

# THE STATUS OF THE TEACHING PROFESSION IN LATVIA: VIEWS OF THE TEACHERS

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## Abstract

*Professionals who are respected in the wider community can influence public opinion and shape societal value system. While in a number of European countries teaching profession is popular and respected, in many other including Latvia its prestige is rather low. There is an ongoing debate in Latvia how to raise it; therefore, the aim of this research was to study teachers' views about the status and prestige of their occupation. The quantitative research design was developed. The web survey of teachers (n=1773) confirmed that teachers perceived their occupational prestige in Latvia as low and believed that in other European countries it is much higher. Teachers did not feel assessed adequately to their contribution. In general, teachers were concerned about their professional autonomy and freedom as they felt frustrated, overloaded and over-controlled from different sides. The respondents believed that teachers are authorities and opinion leaders also outside school that indicated positive aspects of occupational prestige. They admitted that teachers should have an ability to adapt in order to respond on contemporary societal and technological changes. Some suggestions were developed on how to improve occupational prestige: from a system perspective, more positive and supportive attitude towards education system and teachers is expected from municipalities, policy makers and the line ministry. Meanwhile great part of the respondents believed that teachers themselves should be responsible for the forming of positive image of their profession and should communicate with society more effectively on the specificity of teaching and challenges they face in contemporary conditions.*

**Keywords:** occupational prestige, teaching profession, teaching status, trade union.

## Introduction

Professionals who are respected and recognized in wider society can influence public opinion and shape societal value system. In Latvia, currently there are public as well as political discussions on teacher status and occupational prestige within the context of several ongoing educational reforms focusing on problems of teacher shortage in schools, remuneration system, too low general performance level of pupils especially in centralized exams (mathematics, languages), curriculum and competency-based education, and the optimization of school network in the country. Teachers and their organizations such as trade unions play a significant pro-active social role in society as they “contribute to shape social attitudes and policies” and “carry a major responsibility for forming the future society” (ETUCE, 2008, p. 53). In order to meet these societal expectations, teachers must feel public appreciation at both individual and societal levels. In reality, teachers in Latvia often feel frustrated, undervalued, overloaded and overcontrolled; therefore, the aim of this research is to explore teachers' views about the status

and prestige of the teaching profession in Latvia. The aim of the survey was to find out how teachers feel about their profession and its social recognition in wider society, what influences occupational prestige and what should be done to raise it. The following research questions were defined:

- 1) What are teachers' opinions on their occupational prestige and status in Latvia?
- 2) What should be done to raise the occupational prestige of the teaching profession in Latvia?

Quantitative research design was developed for the research, which was carried out in autumn, 2016.

### *Problem of Research*

The concept of an occupational prestige is ambiguous and rather complex. This fact was acknowledged in all studies seeking to analyse the status of professions (including teachers) at national level as well as international comparisons (for example, European Union, 2013a; European Union, 2013b; Hall & Langton, 2006; Hargreaves, Cunningham, Hansen, McIntyre, & Oliver, 2007; Hargreaves, 2009; Ingersoll & Merrill, 2011; Misāne, Gurbo, Jemeljanova, & Dedze, 2007). Although definitions and explanations differ, it can be assumed that the prestige or status of a profession is a rank which particular occupation holds in hierarchy of professions according to societal understanding and recognition. Occupational prestige is related to its authority, respect and recognition, influence, power, control and other aspects. In classical American sociological tradition it is argued that "occupational prestige is determined by the system of values in a society and by the perceived functional importance of different occupations in that society" (Abercrombie, Hill, & Turner, 2000, p. 277). In the European sociological tradition Weber viewed the status as social honour and related it to social stratification and class inequality, which "was based on unequal access to material rewards and different life-chances" (Abercrombie et al., 2000, p. 277). Occupational prestige is a societal recognition, which is formed by professionals of the particular occupation, clients, wider society and other professional groups. In the case of the teaching profession these groups are teachers themselves, learners and their parents as well as other stakeholders. This assessment involves adequate financial remuneration and appreciation according to contribution, social recognition and respect, which means recognition of an authority of the professionals and their impact on various processes in a society. Occupational prestige is also related to control and supervision, which is exercised over the workers. Important factors having impact on occupation are employees' working conditions and environment.

Although working conditions may vary among organizations and individually, analysis of general situation, however, allows assessing what attention is paid to the sector and its workers by the state, municipalities and particular institutions especially in the case of education system. When a sector and its workers are highly valued and appreciated as important for society, the sector receives adequate investments in its infrastructure thus improving physical, material and psychological working conditions. This is important also at an institutional level, and in this case – at a level of educational establishments. All these aspects have impact on an attractiveness of the teaching profession.

