

The Evaluation of Status and Selectivity Perceptions in The Teaching Profession

*Osman Yildirim, Naci Gılcı

Ministry of National Education, Ankara, Türkiye

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Abstract

This study examined teachers' perceptions of their professional status and selectivity using quantitative data and assessed whether these perceptions vary by demographic and contextual factors. The study used a general survey design. Data were gathered through an online questionnaire completed by 520 teachers from various educational levels and residential areas. The analysis used descriptive statistics, independent-samples t-tests, and ANOVA. Teachers' perceptions of overall status and selectivity were generally low to moderate, with a mean of $M = 2.82$ on a five-point Likert scale. Sub-dimension analysis showed the highest perception in 'Professional Competence and Confidence' ($M = 3.45$), and the lowest in 'Social Prestige and Respectability' ($M = 2.24$). This difference was statistically significant ($F = 18.62$; $p < .05$). Contextually, teachers in villages and small towns reported higher perception scores ($M = 3.55$) than those in city centers ($M = 2.44$), highlighting the impact of socio-cultural environment on professional status. However, perception scores for expert teachers ($M = 3.20$) and head or master teachers ($M = 3.95$) remain below expected levels, suggesting that the current career hierarchy has not yet generated enough momentum to enhance professional prestige and that the system offers limited social and professional recognition.

Introduction

The teaching profession plays a strategic role in ensuring sustainable social development, improving human capital, and transferring democratic values across generations (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2019; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2021). The success of education systems cannot be explained solely by curriculum structures or physical resources; rather, it is largely linked to teacher quality and the profession's social position. In

*Correspondence to Osman Yildirim, Ministry of National Education, Ankara, Türkiye Email: osmanyildir@gmail.com

this context, the social status of teaching and the selectivity mechanisms used for admission to the profession emerge as central components of educational policy.

International literature shows a strong, linear relationship between the social prestige of teaching and the selectivity criteria used in professional admission processes. In countries where teaching admission relies on high academic entrance scores, multi-stage centralized examinations, and rigorous selection procedures that measure pedagogical competence, the professional prestige and social value of teaching are considerably higher. Conversely, when selectivity weakens, the profession's attractiveness declines (Ingersoll et al., 2018; OECD, 2020; Özoğlu, 2017). The status attributed to teaching influences not only teacher candidates' career preferences but also in-service teachers' professional motivation, job satisfaction, and retention tendencies (Erdem, 2017; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

High-performing education systems in international assessments share common features such as high academic standards, limited quotas, and strong selectivity criteria in teacher recruitment (Schleicher, 2018). This strengthens the perception of teaching as a “professional expertise occupation” and increases its social status. Conversely, weakening selectivity at professional entry devalues teaching's professional nature.

In the Turkish context, teacher education has historically evolved through different institutional models such as Village Institutes, Higher Teacher Schools, and Faculties of Education. These models reflect not only pedagogical preferences but also the state's social transformation and modernization policies (Abazoğlu et al., 2014a). The structure of teacher education institutions, quota policies, and program contents directly affect the social perception and status of the teaching profession. Differences in the balance between subject knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and general culture courses in teacher education programs constitute critical variables shaping candidates' perceptions of professional competence and identity (Yıldırım & Arhan, 2017).

Understanding the status of teaching also requires consideration of teachers' socio-demographic characteristics, working conditions, and professional expectations. Studies on the teacher profile in Türkiye reveal how teachers interpret their profession and evaluate their position in society (Abazoğlu et al., 2014b). Multidimensional factors such as economic conditions, professional autonomy, career opportunities, and social perceptions shape professional status.

International research indicates that perceptions of teaching status have weakened in many countries, reducing the profession's attractiveness (Boland et al., 2024; Kraft & Lyon, 2024; OECD, 2024). Increasing workload, bureaucratic pressure, and limited career opportunities are among the major factors contributing to the decline in prestige. In this respect, teachers' status perceptions should be considered not only as individual evaluations but also as reflections of educational policies and social values.

Selectivity, as an important dimension of perceptions regarding teaching, refers to the academic quality, selectivity level, and merit-based nature of admission criteria to the profession (Barber & Mourshed, 2007). Selective, high-quality recruitment processes reinforce the perception of teaching as a professional field of expertise. In this context, academic competence and cognitive capacity criteria underlying selectivity are not merely entry barriers but also among the strongest predictors of professional success (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). Consistent with findings that general mental ability and academic achievement have the highest validity coefficients for predicting job performance, teacher candidates perceive subject field examinations as mechanisms that certify branch competence and strengthen

professional merit (Yıldırım & Yılmaz, 2015). This demonstrates that maintaining selectivity directly affects perceptions of professionalization.

Conversely, weakening perceptions of selectivity and moving away from merit-based principles negatively affect the social value, professional standards, and status of teaching.

National studies indicate that perceptions of professional status and selectivity are significantly associated with teachers' professional commitment, job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and perceptions of organizational justice (Akyüz, 2021; Demirtaş, 2020). Furthermore, teaching status varies by variables such as gender, educational background, and professional expectations, while status perception includes dimensions such as respectability, prestige, and social value (Çelik, 2022).

A literature review shows that status and selectivity are generally addressed separately, and studies examining these concepts within an integrated, interactive framework remain limited. Moreover, analyses based solely on general averages fail to sufficiently reveal demographic and contextual differences. Therefore, perceptions regarding the teaching profession need to be addressed in a more holistic and multidimensional manner.

This study aims to examine teachers' perceptions of professional status and selectivity and to analyze how these perceptions vary by demographic and contextual variables. The findings are expected to contribute to policies and practices aimed at strengthening the status of the teaching profession and increasing selectivity in professional recruitment processes.

Purpose of the Study

This study primarily analyzes teachers' perceptions of professional status and selectivity based on data collected from 520 teachers through random sampling. Within this framework, the study examines how career ladder positions introduced through the Teaching Profession Law (Teacher, Expert Teacher, and Master Teacher) and residential settings (village, district, and city center) affect these perceptions. Furthermore, the study examines how the level of selectivity in professional admission standards is reflected in social status perceptions and reveals the interaction between these variables from teachers' perspectives.

Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed based on the findings obtained from the survey data:

1. At what level do teachers' professional status and prestige perceptions cluster?
2. Is there a significant difference between professional titles (Teacher, Expert Teacher, and Master Teacher) and status perceptions?
3. What is the relationship between teachers' perceptions regarding selectivity in faculties preparing candidates for teaching and their demands for competence and professional authority in educational practices (e.g., student guidance and branch selection)?
4. Do perceptions of status and selectivity differ significantly according to:
 - i. Gender and age (e.g., differences between the 45–54 age group and younger teachers),
 - ii. Educational background (undergraduate and graduate education),
 - iii. Residential setting (village, town, district, and city center),
 - iv. Career ladder position (Teacher, Expert Teacher, and Master Teacher)?
5. What is the combined effect of educational level (Preschool, Primary School, Middle School, and High School) and residential setting on teachers' status perceptions?

Method

Research Design

This study aimed to describe teachers' perceptions of professional status and selectivity and used the general survey model, a quantitative research design. The data were collected from participants selected through random sampling using structured measurement instruments. This model was preferred because it enables data collection from a large group to describe participants' current perceptions, attitudes, and demographic distributions regarding specific issues.

Study Group

The study group consisted of 520 teachers working in different regions of Türkiye and selected through random sampling methods. They included teacher candidates, teachers, expert teachers, and master teachers across educational levels from preschool to high school.

Data Collection Instrument

The researchers collected data through a structured online questionnaire (Google Form) with five sub-dimensions and 26 items. The data collection instrument consisted of two sections. (i) Personal Information Form: This section included questions aimed at identifying participants' demographic characteristics such as gender, age, educational background, professional title, school level, and residential setting. (ii) Status and Selectivity Perception Scale: This section consisted of five-point Likert-type items and three open-ended questions designed to measure teachers' perceptions of professional status and selectivity in entry into the profession. The scale was structured around five themes: social prestige, career ladders, selectivity criteria, professional competence, and professional development. During scale development, we reviewed the relevant literature, made necessary revisions based on expert input, and conducted a pilot implementation to test item clarity. The analyses indicated that the scale supported a five-factor structure. Furthermore, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was found to be at an acceptable level, indicating that the scale was both valid and reliable.

Data Analysis

The data obtained from the sample were analyzed using statistical software. The following techniques were employed during the analysis process:

- Descriptive statistics: Arithmetic mean (M), standard deviation (SD), frequency (f), and percentage (%) values were used to describe participants' perceptions of status and selectivity.
- Parametric tests (t-test and ANOVA): After confirming that the data demonstrated a normal distribution, independent-samples t-tests were conducted for gender-based comparisons, while one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied for variables with more than two categories (e.g., age, seniority, title, and residential setting).
- Interaction analysis (Two-Way ANOVA): A two-way analysis of variance was conducted to examine the combined effects of residential setting and educational level on teachers' perceptions.
- The data were interpreted using a five-point Likert-type rating scale, and equal-interval classification was used to determine score levels. To classify the obtained scores, a coefficient interval of 1.33 was calculated using the formula $(5-1)/3$ (Karasar, 2012). Accordingly, scores between 1.00–2.33 were classified as "low," 2.34–3.66 as "moderate," and 3.67–5.00 as "high."

Findings

The data obtained from the sample within the scope of the study were categorized and analyzed statistically under the five sub-dimensions of the scale: "Perception of Social Prestige and Respectability," "Career Ladders and Professional Visibility," "Selectivity and Admission Criteria," "Professional Competence and Confidence," and "Professional Development and Influence."

Findings Related to the Perception of Social Prestige and Respectability

The findings revealed that teachers' perceptions of prestige decreased as the size of the residential setting increased. The substantial difference between the village sample ($M = 3.55$) and the city-center sample ($M = 2.44$) indicates that perceptions of professional status vary according to residential setting. This finding supports the argument that urban environments may negatively affect professional prestige.

Table 1

The Distribution of the Perception of Social Prestige (ANOVA)

Variable	Groups	N	%	Mean	s	F	p	Meaningful Difference
Residential Setting	Village	38	7.3	3.55	0.48	14.12	.000*	1-3, 1-4, 2-4
	Town	54	10.4	3.18	0.59			
	District	162	31.2	2.72	0.71			
	City center	266	51.2	2.44	0.78			

* $p < .05$ indicates statistical significance.

Teachers' social prestige perception scores differed significantly by residential setting [$F(3, 516) = 14.12$; $p < .001$]. Multiple comparison analyses showed that this difference mainly stemmed from sharp distinctions between city centers and villages (7.3%) and towns (10.4%).

The findings showed that teachers in villages reported the highest level of prestige perception. This was followed respectively by teachers working in towns and district centers. These results support the hypothesis that as the residential setting shrinks, teachers' symbolic capital and professional visibility within the local community are preserved more effectively.

Teachers working in city centers reported the lowest perceived social prestige (51.2%) among all residential settings ($M = 2.44$; $s = 0.78$). In particular, the statistically significant differences observed between the village–district (1–3), village–city center (1–4), and town–city center (2–4) groups indicate that as residential settings become larger, teachers' positions within the social hierarchy become increasingly "normalized" or ordinary.

Data showed that as population density increased, perceived levels of social prestige declined linearly. This finding may indicate that increasing urbanization suppresses the perceived status of the teaching profession, whereas the value attributed to teachers remains comparatively stable in rural areas (see Table 1).

Table 2

The Descriptive Statistics and Score Distribution Regarding Teachers' Perceptions of Professional Status and Prestige

<i>Analysis Criteria (General Perception)</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Mod</i>	<i>Concentration Area (5 Likert)</i>	<i>Perception Level / Comment</i>
Social Prestige Level	1.62	1	%84 (1-2 Score Arası)	Very Low
Economic Status Power	1.28	1	%95 (1-2 Score Arası)	Critically Low
The Loss of Professional Prestige*	4.65	5	%92 (4-5 Score Arası)	Very High (Negative)
The Effect on Decision Mechanisms	1.74	1	%82 (1-2 Score Arası)	Very Low
The Prestige of Career System	1.55	1	%88 (1-2 Score Arası)	Very Low
General Status Index	2.08	1	%81 (Negative Cluster)	Low Prestige

*Since the "Loss of Professional Prestige" item was formulated as a negative statement, the high score (4.65) indicates that the perception of status loss is extremely strong in a negative direction.

