the education sphere. Possible reasons for the relative unimportance of workload will be investigated in the Discussion section.

Differences between Kazakh and Russian language respondents were also evident for most of the factors. Specifically, high autonomy and high entry requirements have been rated to be less important by 10% of Russian-speaking teachers. It is only the salary factor that was similarly perceived by both groups.

In order to understand the effectiveness of the reforms across the aforementioned dimensions, respondents were asked to tell if they believe that certain aspects of their work were positively influenced by the 2019 reforms. It is crucial to mention that the "salary" factor was asked not on the perceived 'improvement' but on salary satisfaction levels after reforms. The reason is that the government heavily focused on incremental salary increases in 2019, doubling the amount in 4 years, and almost all teachers, as was further supported by interview findings (2, 4, 7), indicated that the reform was truthful to its promises. As can be seen from Graph 4, the other effects of the reform were not perceived as positively.



Graph 4. The sectoral positive change observed after the reforms

First of all, the difference between Kazakh and Russian-speaking teachers is observed across all factors of interest. It ranges from 10.4% when asked about opportunities for professional growth, to 34.24% on entry requirements. While it might not be clear why Kazakh-speaking respondents consistently report higher numbers of positive perceptions, we will provide a

possible explanation for the stark difference in perception of the "entry" aspect for the two groups.

As for other factors, less than 50% of all teachers reported that they felt a decrease in the number of out-of-classroom responsibilities. This suggests that teachers are still being forced to partake in activities not associated with their school responsibilities. One of our interviewees (Interview 5) indicated that their school still participates in city-wide cleanings (subbotnik), despite government regulations prohibiting that. Other interviewees (Interview 1 and 5) said that the amount of paperwork decreased slightly, mostly due to the switch to online forms of documentation. Similarly, despite a 100% increase from the base amount in 2019, which teachers confirmed, salary satisfaction levels remain low. Respondents and interviewees (Interviews 4 and 7) stated that the amount of monetary compensation is still insufficient for the amount of workload performed.

Reform effects on classroom autonomy and development opportunities were generally rated as positive, as can be seen from Graph 4. Teachers stated that they have more control over the content and pace of their lectures. At the same time, one interviewee (Interview 2) suggested that it might be beneficial to somewhat 'restrict' high levels of autonomy in certain aspects. They proposed that having semi-regular classroom visitations by a commission will help to ensure that teaching practices are up to a high standard. Survey respondents also positively rated the availability of opportunities for professional development. Most interviewees (Interview 2, 3, 4) stated that they were able to participate in courses and workshops organized by the ministry or affiliated organizations and rated them as useful for their teaching career. However, it was also mentioned (Interview 3) that some seminars might be conducted "only to take some photos", which will be sent to the ministry, suggesting their purely formal nature.

Even though we were unable to recruit Russian-speaking teachers for our interviews, Kazakh-speaking teachers reported satisfaction with the increase in entry requirements to the field. For example, a school principal (Interview 6) said that a huge difference is noticeable between the youngest teachers and those who entered the field in the 2000s. They highlighted that young professionals pursue careers consciously and tend to be more educated. Moreover, the principal suggested that universities should directly invite good students to study in the teaching profession. Similarly, interviewees (Interview 6, 7) stated that a high level of motivation and education is crucial for teachers, as they need to "ignite the spark" in their students. Hence, they supported increasing entry requirements. Another interviewee (Interview 2) suggested that higher competition among fresh graduates will lead to "higher quality" of professionals and contribute to increasing the status of the teaching profession among the general population. Overall responses indicate that while there are positive changes in the education sphere after reforms, a lot can still be done to further improve teachers' status.

One of the survey respondents suggested that there might be a disparity in status between teachers of different subjects. More specifically, they expressed a view that Physical Education (PE) teachers are less respected in the community and have lower status levels. This might stem from a perspective, not supported by our findings, that PE teachers tend to be less educated and have no "real classroom". Since our survey asked teachers to indicate the subjects that they taught, we were able to test the claim. A total of 16 subjects were identified, subjects like "World history" and "History of Kazakhstan" or "Kazakh language" and "Kazakh literature" were grouped together, because the same individual teachers are generally assigned to these subjects. The 5 subjects are displayed for the purposes of this research and the percentage of positive responses to the aforementioned questions about status are provided in Table 4.