### *Research Focus*

International comparisons indicate that amongst European countries teaching profession is the most popular vocation in Cyprus and very popular in Greece, whereas in Germany this profession ranks in the third place, and in Finland is amongst the five most respected professions (European Union, 2013b, p. 213). In some countries teachers have the civil service

status. The data showed that in countries where the status of a teaching profession has recently changed, there was a strong concern of weak institutional recognition. Teachers in Ireland, Finland and the United Kingdom felt that they did much more than the teaching activity; teachers felt ‘exploited’ and ‘disrespected’ in Hungary, Germany and France (European Union, 2013b, p. 213). In New Zealand, it was concluded that the teaching profession was regarded as valuable and honourable at individual level rather than at the level of professional group (Hall & Langton, 2006). Studies in the USA envisaged that the status of the teaching profession and its prestige was not high, similarly to other occupations dominated by females (Ingersoll & Merrill, 2011, p. 194). International comparisons (e.g. UNESCO, 2006, p.88) stressed that the quality of education can be seriously impacted by wage differentials reducing also the prestige of the teaching profession by attracting less qualified individuals in the profession. Hargreaves pointed out that “the prestige of different groups of teachers within one country varies also” (Hargreaves, 2009, p. 221). However, other studies showed that the status of the teaching profession improved if the state implemented specific policies (e.g. Lankford, Loeb, McEachin, Miller, & Wyckoff, 2014). Number of researches (e.g. Cameron, 2003; Frunzaru & Dumitriu, 2015; Hall & Langton, 2006) has proved that teachers themselves are more critical about their profession and its prestige than other social groups.

As the teaching profession is related to socialization of children, teacher’s personality and professional qualities are extremely important. Within a framework of discussions on improvements in teacher education programmes, occupational prestige of the teaching profession as well as societal expectations towards educators in general, it is worth to focus also on issue, what teacher needs to be? There are quantitative and qualitative studies focusing on topic of a good or ‘ideal’ teacher from the perspective of students (e.g. Arnon & Nirit, 2007; Rusu, Șoitu, & Panaite, 2012) or both teachers and students (e.g. Telli, Brok, & Jale, 2008). The researches revealed a number of personality traits and professional skills and competences, which are important for both educators and students.

Turner (as cited in Hargreaves, 2009, p. 218) has pointed out subjective and objective dimensions of the status: the first one refers to individual perceptions of prestige, whereas the second one on “the socio-legal entitlements of an individual”. In their study, Frunzaru and Dumitriu (2015) have focused on self-perceived teachers’ occupational prestige by analysing several organisational explicative factors. Subjective aspects of the status of the teaching profession were analysed on the basis of the teachers’ survey and the respondents’ views on their occupation. What is the state of the teaching profession in Latvia? Some evidence from previous studies (e.g. European Commission, 2015; Misāne et al., 2007; OECD, 2014) showed that occupational prestige of the teaching profession is not very high; therefore, it is important to understand if any changes in teachers’ self-assessment can be observed since a positive image of the profession is one of the factors influencing teacher retention.

## **Methodology of Research**

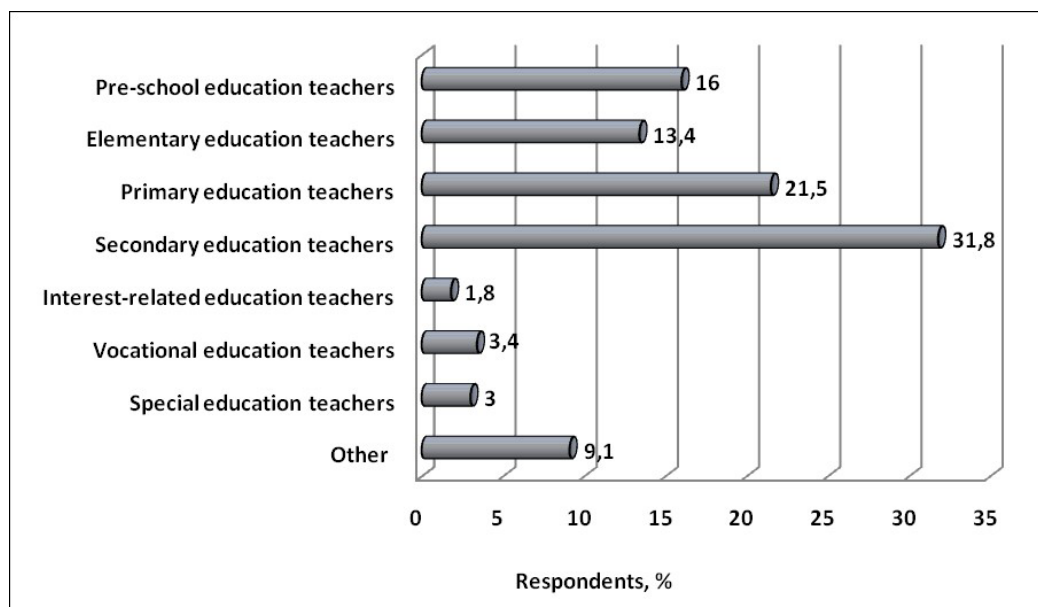
### *General Background*

Although a number of new specialists graduating universities and teacher education programmes is sufficient to ensure schools with a teaching staff in Latvia, the education system faces another harsh reality: teacher ageing, feminization of education system, lack of teachers in most of the subjects in both rural and urban schools. Some of these challenges have been observed in many other countries as well (OECD, 2018). In 2013, it was concluded that Latvia had no global shortage of qualified teachers, but its education system showed no significant targeted policy measures aiming at enhancing the attractiveness of the teaching profession (European Commission, 2013a). Unfortunately, it should be emphasized here that