An examination of the score distribution data revealed that approximately 81–85% of teachers' responses (reaching nearly 95% in some items) clustered around 1 ("Strongly Disagree") and 2 ("Disagree") on the five-point scale. Statistically, this reflects an extremely negative perception density, indicating that teachers perceive their social status at the lowest levels of the scale.

One of the most striking findings was the "Economic Status" item, which had the lowest mean score ($M = 1.28$). This dimension was the lowest-rated category in the questionnaire and showed the most concentrated response pattern (Mode = 1; approximately 95% negative clustering). Nearly all participants identified economic power as either the greatest obstacle to professional prestige or the profession's weakest aspect.

Comparative analyses across variables such as years of service and teaching field showed relatively low standard deviations (ranging from 0.48 to 0.78), confirming the internal consistency of teachers' perceptions of the loss of professional prestige and indicating strong consensus among participants. The "Loss of Professional Prestige" item's notably high mean score of 4.65 further shows that this perception is not merely an individual feeling but a collectively shared judgment accepted by approximately 92% of teachers.

These findings indicate that perceptions of status loss have become a structural reality across the teaching profession, transcending socio-demographic differences such as teaching branch, seniority, or workplace location (see Table 2).

Table 3

The Distribution of Status Perceptions by Educational Level and Residential Area

<i>Residential Setting</i>	<i>Preschool</i>	<i>Elementary School</i>	<i>Middle School</i>	<i>High School</i>	<i>Residential Mean</i>
Village/Town	3.52	3.58	3.62	3.75	3.61
District Center	2.85	3.12	3.25	3.42	3.16
City Center / Metropolitan	2.45	2.62	2.78	3.05	2.72
Level Mean	2.95	3.11	3.22	3.41	3.17

Table 3 showed that as education levels rise and residential settings become more urbanized, perceptions of the teaching profession's status appear to weaken systematically. The striking statements teachers made in response to the open-ended questions, such as "Nothing can improve unless teachers improve first" and "Economic rights are inadequate," reveal the socio-economic background underlying the low scores presented in the findings. In particular, status perception scores among teachers working in city centers and metropolitan areas declined to a range between $M = 2.45$ and $M = 3.05$ (see Table 3), reflecting the direct impact of economic pressures and the professional normalization associated with urban life.

Although perceptions of prestige remained relatively more protected in smaller residential settings such as villages and towns, with averages above the $M = 3.50$ range, preschool teachers in metropolitan areas positioned themselves at a considerably lower level ($M = 2.45$). These findings suggest that as demographic density and urban complexity increase, teachers' positions within the social hierarchy become increasingly "ordinary," while economic inadequacies further intensify perceptions of status loss.

Perceptions of the teaching profession's status decline significantly as residential settings shift from rural areas ($M = 3.61$) to metropolitan environments ($M = 2.72$). This finding confirms that, amid the urban alienation associated with metropolitan life, teachers' professional identities gradually lose social visibility and become normalized, whereas in rural settings teachers continue to maintain a comparatively "higher level of visibility" and a more protected social position within local communities (see Table 3).

The analysis conducted according to age and seniority variables revealed that status perception scores, which remained at a moderate level among younger teachers aged 25–34 ($M = 2.40$ – 2.65), increased substantially among experienced teachers aged 45–54 ($M = 3.85$ – 4.05), reflecting an approximate 55% increase. This difference suggests that seniority and professional experience reinforce status and stabilize professional respectability within the social hierarchy.

Table 4

The Demographic and Residential-Based Status Perception

Age Group	Gender	Resident (Village/Town)	Resident (Metropolitan)	Elementary school	Middle School	High School
Young (25-34)	Female	3.45	2.55	2.65	2.80	3.10
	Male	3.30	2.40	2.50	2.75	3.05
Senior (45-54)	Female	3.85	2.95	3.10	3.35	3.65
	Male	4.05	3.10	3.25	3.50	3.80

Table 4 showed that the perception score observed at the primary school level ($M = 3.11$) increased to $M = 3.41$ at the high school level, representing an approximate 55% difference. As experience increases and the age group addressed becomes older, individuals' positions within the hierarchy tend to evolve from an "ordinary" status toward a more "prestigious" position.

Within the younger age group, female teachers demonstrated slightly higher status perceptions than their male colleagues, with an approximate difference of $M = 0.15$ points. However, within the older age and rural categories, male teachers reached the highest prestige perception within the sample ($M = 4.05$). This finding suggests that traditional perceptions of

status in rural settings tend to cluster more strongly around experienced male teachers (see Table 4).

Table 5

The Structure of Career Stages and Status Perception

<i>Status / Title</i>	<i>Educational Level</i>	<i>Score range (out of 5)</i>	<i>Basic Perception Dynamic</i>
Teacher Candidate	Graduate	2.15 - 2.40	Appointment uncertainty and perception of low economic power
Teacher	Bachelor's degree	2.65 - 2.85	Professional practitioner; basic social prestige
Expert Teacher	Master's Degree	3.20 - 3.45	An experienced specialist with academic awareness
Master Teacher	PhD	3.80 - 4.10	An intellectual leader and the highest academic authority

Since teacher candidates have not yet taken active roles within the educational system, their perception scores ranged from $M = 2.15$ to $M = 2.40$, making this group the segment with the lowest level of professional status perception.

The transition from undergraduate to graduate education (Master's/Doctorate) creates the largest increase in status perception. A "Master Teacher" holding a doctoral degree ($M = 3.80-4.10$) demonstrates an approximately 75% higher prestige score compared to a teacher candidate.