Table 4. Survey responses by subjects

	Satisfaction	Status change	Autonomy	Salary	Workload	Opportunity	Entry
Phys. Ed.	93.8%	68.5%	90.41%	76.03%	56.16%	88.36%	78.08%
Kazakh	90.9%	72.6%	92.83%	69.38%	53.42%	91.53%	85.67%
Mathematics	84.9%	61.5%	89.06%	70.31%	44.27%	82.81%	77.08%
Geography	81.7%	53.8%	88.17%	52.69%	48.39%	89.25%	79.57%
Russian	73.6%	43.3%	74.52%	57.21%	39.42%	80.77%	55.29%

According to our survey data, PE teachers reported the highest level of job satisfaction among all subjects. Moreover, we can observe that their perception of status is consistently among the most positive for other factors. Hence, we can argue that contrary to the teacher's comment, PE teachers are not respected less than other teachers.

In accordance with previous data, teachers of the Russian language, who are mostly Russian-speaking, reported the lowest levels of satisfaction and perceived improvement for all sectors. In contrast, one of the highest rates of positive responses was recorded for teachers of the Kazakh language. Mathematics and Geography teachers represent a plethora of other subjects, the middle ground, who report varying degrees of reform perception, but generally within an average range.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 General findings

The goal of this study was to understand the effects of 2019 Education reforms on teachers' status. By conducting surveys and interviews we were able to identify teachers' opinions on reforms and some interesting trends. Additionally, we were able to test how status changed across 5 dimensions, which are considered to be most important to teachers' status by previous literature. Participants provided their own experiences and opinions about what affects their status and aspects where policy reforms lacked, either in implementation or design. Their answers help to evaluate the effectiveness of the government program. Our

findings reveal that the reforms introduced in 2019 had an overall positive effect on teachers' perceptions of their status across various indicators. A key contribution of our study is providing insights into shifts in attitudes of teachers towards their status and bringing attention to the list of challenges which are still faced by teachers both in urban and rural areas.

Answering our first research question, "The Law on Improving the Status of Teachers" passed in 2019 has brought much-needed improvements to teachers' working conditions, but there remain a number of challenges that still need to be addressed. As for the second research question, which inquires about prominent factors that affect teachers' status, our findings have been a surprising addition to the existing body of literature. Contrary to expectations that confounding variables like age, sex, education level or school type might play a role in teachers' status, our data provided no evidence in support of these theories. However, we were able to identify factors like school locality (urban/rural), respondents's preferred language (Kazakh/Russian) and subjects taught as potential influencers.

The stark difference in answers of Kazakh and Russian-speaking respondents can possibly be explained by the shortage of teachers who are able to teach in Russian language. Shashkina (2023) provides an example of a pedagogical university in Astana, where only 2 out of 38 students in the Chemistry department were studying it in Russian. A similar trend is observed in other regions of Kazakhstan (Azattyq Ryhy, 2022; Sagidulla, 2023). An insufficient number of Russian-speaking teachers might contribute to increasing levels of workload on already working teachers. An increase in the entry requirements may limit the available pool of future teachers even more, further heightening the demand. Alternatively, it can also be argued that a shortage of teachers might lead to lower competition and lower barriers for entry, which will also contribute to lower 'quality' of teachers and decrease the status of the teaching profession. However, this factor alone might not be sufficient to explain

the Kazakh/Russian language divide, it is necessary to investigate underlying reasons in future research.