still no significant and systemic activities are being implemented at the state level to raise the attractiveness of the teaching profession and recruit new teaching staff in schools. Recent changes in teachers' remuneration system, the optimization of school network and other reforms of education system in Latvia partially aiming to solve also the problem of attractiveness of the profession, are critically assessed from various stakeholders and specifically in the community of teachers. The Latvian Trade Union of Education and Science Employees (LIZDA) as a social partner in the process of educational policy-making is one of the organizations dealing with the issues that teachers face. It is concerned not only about the rights of teachers but also about other challenges that education system faces, for example, the lack of teachers in schools, the retention of highly qualified and novice teachers, the prestige of the profession. In order to find solutions and proposals for sectoral policy-making, the LIZDA research focused on teachers' opinions about their status and occupational prestige in Latvia.

### Sample

In the online survey, 1773 teachers representing all five planning regions of Latvia (Zemgale, Vidzeme, Kurzeme, Latgale, and Riga) participated. Sample of the teachers reflected general teacher population in Latvia according to various traits including age groups, gender, length of teachers' in-service, etc. (IZM statistika). 723 respondents (40.8 % of the sample) resided in cities, whereas 1050 (59.2 %) were teachers from rural municipalities including small towns. The sample well reflected the current situation of teachers' ageing: more than 40% of all teachers in Latvia are over 50 (IZM statistika). The sample represented following age groups: below 30 years – 6.3%; 30-39 years – 12.9%; 40-49 years – 30.7%; 50-59 years – 38.4%; over 60 – 11.7%. Breakdown of the sample according to the length of teachers' in-service was as follows: 5% of the sample is novice teachers having in-service experience below 3 years; 9% of the respondents work in school 4 to 10 years; 20.4% have 11 to 20 years in-service experience, and the greatest part of the sample (65.7%) have worked as teachers for over 20 years. Among the respondents, 1671 are female (94.2% of the sample) and 102 - male (5.8% of the sample). Secondary education teachers are most represented in the sample (Figure 1).



**Figure 1. Breakdown of the sample according to the respondents' positions in school, n=1773.**

The answer “other” was chosen by the respondents who held more than one position at school or identified themselves as school principals, deputy directors of school, school psychologists, speech therapists, social pedagogues, educational methodologists, and librarians.

According to the research ethics (Joe, Raben, & Phillips, 2016; Toepoel, 2016), participation in the survey was completely voluntary and anonymous. The respondents were informed about the aim of the research, they were provided with contact information in case they had queries. The results of the research were analysed only in an aggregated way.

### *Instrument and Procedures*

The survey questionnaire was developed and posted on the webpage *visidati.lv* and was available from September 7 till October 17, 2016. Information about the survey was disseminated via LIZDA homepage, social media, website *eklase.lv* and trade union’s member organizations in schools.

The questionnaire comprised questions of different types. The greatest part of the questionnaire was composed of the statements, offered to the respondents for showing their level of agreement by using symmetric 5-point Likert scale (strongly agree, slightly agree, neither agree nor disagree, slightly disagree, strongly disagree). For some statements asymmetric 5-point Likert scale was used (for example, such as in Table 2). A few closed and open-ended questions were also included in the survey. The statements and questions were formulated, grouped and analysed according to the main aspects of occupational prestige theoretically discussed in the literature review and empirically tested in previous studies: overall assessment of the prestige of the teaching profession; reward and recognition; working conditions of the teachers; professional freedom and autonomy; control and surveillance.

As it is suggested by other researchers, the measurement of occupational prestige can be made by using prestige scales, for example, people are asked to rank occupations according to their social standing or desirability and afterwards rankings are aggregated by taking the average (Abercrombie, Hill, & Turner, 2000, p. 277). According to this principle, in LIZDA survey, the respondents were asked to rank the teaching profession from ‘1’ to ‘10’ on the imaginary ladder of professions where ‘10’ was the least prestigious occupation and ‘1’ was the most desirable profession. Additionally to this, one of the open-ended questions offered the respondents an opportunity to name any other profession which has similar occupational prestige as teachers.

Another open-ended question sought to find the answers on what personal and professional qualities an ideal teacher should have. Similar approach was used in other studies (e.g. Rusu et al., 2012; Telli et al., 2008). Respondents had a chance to name as many traits as they wished. As a result, many different qualities were mentioned which later were grouped and coded.

### *Data Analysis*

For the descriptive analysis of quantitative data standard deviation (*SD*) and mean (*M*) was calculated by using statistical program SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science v21). Independent samples t-test was calculated to analyse differences in opinions of the respondents representing different sample groups (gender, length of in-service, teachers from rural and urban territories, respondents living in different Latvian regions).

Open ended questions were analysed according to the approach of qualitative content analysis (Titscher, Meyer, Wodak, & Vetter, 2000). When the questionnaire was completed, the units of analysis (categories) were coded and grouped to scrutinize the answers on the open-ended questions about characteristics of an ideal teacher and professions having occupational prestige similar to the teaching profession. To ensure the reliability of qualitative analysis,

a special attention was paid to coding procedure during text analysis. Since the respondents freely described characteristics of an ideal teacher and named as many traits as they could, the researchers made sure that all traits with different semantic meaning are identified. Coding and grouping of the units of analysis was discussed between researchers to ensure greater precision.