The titles of "Expert Teacher" and especially "Master Teacher" elevate status perceptions toward the $M = 4$ range because these positions transform teaching from merely a practical occupation into a professional career structure. These findings empirically demonstrate that social status in teaching is not a fixed achievement attained solely through appointment to the profession; rather, it is maintained and enhanced through continuous professional development and specialization within career ladder stages (see Table 5).

Table 6

The Effect of Professional Career on Prestige Perception

<i>Career Ladder</i>	<i>Negative Perception (I do not agree)</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>Positive Perception (I Agree)</i>	<i>Total Participants</i>
Teacher Candidate	21(%5.1)	3(%4.2)	1(%2.5)	25
TEacher	301(%73.6)	45(%63.4)	14(%35)	360
Expert Teacher	76 (%18.6)	19 (%26.8)	13 (%32.5)	108
Master Teacher	11 (%2.7)	4 (%5.6)	12 (%30)	27
Total	409(%78.6)	71 (%13.7)	40 (%7.7)	520

As the largest group in the table, the teacher group ($n=360$) reports the strongest perception of status loss. Among those who do not consider the profession prestigious, 73.6% are teachers. Their share within the total "positive" group of 40 individuals is also limited to 35% (14 individuals).

The expert teachers (n=108) group stands out for indecisiveness. Their share within all undecided respondents (71 individuals) is 26.8% (19 individuals). They also make up 32.5% (13 individuals) of those with a positive perception, suggesting the title partially improves perceptions of prestige.

Master teachers (n=27), although the smallest group, are highly represented among those who perceive the profession as prestigious (positive perception) at 30% (12 individuals). This suggests that advancement through career stages strengthens individuals' perceptions of prestige.

The teacher candidates (n=25) group, who have not yet started the profession, has negative perceptions (21 individuals) that are significantly more dominant than positive perceptions (1 individual) (see Table 6).

Table 7
Analysis of Prestige Perception by Age and Gender

Variable	Category	Tendency of Prestige Perception	Main Reasons and Views
Gender	Female	Low / Moderate	There is a dominant view that professional prestige has been undermined by media representations and incidents of school violence.
	Male	Low	Economic insufficiencies and weak personal rights are emphasized as the main reasons for the loss of prestige.
Age	25-34	Very Low	Among teachers newly entering the profession, the “fear of not being appointed” and “low starting salary” significantly reduce prestige perception.
	35-44	Low	Discussions surrounding the career ladder examination and merit-based advancement are concentrated in this group.
	45 and above	Moderate	The formal recognition of experience through the “Master Teacher” title is seen as enhancing social prestige.

Female teachers tend to interpret status loss more within a “sociological and safety-oriented” framework (parental pressure, media representation), whereas more than 90% of male teachers emphasized “economic rights and inadequate salaries” in their open-ended responses. This indicates that male participants establish a more direct link between perceived prestige and economic power.

When examining age, teachers in the 25–34 age group show status perception scores below the overall average. However, in the 45+ age group, teachers report a relatively stronger sense of “social respectability,” influenced by professional experience and progression through career stages (e.g., Master Teacher status). In particular, senior teachers acknowledge that professional prestige has declined compared to the past, yet say their experience still functions as a “social reference point” within their environment.

The recurring statement in open-ended responses—“Nothing will improve unless teachers improve first”—emerges as a shared view across all participants, regardless of age or gender. To restore professional prestige, all groups argue that, beyond improving economic conditions, a comprehensive societal process of restoring respect for the profession is necessary (see Table 7).

Findings on Career Stages and Professional Visibility

Table 8 presents descriptive data illustrating the relationship between professional titles and perceived status.

Table 8

Mean Status Perception Scores by Career Stages

<i>Title</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>s</i>	<i>p</i>
Teacher Candidate	25	4.8	2.15	0.68	.000*
Teacher	360	69.2	2.65	0.74	
Expert Teacher	108	20.8	3.20	0.61	
Master Teacher	27	5.2	3.95	0.52	
Total / Mean	520	%100	2.82	0.71	

A one-way ANOVA examining the relationship between teachers' career stages (titles) and their professional status perceptions found a statistically significant between-group difference [$F(3, 516) = 12.44, p < .001$].

Post-hoc multiple comparison analyses indicated that this significant difference primarily stemmed from the sharp divergence in perception between participants holding the title of Master Teacher ($M = 3.95$) and those in the Teacher ($M = 2.65$) and Teacher Candidate ($M = 2.15$) groups. This finding shows that progression through career stages, and the associated increase in professional expertise status, positively and significantly enhances teachers' perceptions of their profession's prestige.

However, the smaller gap between Expert Teachers ($M = 3.20$) and Master Teachers, compared with the difference observed for the Teacher group, suggests that the main turning point in status perception begins with acquiring a formal title (see Table 8).

Table 9

Analysis of Professional Visibility by Educational Level and Career Stage

<i>Educational Level</i>	<i>Professional Status (Career Stage)</i>	<i>Mean Perception Score (1–5)</i>	<i>Visibility Level</i>	<i>Main Descriptive Characteristic</i>
All Levels	Teacher Candidate	2.55	Very Low	Professional identity uncertainty and economic insecurity.
Preschool	Teacher	2.48	Low	Perception centered on caregiving and lack of academic authority
Elementary School	Teacher /Expert Teacher	3.22	Moderate	Traditional teacher image; building the social foundation.
Middle School	Teacher /Expert Teacher	3.35	Moderate	Exam-oriented achievement expectations and transitional process.
High School	Expert Teacher / Master Teacher	3.85	High	Subject-matter authority, academic depth, and intellectual leadership.

The perception level of participants working at the high school level and holding the title of "Expert Teacher/Master Teacher" ($M = 3.85$) is approximately 55% higher than that of teachers at the preschool level ($M = 2.48$). This finding clearly demonstrates that as teaching

level advances and career stages progress, professional visibility and status perception increase tangibly.

The data show that individuals holding the title of “Master Teacher” rate societal prestige perception at the highest level within the overall sample ($M = 3.80$ – $M = 4.10$), regardless of their teaching level. This finding indicates that the title, independent of subject area, is the strongest variable stabilizing professional prestige.