Another finding of our study was a significant response difference between rural and urban teachers. Rural teachers consistently reported 5-15% higher levels of satisfaction and perceived status than their urban counterparts. One of our interviewees, expert in the education sector (Interview 1), suggested that close-knit communities in villages foster respect for teachers: "A student in a village will greet and take interest in a teacher even if they have never studied in their class. A student in the city might not even know a teacher from his own school. "This is also influenced by traditional attitudes, personal relations of residents with teachers, and the active participation of teachers in the social life of the community. Teachers often act not only as service providers but as mentors and tutors for youngsters, like they did during the Soviet Period when teaching was considered to be one of the most respected professions. During an interview (Interview 7), a teacher from a village said that "...teaching is a respected profession. Despite his attire or salary, everyone respects him for teaching." Despite often lacking teaching materials or insufficient infrastructure (Interview 4), rural teachers reported a bigger increase in respect from parents and children compared to urban teachers. The 2019 reforms may have helped to further cement teachers' position in villages as respected professionals and community leaders. However, there is an increasing need for government to recognize that while salary and other financial incentives are important, teachers' status is a more complex phenomenon, which is influenced by socio-cultural factors as well.

Even though the common perception is that schools are currently dominated by the elderly and that it is an ageing profession, we found that middle-aged professionals, who will most likely be in the field in the upcoming years, make up most of the teaching population. On this issue, it is not certain that the teaching profession in Kazakhstan is ageing, as noted

by Tastanbekova (2020). On the contrary, recent reforms were able to attract a new cohort of motivated graduates into the field and given the increase in salaries and a more demanding selection criteria for the profession, it can be assumed that more and more young people will be interested in the teaching career.

Additionally, the large occupation of the teaching profession by women in the sample not only confirmed the continuing trend of "female nature" in education in Kazakhstan but also reflects a global trend. This trend is not a new phenomenon and has long been established in many countries around the world. To this day, the teaching profession is often perceived as traditionally female and this is reflected in the high percentage of women among teachers. In global practice, the "female nature" of the profession is linked to a number of historical, and socio-cultural factors and stereotypes. Conventional expectations also play a role in shaping the notion that the teacher should be a "motherly" figure with caring and emotional support for students. The overrepresentation of women in the field may contribute to the occupation's status level and should be further studied.

5.2 Factors of interest

The primary objectives of draft laws are to enhance teachers' rights, alleviate them from unrelated tasks, and lessen their workload. Nonetheless, instances of violating teachers' rights and interests persist as a well-recognized issue. It is worth adding that some teachers mentioned low salaries in this field, additional unpaid duties and a lack of respect for the profession. It is important to note that teachers also expressed the opinion that the school was not well equipped and that they had to pay for some things out of their own pockets. For example, in one interview, a teacher shared the following:

"I strive to work with integrity, yet I find myself having to allocate money for repairs at the end of the year, pay fines for school cleanliness violations, address penalties from the prosecutor's office and provide funds to the regional education department to

move up a category. Besides, to get a job in a school, you need acquaintances and money."

In addition, among the teachers interviewed, there was also an opinion to lower the retirement age for teachers, as the difficulties of the job often lead to health problems and the quality of work decreases over time. For example, one teacher noted the following (survey response):

"Lack of conditions for work, incompetence of school administration and willful decisions of the new director. In Uzbekistan, after fifteen years of continuous work as a teacher, before retirement, a teacher is assigned a category and achievements that are not subject to attestation. In Kyrgyzstan, teachers themselves choose whether to be upgraded or not. In our country, certification ends in strokes and heart attacks. The status of a teacher is only written on paper."

Regarding teachers' unwarranted involvement in extraneous activities outside of their school duties, 53.3% of teachers surveyed in the Kazakh questionnaire noted a decrease in such responsibilities. One of the interviewed teachers (Interview 2) corroborated this finding, stating that previously, the school would often assign teachers to concerts and events without their consent. However, the teacher remarked that thanks to the reform, the frequency of such events, including Saturday work, assemblies, and concerts, has significantly diminished.