## Results of Research

The first group of the statements and questions in the questionnaire focused on *an overall assessment of the prestige of the teaching profession* in Latvia. Detailed analysis of the teachers' views about these statements is presented in the Table 1.

**Table 1. Teachers' views on the prestige of a teaching profession in Latvia\*, n=1773.**

Statements	M	SD
1. In general, society highly values work of the teachers	3.675	.902
2. In Latvia, teaching profession has high occupational prestige	4.045	.835
3. Teaching profession in other EU countries has higher occupational prestige than in Latvia	1.714	.725
4. Secondary school teachers have higher occupational prestige in comparison with primary school teachers	2.829	.999
5. Secondary school teachers have higher occupational prestige in comparison with elementary school teachers	2.788	1.057
6. Primary school teachers are valued higher than elementary school teachers	3.049	1.001
7. Pre-school teachers are highly valued in society	3.785	.947
8. Today teaching profession has lower occupational prestige in comparison with the past	1.658	1.014
9. Teaching profession would be more attractive if there were less problems with discipline in schools	2.177	1.063
10. Occupational prestige of teachers in private educational institutions is higher in comparison with their colleagues from other schools	2.690	1.001
11. Teaching profession would be more attractive if teachers themselves formed more positive opinion about it	2.875	1.109

\*Note: the statements were assessed by using Likert scale from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' (1 - strongly agree; 2 - slightly agree; 3 - neither agree nor disagree; 4 - slightly disagree; 5 - strongly disagree)

The LIZDA survey demonstrated that 66.7 % of the respondents strongly disagreed or slightly disagreed with the statement that in general society highly values teachers' work. The results showed statistically significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) in views between the respondents having different length of in-service and residing in different Latvian regions. The longest was the respondents' in-service experience, the more they disagreed with the statement (novice teachers –  $M=3.51$ ; in-service experience 4 to 10 years –  $M=3.56$ ; in-service experience 11 to 20 years –  $M=3.61$ ; in-service experience over 20 years –  $M=3.74$ ). The teachers from Riga region were more critical in comparison to those from other regions.

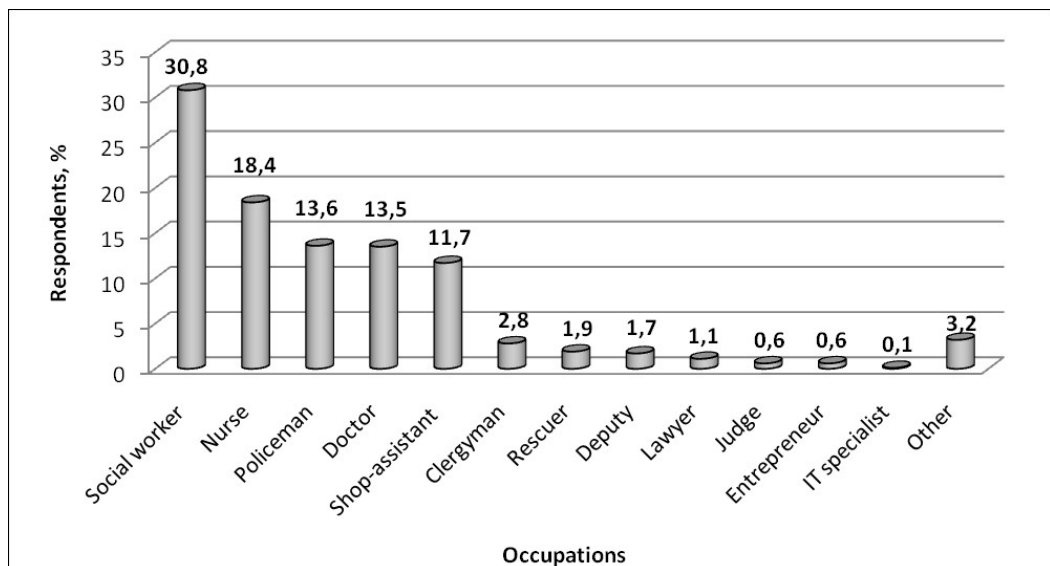


Most of the respondents believed that their occupational prestige is not high in Latvia. Statistically significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) were observed also regarding this statement: respondents with longer in-service experience were more critical (novice teachers –  $M=3.77$ ; in-service experience 4 to 10 years –  $M=3.85$ ; in-service experience 11 to 20 years –  $M=3.98$ ; in-service experience over 20 years –  $M=4.12$ ). The teachers supported the statement that previously in Latvia the occupational prestige of their profession was higher (55.7 % strongly agreed and 30.9% slightly agreed with this statement). The teachers were very positive about the statement that in other EU countries occupational prestige of the teachers is higher than in Latvia. Regarding this statement, no statistically significant differences were identified in different sample groups.