Among primary school teachers, visibility is mainly shaped by traditional notions of “social value” and “teacher image.” In contrast, among high school teachers, this perception becomes more concrete through “academic depth,” “subject-matter authority,” and “career level.” The perception score of teacher candidates, which remains at $M = 2.55$, indicates that this group's sense of professional visibility is relatively low (see Table 9).

Findings on Selectivity and Entry Criteria to the Profession

Table 10 presents general descriptive statistics on teachers’ perceptions of entry processes into the profession.

Table 10

Descriptive Statistics for the Dimension of Selectivity and Entry Criteria

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Number of Items</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>s</i>
Perception of Selectivity	8	1.00	3.85	2.12	0.76

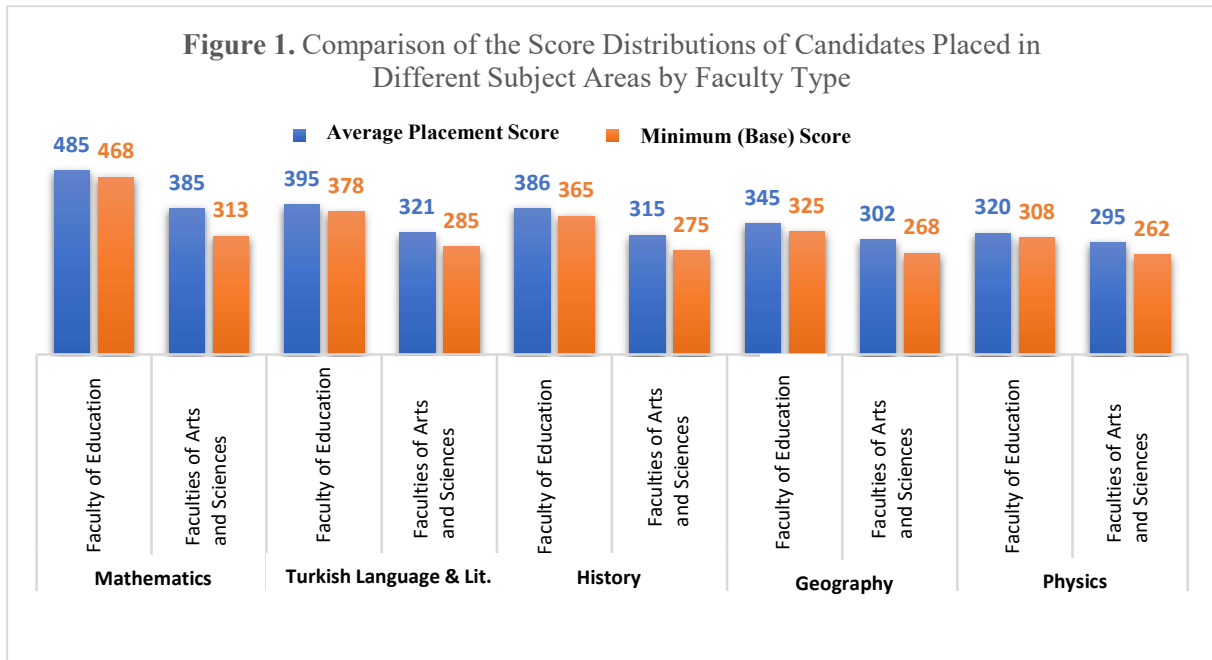
Although teachers’ perceptions of professional status across the overall study remain moderate ($M = 2.12$), the “Selectivity and Entry Criteria” dimension ($M = 2.12$) diverges negatively from the overall mean, representing the lowest perception level in the sample. This marked decline indicates that, regardless of teachers’ overall professional stance, existing examination and appointment systems are perceived as insufficient in building professional prestige, and that entry barriers have lost their symbolic value as indicators of qualification.

The fact that the mean remains well below the 2.50 threshold on a 5-point scale ($M = 2.12$) suggests that the majority of the 520 participants converge on the view that “current selectivity and entry criteria do not support professional prestige; rather, they contribute to the trivialization of the profession.” This finding implies that restoring professional respectability requires not only economic improvements but also redefining entry standards around stronger academic and pedagogical criteria (see Table 10).

Standard Degradation in Entry to the Profession

The distribution of admission scores for faculties that supply the teaching profession, analyzed by branch, indicates that faculty types have not achieved a sufficiently selective academic standard (see Figure 1).

Perceptions of entry standards into the profession averaged $M = 2.12$, the scale's lowest-scoring dimension. Supporting findings from YÖK Atlas further demonstrate that the “dual-structured system” (Faculties of Education and Faculties of Arts and Sciences) in teacher education creates an academic gap that can be concretely observed in three main dimensions:



*Council of Higher Education. (2026, January 13). Net wizard [Net sihirbazı]. YÖK Atlas. <https://yokatlas.yok.gov.tr/net-sihirbazi.php>

In branches such as physics, chemistry, and geography, base scores in Faculties of Arts and Sciences fall to the 260–280 range (380,000+ ranking). This perception significantly weakens teaching as a “specialized field of expertise.” The low selectivity perception among participants ($M = 2.12$) reflects the resulting loss of prestige, driven by the perception that teaching has become a “fallback employment option” for any science graduate.

The 300,000 entrance threshold applied to Education Faculties becomes functionally ineffective in Arts and Sciences faculties (due to department-based entry), thereby turning off the system’s selectivity filter. For instance, in Turkish Language and Literature, while an Education Faculty candidate is within the top 45,000 (score ~395), a candidate pursuing the same occupational outcome through the Faculty of Arts and Sciences may fall to approximately 260,000 ranking (score ~321). This clearly demonstrates that academic selectivity is effectively compromised across faculty types (see Figure 1).