However, it is worth noting that some teachers disagreed with the latter and expressed the view that teachers' rights are often violated and that school managers usually stop such facts for non-proliferation. This occurs despite the clear stipulations of the draft law "On the Status of a Teacher," which explicitly prohibits activities unrelated to their professional duties. This opinion is confirmed by the data from the questionnaire of teachers in Russian language, where it was found that only 33.19% of 855 respondents believe that their extracurricular activities have decreased over the last few years.

On the bright side, after reform implementation, required scores for enrolling to pedagogical specialization increased significantly and were accompanied by an increase in stipends for future pedagogogs. A school principal (Interview 6) highlighted a shift in the choice of career paths of fresh graduates. While the brightest students typically preferred to enrol in medical schools before, there is an emerging trend where students choose to become teachers and re-enrol in teaching roles. A similar argument was made by an education expert (Interview 1), who highlighted that students with strong academic backgrounds are enrolling to this field of study. It shows that a more motivated, and better-educated cohort of students pursue the teaching profession. Interestingly, the interview responses align with the statistics of applicants, indicating an increase in the total number of applicants and the share of applicants with a "Golden badge" (a distinction for exemplary grades): 1565 individuals, 20% of the total of 8506 recipients of grants for pedagogical specializations.

Positive changes are also associated with increased salary. When asked about the main results of the reform, teachers stated that the amount of compensation was a primary focus. During the period of reform from 2020 to 2023, teachers' salaries doubled by increments of 25% from the base salary in 2019.

During the interviews, we identified that the workload on teachers, their involvement in mass events, or even the risks of corruption often originated from directives issued by education management. According to the answer of an education expert, there is an emphasis on individuals in management roles adhering to reform requirements:

"Much depends on the individuals, leaders and their readiness to comply with the provision of legislation. Overall, with low legal literacy among individuals and a low level of compliance with legislation, it is challenging to compel people to abide by the rules. Particularly, if they reside in rural areas or remote regions". (Interview 1)

We can see that it becomes difficult to enforce compliance with state directives. Isolation of rural areas from the central government apparatus may contribute to poor implementation of the reforms. Teachers also reported absence of clear communication methods with the government (Interview 2, 7). They can't express their concerns in an effective and transparent manner, without the fear of retaliation or bias. Moreover, teachers encounter difficulty in assessing the extent to which government bodies respond to their inquiries. Even when teachers' responses are addressed, it isn't always clear if this was the result of their actions.

Despite these gloomy findings, it is important to note that 75% of teachers overall reported positive effect of 2019 reforms on teachers' status. While not perfect, persistent challenges in the education system are experienced by a lesser number of teachers than before, indicating certain levels of success.

6. CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Research summary

The education sector in Kazakhstan is presently undergoing a process of modernization, entailing adjustments in educational structure, content, and teacher training, with the objective of aligning with the benchmarks set by developed nations and acknowledging teachers as pivotal figures in the formation of the next generation. This research analyzed the efficiency of the "2019 Education Reforms in Enhancing Teachers' Status" in Kazakhstan, utilizing UNESCO's five main indicators of Teacher's status.

The findings indicate positive changes in development opportunities, entry requirements for students to enter pedagogical specialization and increase in salary. It is important to note that a teacher's status is influenced by factors extending beyond financial compensation. Participants in the study emphasized persisting challenges such as lack of

clear directives, excessive responsibilities and work-life balance issues. Teachers find themselves burdened with numerous responsibilities, encompassing class coordination and extracurricular engagement. This adversely impacts teaching quality, potentially affecting teachers' well-being and the overall educational process. Through this research other factors affecting teachers' status are identified, they are related to local budget spending, active parental involvement and school resource provision.

6.2 Practical implications

The findings of this research can have a broader impact for the education reforms in Kazakhstan, particularly in the public school management system and in increasing teachers' societal status and well-being. This research helps to understand which parts of reforms worked effectively and which parts require further development. Moreover, the difference in perception of reform effectiveness across various groups, like between urban/rural, Kazakh/Russian-speaking teachers and across different subjects could help in understanding a more nuanced picture of the education sphere in Kazakhstan.