More than half of the respondents believed that pre-school education teachers do not receive high recognition in society, and 68% of the respondents admitted that teaching profession would be more attractive if there were less discipline problems in schools (30.1% strongly agreed and 38.1% slightly agreed with this statement).

As it was already described in the methodology part, the respondents were asked to rank the teaching profession from '1' to '10' on the imaginary ladder of professions to show its status in comparison to other occupations available in the labour market. Considering that '10' was a rank of the least prestigious occupation and '1' was a rank of the most desirable profession, rank numbers '7' and '8' dominated in the answers for the teaching profession. Apparently, the teachers were very critical about the prestige of their occupation. Statistically significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) were observed between novice teachers ( $M=6.26$ ) and the respondents having in-service experience over 20 years ( $M=6.90$ ).

Figure 2 represents opinions on the question which of the professions holds similar occupational prestige as the teaching profession?



**Figure 2. Teachers' opinions on professions having similar occupational prestige like teachers,  $n=1773$ .**

Based on the data, it is obvious that profession of a social worker dominates, followed by a nurse, a policeman, a doctor, and a shop-assistant. The following professions were indicated as 'other': a cleaner (mentioned 10 times), a street sweeper (mentioned 6 times), a psychologist (mentioned 3 times), a waiter (mentioned twice), an engineer, a frontier guard, a coach, an

accountant, an actor, a carrier counsellor, a researcher, a fireman, a civil servant, a volunteer, a writer, a prison guard and 'any low paid worker'. One of the LIZDA survey respondents commented:

*„I think the amount and responsibility of a teacher's work is similar to that of a doctor's, a lawyer's or a deputy's; however, society values teacher's work similarly as a shop-assistant's job...”.*

The respondents were asked to evaluate the statements regarding *an assessment of the teacher's work in society*. The results of the survey showed that teachers did not feel adequately evaluated according to their contribution. Statistically significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) were observed between the respondents from different regions: the teachers from Riga region expressed greater disagreement ( $M=3.79$ ) in comparison to the respondents from other regions with exception of Zemgale region ( $M=3.70$ ). 73.7% of the respondents strongly agreed and 20% slightly agreed that they were entitled to higher wage. Teachers were not positive that they are well-paid in comparison with other professions. Most of the respondents either strongly agreed (27.6.1%) or slightly agreed (42.5%) that excellent teacher's work is not particularly appreciated. More than 70% of teachers strongly agreed that teachers are entitled to long service pension.

The working environment and conditions are an important aspect that affects employees' satisfaction with their work, therefore in the survey, teachers were asked about their *working conditions and environment*. Alarming was the teachers' assessment of the internal tensions and competition in relationships with their colleagues creating a tense psychological climate. More than half of the teachers - 52.5% answered affirmatively that they have encountered this problem, which in turn shows internal problems in the context of the working environment. Statistically significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) were observed in views between the respondents from rural and urban territories. Teachers were asked to assess the statement that it is much easier for teachers to work in rural schools than in urban schools. The respondents from the rural schools disagreed to this statement more than the respondents from urban schools (rural teachers -  $M=3.10$ ; urban teachers -  $M=2.63$ ). Statistically significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) were also in views between the rural and urban teachers with an in-service experience over 20 years (rural teachers -  $M=3.16$ ; urban teachers -  $M=2.66$ ).

Very important aspects related to the prestige of the profession are professional freedom or autonomy, the control over the work and supervision of the professionals. Respondents were asked to assess *the extent to which teachers' work is being controlled by parents, society, and the management of an educational institution*. The analysis of the situation shows that teachers in general in all European countries feel distrust towards them; they feel undervalued and overly regulated (controlled) by governments (European Union, 2013b). Studies showed that teachers were given creative freedom and autonomy on the one hand, and on the other hand, they were subject to extremely high control and supervision by public and local authorities, the management of educational institutions, as well as various societal groups (for example, parent organizations), and this trend was increasing. The LIZDA survey showed that the teachers felt this pressure very acutely. The percentage of answers in the assessments of various statements was variable; however, there was a general tendency: the teachers felt that their professional freedom and autonomy is threatened (13.2% strongly agreed and 44.1% slightly agreed to this statement), they felt great societal pressure (31.7% strongly agreed and 48.8% slightly agreed to this statement) and parents' control (31.0% strongly agreed and 47% slightly agreed) as well as increased pressure and control from the management of the educational institution (14.8% strongly agreed and 33.2% slightly agreed). The teachers in urban schools agreed more that they felt increased pressure from the management of the educational institution ( $M=2.46$ ) in comparison to those from the rural schools ( $M=2.69$ ). At the same time, the majority of



respondents (81.7%) acknowledged that teachers need to be more able to adapt to contemporary conditions. There were statistically significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) between the rural and urban respondents: the rural teachers were more positive about necessity to be able to adapt ( $M = 1.86$ ) in comparison to urban teachers ( $M = 2.02$ ).