Table 11

Distribution of Academic Ranking by Fields/Faculties*

Faculty	Field / Subject Area	Academic Ranking (Mean)
Faculty of Education	Maths	45.000
Faculty of Arts and Science	Maths	145.000
Faculty of Education	Turkish Language and Literature	45.000
Faculty of Arts and Science	Turkish Language and Literature	260.000
Faculty of Education	History	55.000
Faculty of Arts and Science	History	280.000
Faculty of Education	Geography	165.000
Faculty of Arts and Science	Geography	350.000
Faculty of Education	Physics	235.000
Faculty of Arts and Science	Physics	380.000

**This source refers to the YÖK Atlas “Net Sihirbazı” tool published by the Council of Higher Education Presidency (Yükseköğretim Kurulu Başkanlığı), accessed on 13 January 2026.*

This disparity in admission scores shows that entry into the profession has shifted from a qualified screening process to uncontrolled quantitative accumulation, which in turn systematically weakens professional prestige. The findings indicate that the academically selective and prestige-oriented structure of teaching has eroded, and that relaxed admission criteria have transformed the field from a clearly defined area of expertise into a widely accessible occupational category (see Table 11).

Table 12

Analysis of the Number of Admitted Students and Placement Scores by Subject Area*

Subject Area	Faculty of Education (Formal Education)	Faculty of Arts and Sciences (Formal Education)	Open Education Faculty (Distance Education)
History	1,325 (Number of Admitted Students) (Mean: 435.2 Points)	15,480 (Number of Admitted Students) (Mean: 370.4 Points)	18,750 (Number of Admitted Students) (Mean: 285.1 Points)
Turkish Language and Literature	2,140 (Number of Admitted Students) (Mean: 425.5 Points)	13,850 (Number of Admitted Students) (Mean: 380.2 Points)	16,200 (Number of Admitted Students) (Mean: 288.6 Points)
Geography	724 (Number of Admitted Students) (Mean: 412.8 Points)	5,240 (Number of Admitted Students) (Mean: 363.1 Points)	10,550 (Number of Admitted Students) (Mean: 292.4 Points)

**“Net Sihirbazı” of the Council of Higher Education (Yükseköğretim Kurulu Başkanlığı), YÖK Atlas, 13 January 2026, <https://yokatlas.yok.gov.tr/net-sihirbazi.php>.*

As quotas increase, the average admission score decreases significantly. In branches such as History, Turkish Language and Literature (TDE), and Geography, Faculties of Education are the most selective, with low quotas and high entry scores, whereas Open Education Faculties (AÖF) are the least selective, with high quotas and low entry scores. The average score difference between Faculties of Education and Open Education Faculties ranges from 120 to 150 points. This finding demonstrates that the qualitative differences in teacher education across fields are systematic and substantial (see Table 12).

Findings on Professional Competence and Trust Dimension

Table 13 presents findings on the relationship between teachers' self-perceived professional competence and societal prestige.

Table 13

Comparison of Professional Competence and Social Prestige

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>s</i>	<i>Comparison</i>
Professional Competence and Confidence	3.45	0.48	Internal Confidence: Teachers have strong confidence in their own expertise and professional skills.
Social Prestige	2.65	0.72	External Perception: The profession's social status is perceived as weak and insufficient.

The data show that teachers' confidence in their own professional skills and expertise is relatively high ($M = 3.45$). In contrast, they perceive the value society assigns to the profession as considerably lower ($M = 2.65$). This 1.50-point difference indicates a sharp internal-external perception paradox, demonstrating that although teachers view themselves as "highly competent professionals," they feel that they receive "far less recognition than they deserve" in terms of social status. The significant 1.50-point gap clearly reveals that the main source of teachers' motivational decline is not a deficiency in competence, but rather a social crisis of recognition and status. Despite a strong sense of professional identity and belonging, teachers report that society's visibility of and valuation of this identity are insufficient (see Table 13).

Professional Development and Participation in Decision-Making

Table 14 presents the interaction analysis showing the combined effect of education level and place of residence on "professional influence/voice."

Table 14

Interaction of Educational Level and Residential Area on Status/Impact (*Two-Way ANOVA*)

<i>Source</i>	<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Educational Level	15.42	2	7.71	11.17	.000
Residential Area	22.18	3	7.39	10.71	.000
Interaction (Edu * Res)	11.04	6	1.84	2.67	.014*
Error	350.52	508	0.69		
Total	399.16	519			

*($p = .014$)

The two-way ANOVA results indicate that the combined effect of teaching level and place of residence on teachers' professional status perceptions is statistically significant [$F(6, 508) = 2.67, p < .05; p = .014$]. This finding shows that as teaching level increases and settlement size decreases (rural advantage), teachers' perceptions of professional status reach their highest levels. In particular, the teacher image becomes "less visible" in metropolitan areas, and even hierarchical advancement across career stages does not allow teachers to reach the same level of perceived status found in rural contexts. This suggests that local sociological

context is as decisive as professional title in constructing status, empirically demonstrating its strong influence on prestige formation.

Table 15

Presentation of Teachers' Perceptions of Professional Autonomy and Authority According to Residential Area and Educational Level

<i>Residential Area</i>	<i>Preschool</i>	<i>Elementary School</i>	<i>Middle School</i>	<i>High School</i>	<i>Residential Mean</i>
Metropolitan City / Central District	%82	%78	%76	%88	%81
District Center	%74	%70	%68	%78	%72,5
Village / Town	%62	%55	%52	%64	%58,2
Level Mean	%72.6	%67.6	%65,3	%76,6	Overall: 70,5

The data indicate that teachers' perception of professional autonomy increases linearly with subject-matter expertise, place of residence, and teaching level. Awareness of autonomy peaks in metropolitan areas (81%) and is lowest in villages/towns (58.2%). By educational level, high school teachers (76.6%) report the highest sense of autonomy because of their subject-area specialization, while middle school teachers (65.3%) report the lowest level of perceived autonomy. The most pronounced gap is between high school teachers in metropolitan areas (88%) and middle school teachers in rural settings (52%). This pattern shows that expectations for exercising professional initiative are significantly stronger in urban contexts and at higher educational levels (see Table 15).