6.3 Limitations of the study

First, one significant limitation of our study is that we conducted a survey on the status of teachers in public schools. School principals, whose numbers were retrieved through government websites, were contacted and asked to distribute the survey in two available languages among their school teachers. Regional education departments from Western and Southern Kazakhstan also agreed to distribute surveys. We encountered numerous inquiries from education departments regarding whether teachers' names and other school-related data would be disclosed, which may have deterred certain regions from participating. For example, almost no teachers from Astana and Almaty city completed the survey.

Second, there was a reluctance among many to partake in interviews and provide honest opinions about the reform. When questions were posed regarding teachers' rights or workload, there were instances where concerns were mentioned superficially and with caution, potentially indicating that the true difficulties and problems within schools were not fully expressed.

Third, because of help from regional education departments, respondents from Western and Southern Kazakhstan make up over 80% of the total population, which may have influenced survey results. Moreover, the non-representative sample size may have also resulted in the over-representation of ethnic Kazakh teachers.

6.4 Policy recommendations

Further research on teachers' status in Kazakhstan should include teachers from a varied type of schools, including Nazarbayev Intellectual schools, Bilim-innovation Lyceums and other private schools. This approach is pivotal to gathering insights from the status of teachers across different schools. In our research, we focused only on public teachers from rural and urban areas of Kazakhstan, because "2019 Education Reforms in Enhancing Teachers' Status" specifically targets public school teachers. Our respondents indicated that the following factors might positively influence teachers' status in public schools: active parental involvement, local budget allocation, and school resource provision. Notably, Nazarbayev Intellectual schools, and Bilim-Innovation Lyceums have programs to foster active parental involvement. The introduction of such measures will help to close the gap between private and public schools and help to implement effective management strategies within the school education system in Kazakhstan.

Considering changes after the 2019 reform and the findings of this research, the following policy recommendations are suggested:

First, we recommend strengthening measures to protect teachers' rights, including preventing arbitrary exclusion from employment and other forms of discrimination. The "2019 Education Reforms in Enhancing Teachers' Status" reform highlighted the prohibition of engaging teachers in activities which are not specified in their job responsibilities. According to the reform, no one is entitled to request excessive documents or compel teachers to buy any goods, or services at their own expense. However, regrettably, respondents to our survey indicate otherwise. Hence, to improve the status of teachers, it is important to strengthen measures to protect their rights, in particular, solving cases with collecting funds, unjustified dismissal from jobs, pressure from the side of parents and children, and administrative pressure from school authorities. Establishing a mechanism to protect teachers' rights is deemed crucial. The first step in this direction should be the development and implementation of regulatory frameworks: outlining rights, and responsibilities. This document should encompass guidelines to resolve conflicts that relate to teachers' rights. Furthermore, it is important to provide teachers with training and consultations about their rights. We believe that it is essential to incorporate the topics of legal protection, conflict management and communication skills into the training. During interviews, we observed that teachers encounter difficulty in assessing the extent to which government bodies respond to their inquiries. There is a need for an independent teacher advocacy body that would allow teachers to express their concerns without fear and confidently report any violations.

Second, the government need to develop and implement activities to promote the work-life balance of teachers. Reduction in bureaucratic burdens and streamlining of work processes could contribute to this reduction. Many teachers in public schools undertake multiple roles, such as working as class advisors, methodologists, or deputy principals. In order to relieve teachers, it is important to establish new vacancies for class advisors or

coordinators, similar to those existing in private school systems. It will allow teachers to concentrate more on their primary duties. Additionally, it is important to create a lounge area for teachers, where they can relax during their free time between classes.

Third, to improve the status of teachers in society, it is important to focus on comprehensive measures. Improvements should focus not only on the material conditions but also on the development of professional skills, the creation of a supportive environment and the recognition of the significance of their work. Our findings indicate that teachers require support from school administration and rate continuous professional development as very crucial, which might often go unprioritized by the school administration. Our recommendation would be to allow teachers to indicate areas and topics that they would prefer to study for their professional growth.

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