The prestige of the profession can also be associated with its influence in society; therefore, respondents were asked to assess the statements *on trust in the professionalism of the teachers, their influence and authority in the community outside the school*. 81.4% of respondents admitted that teachers should be socially active and publicly express their views on what is going on in society. There was no unequivocal assessment of how much public opinion focuses on the views expressed in the media by teachers. 50.9% disagreed with the statement that society trusts teachers as professionals, which is why they would listen to their opinions. 31.3% of the respondents were neutral about this and only 1.3% of the teachers strongly agreed with this statement. Only 37.6% of the respondents agreed that teachers are authorities also outside the school. Regarding this statement, more sceptical were urban teachers ( $M = 3.05$ ) in comparison to the rural teachers ( $M = 2.77$ ); there were statistically significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) between these two sample groups. 72.3% were convinced that teachers and schools should promote their work more actively. Most of the respondents (21.0% agreed and 40.0% slightly agreed) were positive that teachers with their professional activities can have a significant influence on the system of values and beliefs in society and that they are able to influence the system of values and beliefs of youth (61.3%). At the same time, it was acknowledged that it is becoming increasingly difficult for teachers to influence the new generation (27.3% strongly agreed and 51.9% slightly agreed). Regarding this statement, statistically significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) were between rural ( $M = 1.96$ ) and urban ( $M = 2.11$ ) respondents. The teachers were convinced that the role of authorities, including teachers, in the lives of individuals in contemporary society significantly diminishes (20.0% strongly agreed and 53.7% slightly agreed).

One of the problems in the education system in almost all countries of the world is *low proportion of males in the sector*: the education sector is strongly feminized (OECD, 2014) and this is also the case in Latvia (IZM statistics). The survey respondents were asked to answer, why in their opinion men do not choose a teacher's profession. Most of the respondents agreed with the statement that men do not see career opportunities in school (62.7%). 63.3% of the teachers believed that women more than men like to work with children; still, statistically significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) were observed in views between males ( $M = 2.69$ ) and females ( $M = 2.35$ ). Regarding the statement that men do not view teaching profession as attractive, the views of the respondents varied greatly. Statistically significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) were between opinions of males ( $M = 3.26$ ) and females ( $M = 3.01$ ). The teachers were strongly convinced that the profession does not seem to be attractive to men due to low wages (91.4% were positive) and low occupational prestige (83.8% were positive). No statistically significant differences were identified about these statements between the sample groups.

The respondents were asked to assess, *how strongly teachers face various difficulties in their work* by using the assessment scale from 1 to 5, where 1 meant 'do not face' and 5 – 'face very much' (Table 2).

**Table 2. Difficulties that teachers face in their work\*, n=1773.**

	Statements	M	SD
1.	Lack of respect from the students	3.395	1.109
2.	Lack of respect from the parents	3.239	1.069
3.	Lack of respect from the education policy makers	3.906	1.176
4.	Parental distrust in teachers' professionalism	3.119	1.041
5.	Children's permissiveness	3.961	1.142
6.	Overly high societal demands towards teachers	3.624	1.076
7.	Increased media interest in negative events in school life	3.872	1.189
8.	Difficulties to reconcile work with family life due to the specifics of a profession	3.459	1.222
9.	Overly strict control and supervision over teachers' work	3.398	1.080
10.	Public perplexity about the specifics of the teacher's work	4.036	1.100
11.	Stress, professional burnout	4.336	1.076

\*Note: assessment scale 1 to 5, where 1 means 'do not face' and 5 – 'face very much'

Public perplexity about the specifics of a teaching profession, lack of respect from the education policy makers, children's permissiveness as well as stress and professional burnout were assessed as the greatest difficulties in teachers' work (Table 2). Statistically significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) were observed in a number of statements between various sample groups. The teachers with longer work experience faced fewer problems with a respect from the students: novice teachers –  $M=3.94$ ; in-service experience 4 to 10 years –  $M=3.68$ ; in-service experience 11 to 20 years –  $M=3.54$ ; in-service experience over 20 years –  $M=3.26$ ). Also children's permissiveness was a bigger problem for less experienced teachers (novice teachers –  $M=4.22$ ; in-service experience over 20 years –  $M=3.92$ ). In comparison to female teachers, the male respondents faced fewer difficulties with overly high societal demands towards teachers (females –  $M=3.64$ ; males –  $M=3.34$ ), overly strict control and supervision over teachers' work (females –  $M=3.41$ ; males –  $M=3.12$ ), and public perplexity about the specifics of the teacher's work (females –  $M=4.05$ ; males –  $M=3.74$ ). Parental distrust in teachers' professionalism was faced more by urban teachers ( $M=3.20$ ) in comparison to rural teachers ( $M=3.05$ ). Difficulties to reconcile work with family life due to the specifics of a profession urban teachers faced more than rural colleagues (urban teachers –  $M=3.53$ ; rural teachers –  $M=3.41$ ).

The problem of stress and professional burnout is indeed alarming in Latvian schools as 62.9% of the respondents assessed it with 5, which means that they face this problem very often. Females faced this problem more than males (females –  $M=4.35$ ; males –  $M=4.06$ ).

Responses on the open-ended question on *what personal and professional qualities an ideal teacher should have* indicated, that the teachers set high demands and standards for themselves and teaching profession in general. The most frequently mentioned qualities of an 'ideal teacher' are summarized in the Table 3, which shows how many times particular qualities were mentioned by the respondents.