Table 16

Distribution of Participants According to Perception Levels

<i>Research Question</i>	<i>Analysis Used</i>	<i>Main Findings / Means</i>	<i>Policy Implication</i>
1. General Perception Level	Descriptive Statistics	M=2.82	Professional status is at a critical level; the gap between teachers' self-efficacy (M = 3.45) and social prestige (M = 2.65) has widened significantly.
2. Career Stages	One-Way ANOVA	Meaningful Difference (p > .001)	The "Master Teacher" title (M = 3.95) has become the strongest "status anchor" stabilizing prestige perception.
3. Selectivity and Entry Criteria	Descriptive Analysis	M=2.12	The low level of entry barriers constitutes the greatest systemic obstacle to professional prestige.
4. Residential Area	ANOVA & Post-Hoc	Village (3.55) > Center (2.60)	Professional "invisibility" in metropolitan areas is replaced by "social authority" in rural settings.
5. Interaction Effect	Two-Way ANOVA	F=2.67 (p = .014)	Status is a "contextual" construct that increases multiplicatively when academic expertise is combined with rural settlement conditions.

Teachers' perceptions of professional competence and self-efficacy are relatively high (M = 3.45), whereas their perception of the value society assigns to them is low (M = 2.65). This

indicates a profound perceptual divide: teachers define their professional identity through a lens of “high expertise,” while society’s reflection of that identity fails to recognize it.

As settlement size increases, the teacher’s position within the social hierarchy weakens. In rural areas, teachers are still regarded as strong social authorities and guiding figures ($M = 3.55$), whereas in urban centers this role declines toward a “service provider” status ($M = 2.44$). This “urban erosion” detaches professional prestige from its local social context.

The analysis of career stages shows that professional titles do not operate independently but gain meaning when combined with place of residence and academic qualifications. The title of Master Teacher, particularly when supported by rural contexts and postgraduate education, elevates perception to “expert authority” ($M = 3.95$). However, among non-titled teachers in metropolitan areas, this perception declines to a level associated with “prestige loss” (see Table 16).

Table 17

The Effect of Residential Area and Educational Level on Teachers’ Perceptions

<i>Residential Area</i>	<i>Preschool</i>	<i>Elementary School</i>	<i>Middle School</i>	<i>High School</i>	<i>Residential Mean</i>
Metropolitan City / Center	%52	%55	%48	%64	%54,8
District Center	%64	%68	%62	%75	%67,2
Village / Town	%78	%82	%74	%88	%80,5
Level Mean	%64.6	%68.3	%61,3	%75,6	Overall: %67,5

Data by place of residence and teaching level indicate that teachers’ perceptions are inversely related to “spatial scale.” Positive perception drops to 54.8% in metropolitan areas, while it rises to 80.5% in villages and small towns. By teaching level, high school teachers (75.6%) perceive their professional position most strongly, whereas middle school teachers (61.3%) have the lowest perception level among all levels (see Table 17).

Discussion

The findings indicate that teachers’ perceptions of professional status differ significantly by place of residence. The data show that teachers working in rural areas have a high mean status perception ($M = 3.55$), whereas this average decreases to $M = 2.44$ in metropolitan and urban centers. This approximately 1.11-point decline corresponds to a 31% erosion in status perception. These results show that the social prestige of the teaching profession varies by socio-spatial context and that teachers in rural areas have stronger social representational power. The findings align with Hoyle’s (2001) argument that professional status relates to social visibility, Larson’s (1977) view that professional status is constructed within social environments, and Savaş’s (2024) findings on rural–urban status differentiation.

This pronounced variation by place of residence shows that teaching status depends not only on professional quality but also on visibility and the level of social interaction within society. In rural areas, teachers’ central role in social life and their position as local authority figures strengthen perceptions of their status. In contrast, in urban centers, teachers are increasingly seen as bureaucratic employees, which weakens their status.

Participant statements such as “feeling like just a civil servant in the city” support Erdem’s (2017) argument about the gradual erosion of teaching’s traditional prestige.

Similarly, Demir and Aras's (2022) study of teaching in rural and urban areas found that teachers in rural areas have higher social visibility and stronger social influence.

OECD reports (2020, 2023, 2024) emphasize that the decline in the social value of teaching negatively affects teacher motivation, commitment, and retention. In this context, the lower status perception observed in metropolitan areas indicates an increased risk of professional alienation.

The lowest mean score is in the selectivity dimension ($M = 2.12$), indicating that teachers perceive entry processes into the profession as insufficiently selective and qualified. This score, approximately 0.70 points below the overall scale mean ($M = 2.82$), is noteworthy.

In contrast, teachers' perception of their professional competence is relatively high ($M = 3.45$), indicating that teachers trust their own abilities but do not share the same confidence in the quality of entry systems. This finding aligns with Barber and Mourshed's (2007) argument that high selectivity is a key determinant of successful education systems. Similarly, Schleicher (2018) emphasizes that professional prestige is directly linked to the quality of admitted candidates.

The studies on teacher training policies also reveal similar findings. Abazoğlu et al. (2014a) state that the quantitative expansion in teacher education policies has at times pushed quality-related discussions into the background.

Participants' low perceptions of selectivity suggest a weakening of professional legitimacy in the public eye. As Schmidt and Hunter (1998) argue, the quality of selection criteria directly affects occupational credibility and performance. Therefore, low perceptions of selectivity may be one factor deepening the decline in professional prestige. The results show that career stages create statistically significant differences in status perception ($p < .001$). The proportion of positive status perception among Master Teachers (44.4%) indicates that career progression can enhance professional prestige. This finding is consistent with Özkan (2023), who emphasizes the impact of the Teacher Professional Law and career stages on professional identity.

However, one of the most striking findings is the gap between perceived professional competence and societal prestige. While teachers' professional competence is high ($M = 3.45$), their perception of societal prestige remains much lower ($M = 2.24$), indicating a 1.21-point divergence. This finding suggests that teachers see themselves as competent, well-equipped professionals; however, they believe society does not value them as highly. Yılmaz and Altınkurt (2021) found that perceptions of professional status significantly affect teacher commitment. Akyüz's (2021) meta-analysis also demonstrates that perceptions of status are a determining factor in organizational commitment and motivation. Similarly, the approximately 31% difference in status perception observed according to residential area in the present study indicates that the social perception of the teaching profession is shaped not only by individual competencies, but also by multidimensional factors such as the teacher's social environment, social visibility, career structure, and the level of selectivity in entry into the profession.