**Table 3. Qualities of an ideal teacher: opinions of the respondents, n=1773.**

Qualities	Frequency	Qualities	Frequency
Cleverness (including also wisdom, erudition, competence, exhaustiveness)	494	Justice, fairness	100
Creativity	401	Intelligentsia (including emotional)	92
Love (to children, to mankind, to teaching)	303	Peace and self-possession	85
Patience	228	Modernity	75
Tolerance	220	Consistency, strictness	73
Ability to raise an interest about the subject	192	Empathy	73
Good communication skills with children, their parents and other people	174	Inquisitiveness	71
Ability to understand children and their needs	162	Willingness to improve persistently	63
Cordiality, benevolence	157	Being socially active in school and in the society	57
Sense of humor	156	Humanity	53
Self-esteem and respect of children	156	Charisma	51
Honesty	148	Skills to work with modern technologies	39
Considerateness	141	Optimism	29
Flexibility and ability to adapt	135	Joy of living	28
Being positive in general and with positive attitude towards children	122	Courage	14
Professionalism	110	Loyalty	13
Enthusiasm	107	Patriotism	9
Responsibility	104	Selflessness	7

The following cites give some insight on what qualities the teachers should have:

*“Ability to be competent in the ongoing processes in Latvia and in the world, to understand the regularities, to talk about them with pupils. Creativity, attractiveness, ability to communicate effectively and constructively in a wide range of situations. Tolerance, ability to understand psychological problems, help to find a solution to them. “*

*“Ability to adapt, willingness to improve and acquire new knowledge. Interest in modern technologies and all that young people are interested in. Professional competence. Ability to put the child’s interests and abilities higher than the curriculum.”*

Some respondents, however, pointed out that there is no need to look for a teacher’s ideal as there are no ideals: every teacher has strengths and weaknesses, and all teachers must strive for professional improvements. Some commentaries comprised even sarcastic and ironic teachers’ attitude towards general social-economic situation in Latvia and topicalities of the educational policy within a context of recent teachers’ remuneration model:

*“Ideal teacher is able to train a student for a life and not just for fulfilling requirements of an education standard.”*

*“To my opinion, we have to remember, that a teacher first of all is a person and only then a teacher. The traits which are useful for a teacher as a professional may be harmful for him or her as a person. For example, outstanding patience is an advantage in the work with children but becomes a shortcoming when teachers must stand for their rights. This is why teachers experience pressure from different sides: authorities, employers, parents, and children. In a result, teachers lose their positions in society one by one; and a teacher suffers as a person, and this also happens with a teachers’ occupational prestige.”*

Among particular qualities, few respondents emphasized that teachers should not have a family as they have no time for their private life and children because of enormous workload at school, for example:

*“Outstanding cooperation with students, parents, and colleagues. Not married, without children; sacrifices his or her life for school.”*

Realizing that the occupational prestige of a teaching profession in Latvia is not high, it is important to understand how to improve it; therefore, respondents were asked to express their views on *what would increase the prestige of the teaching profession*. In general, all the factors included in the survey to be assessed were recognized as likely important to increase the prestige of the teaching profession. The following factors received the greatest support from the respondents:

- more positive information on schools and teaching in the media;
- improved and higher remuneration for the teacher’s work;
- less control and supervision of the teacher’s work;
- less workload of the teacher;
- improved education system;
- higher social guarantees for teachers.

Based on the research results, the authors propose some recommendations to schools, mass media, municipalities and education policy makers. First of all, society needs to be more informed about the teacher’s responsibilities to understand the specificity of the profession today. Also, more respectful attitude of politicians, parents, and children towards teachers should be increased. This could be reached if, for example, mass media constructed positive narratives and reflected positive examples of school life, instead of focusing mostly on problematic topics. A celebration of the Teachers’ Day in the municipalities and the rejuvenation of the best teachers should be encouraged. The respondents encourage municipalities to post information highlighting achievements of teachers and learners, including challenges on their websites and local newspapers. Schools in cooperation with municipalities should provide teaching staff with the in-service courses on self-esteem, self-motivation, and leadership. The issue of pupils’ discipline has to be addressed. The school’s internal rules and cooperation with the family, the adequacy of the support staff and professionalism, the work of the social service in the municipality should be assessed and improved. All respective parties should be more aware and involved in problem solving. This means improved communication with educators about the rights and behaviour of children, and explanation the role and rights of a teacher.

## Discussion

Regarding the prestige of the teaching profession, the results of the LIZDA survey in 2016 demonstrate some similarities with previous studies conducted both in Latvia and abroad. For example, Geske and Ozola in their article refer to the international study TALIS 2013 in

order to characterise satisfaction of the teachers with their work and opinions about occupational prestige (Geske & Ozola, 2015). They concluded that teacher profession has low prestige in Latvian society and data revealed that more than three fourths of teachers believed that their profession is not respected in society (Geske & Ozola, 2015, p. 193). In the LIZDA survey, most of the respondents (80.3 %), which is more than in TALIS 2013 research, believed that their occupational prestige is not high in Latvia. Similarly to the study conducted in 2007 by Misāne and her colleagues, who concluded that the occupational prestige of teachers has decreased (Misāne et al., 2007, p. 59), respondents also in LIZDA survey supported the statement that previously in Latvia the occupational prestige of their profession was higher (55.7 % strongly agreed and 30.9% slightly agreed with this statement).

In the LIZDA survey, the respondents believed that the status of teachers is the most likely similar to that of a social worker, a nurse, a policeman, a doctor, or a shop-assistant. In Latvia, these are professions that are relatively low-paid and with a high workload. Similar results are presented in studies from other countries. Studies conducted in other countries (e.g. Hall & Langton, 2006; Hargreaves, 2009) showed the trend that teachers are more critical in their opinions about occupational prestige of their profession than other social groups. For example, in public surveys conducted in England in 2003 and 2006, citizens were asked to compare the teachers' prestige with that of other 12 occupations (Hargreaves et al., 2007). The comparison of the primary and secondary school teachers with the social worker was the most favourable, and this choice was largely based on the argument that both professions work with children and young people (Hargreaves et al., 2007, p. 4).

In Latvia, problem of low pupils' performance is emphasized in current political discussions in relation to educational reforms and optimization of school network especially in rural areas. Geske and Ozola also emphasized an interrelation between students' performance and occupational prestige of the teachers in the country, and in Latvia students' performance is considered as corresponding to the occupational prestige of teachers: both parameters are a little bit below an international average value (Geske & Ozola, 2015, p. 194). The authors concluded that in comparison with colleagues of other school types, teachers of professional subjects in vocational schools are more positive about their occupational prestige in society (Geske & Ozola, 2015, p. 207). Some similarities with this conclusion can be observed also in the LIZDA survey.

In Romania, Frunzaru and Dumitriu in their research concluded that the lower the level of satisfaction of the teaching staff with three types of organizational aspects (material conditions, bureaucracy and relational), the lower the level of self-perceived occupational prestige (Frunzaru & Dumitriu, 2015, p. 640-641). The TALIS 2013 study concluded that teachers in Latvia were on average more satisfied with their work environment and profession compared to the rest of the TALIS 2013 survey member states (Geske & Ozola, 2015, p. 194). Teachers' satisfaction with work is most influenced by the positive and democratic school culture - teacher-to-teacher relationships, teacher-pupil relationships, and teacher-school principal relationships (Geske & Ozola, 2015, p. 206). References from their school principal and their reception enhance teachers' satisfaction with the work environment. The teachers' well-being is influenced by relationships with school leadership (Geske & Ozola, 2015, p. 206). In general, teachers' satisfaction with work is largely determined by the activity of teachers themselves at school. Teachers are generally satisfied with their work and admit that they like to work in their workplace; however, about one in ten teachers regret their profession choices (Geske & Ozola, 2015, p. 206).

Discussions on what teacher needs to be to respond on contemporary societal needs and changes are crucial, even few respondents in the LIZDA survey rejected the idea of seeking 'ideal teacher' and/or ideals. The roles of a teacher to some extent changes today, society expects that teachers will be 'modern', they will fulfil different roles in smaller rural

communities in comparison to big cities (e.g. Arnon & Nirit, 2007; Rusu et al., 2012; Smak & Walczak, 2017; Telli et al., 2008). In 2007, in a study conducted in Latvia on the possibilities to increase the prestige of the teaching profession, recommendations were already made that could be implemented by various stakeholders (Misāne et al, 2007). It should be acknowledged that the recommendations have not lost their relevance even ten years later, and many have not been implemented so far or their implementation has been incomplete. Similarly to other researches, for example, carried out in Poland (Smak & Walczak, 2017), also in Latvian case it is important to develop positive image of teaching profession in wider community, mass media, local municipalities.

## Conclusions

The results of the LIZDA survey confirmed that teachers view their occupational prestige in Latvia as low and believe that in other European countries it is much higher. Teachers do not feel adequately assessed according to their contribution, and this is not only a question of financial remuneration. In general, desired positive assessment of teachers' work involves also societal recognition and respect. From a system perspective, more positive and supportive attitude towards education system and teachers is expected also from the politicians and the line ministry. The respondents agreed that excellent teachers' work is not adequately rewarded. Meanwhile great part of the respondents believed that teachers themselves should be responsible for forming positive image of their profession and should communicate with society more actively in order to explain the specificity of a profession as well as challenges it faces in present conditions.

In general, in their everyday school life teachers feel frustrated, overloaded and over-controlled from different sides, which are perceived as serious threat to their professional autonomy and freedom. On the one hand, they believe that teachers are authorities and opinion leaders also outside school capable to shape societal value system (which indicates positive aspects of occupational prestige), but on the other hand – the survey results display the lack of professional self-confidence. Although the concept of an 'ideal teacher' was slightly criticised by the respondents, still their answers envisage that teachers have high professional demands and standards towards themselves. They admit that teachers should have ability to adapt, which is often challenging, in order to respond to contemporary societal and technological changes.

Future research should be done to explore public opinion on teachers' occupational prestige. This would allow comparing opinions from different sides, as occupational prestige is a societal recognition formed by teachers themselves, children they teach, parents, politicians as well as other stakeholders.

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