Conclusion and Implications

Findings from the sample indicate that professional status perception is not homogeneous but a heterogeneous process shaped by contextual and structural variables. The most notable finding is the inverse relationship between place of residence and status perception. In rural areas, teachers are positioned as central symbolic authorities with high

social capital ($M = 3.55$). In contrast, this perception declines significantly in urban contexts to $M = 2.44$, indicating status erosion and “urbanization-related devaluation.” This approximately 31% deviation demonstrates that teachers in metropolitan areas shift from a role of “traditional intellectual leadership” toward a “technical service provider” identity.

Another critical finding is the lowest score observed in “Selectivity and Entry Standards” ($M = 2.12$), indicating a structural crisis in professional prestige. The perception that entry processes lack rigorous selection contributes to the shift of teaching from an elite profession to a more accessible occupational field defined by urban bureaucracy. The lowest score across all sub-dimensions of the scale was recorded in “Selectivity and Entry Standards” ($M = 2.12$), indicating that professional prestige is facing a structural crisis. Participants’ perception that admission processes to the profession are far from “quality-discriminative” leads teaching to move away from the image of an “elite profession” and to be socially coded as a “secondary professional field” because of low entry barriers. This situation reveals the inevitability of reconstructing selectivity mechanisms on rational, academic grounds.

The one-way ANOVA on career stages ($F = 18.62$; $p < .001$) confirms the system’s role in constructing professional status. The fact that the title of “Master Teacher” increases perceptions of status, and that the proportion of participants reporting positive perceptions within this group reaches 44.4% in the intra-group distribution, demonstrates that the career ladder system functions as a critical “internal reference point” for professional prestige. Analyses of the data in Table 6 indicate that the group with the highest concentration of negative status perception is the group holding the title of teacher (73.6% column share). In contrast, Master Teachers, despite their relatively small numbers, constitute 30% of the total participants reporting positive perceptions.

The findings indicate that teacher identity is shaped by “status inconsistency.” Although teachers’ perceptions of self-efficacy and technical competence are considerably high ($M = 3.45$), their perceptions of social prestige ($M = 2.24$) remain far behind this level of self-confidence, revealing the identity of the “competent yet underappreciated professional.” This perceptual gap constitutes the structural foundation underlying professional alienation and motivation-related fractures.

The decline in teaching prestige stems from multidimensional factors such as reduced academic selectivity, the reduction of the role to a mere technical function, and weakened social visibility in urban contexts. Therefore, solutions must go beyond financial improvements and aim at restoring teaching as an authoritative professional field. The teaching profession should shift from merely an area of employment to a distinguished professional status defined by high standards and selectivity. The “quality gap” at the entry stage of the teaching profession constitutes the primary factor reinforcing the societal perception that “anyone can become a teacher.”

To preserve professional prestige, the YKS success ranking threshold for all departments serving as pathways into the teaching profession (including Open Education Faculties) should be restricted to the top 50,000 or an even narrower range. Consider the balance between supply and demand; while improving quality, quotas should be reduced in a planned, systematic manner. KPSS/AGS should shift from a multiple-choice ranking exam focused on elimination to an assessment system that measures teacher candidates’ higher-order thinking skills.

The fact that the titles of Expert Teacher and Master Teacher are reflected merely as numerical differences in payroll renders the professional hierarchy dysfunctional. “Master Teacher Approval” should become a legal requirement in school curriculum arrangements, textbook selection processes, and strategic planning decisions. Internship processes and

performance evaluations for newly appointed teacher candidates should require endorsement from these senior experts rather than administrative personnel. Sharing authority should not create a power conflict between school administrators and expert teachers; instead, it should become a collaborative “academic board” model based on institutional cooperation.

The “professional invisibility” teachers face in metropolitan social networks signifies more than just a decline in social status; it also causes perceptual alienation from their professional identity. To address this, teachers should receive more than discounts through collaboration with local governments; they should also be granted “priority and protocol rights” in urban services like culture, arts, transportation, and social amenities. Additionally, teachers ought to be allocated official “advisor/member” slots within neighborhood and city councils, as well as other local decision-making bodies.

Viewing teachers solely as civil servants or technicians who execute a centrally mandated curriculum undermines creativity and professional fulfillment. To remedy this, a “Pedagogical Autonomy Law” should be adopted, allowing teachers to modify and localize the central curriculum by 20–30% to suit their classroom needs better, while maintaining outcome-based accountability. Teachers must have full authority to choose instructional materials and decide on assessment and evaluation methods within their classrooms. Additionally, scientific publications authored by teachers and the instructional materials they create should carry more weight in calculating “service points” and career advancement.

Professional burnout is a complex issue that brief observations alone cannot fully explain. To uncover its causes and long-term impact on student success and social standing, implement ongoing, process-focused scientific monitoring methods. This involves selecting a group of newly hired teachers and tracking their motivation over time by conducting measurements at the 5th, 10th, 15th, and 20th years of their careers. It is essential to analyze scientifically how teachers’ perceptions of their status evolve and how this influences student performance and the classroom environment. Using real-time data, develop evidence-based policies to address burnout effectively.

Teaching involves more than delivering lessons; it also includes knowledge creation. Current regulations mainly define a teacher’s role through “teaching hours.” A specific part of weekly work hours should be legally designated as “Personal and Professional Development Time,” to be spent either within or outside the school. Based on teachers’ years of professional experience (5th, 10th, 15th, and 20th years), the school should organize “Periodic Mandatory Specialization Training Programs.” These programs should focus on updates in their fields, pedagogical methods, and technological advances, following a strategic schedule. Additionally, on-site, demand-driven training should be tailored to teachers’ particular subject areas and real-world needs, rather than generic topics.

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