

THE SOCIAL PRESTIGE OF TEACHERS IN GREEK EDUCATION: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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Abstract: The social prestige of teachers within the Greek education system is a topic of critical importance, reflecting broader societal attitudes towards education and its role in shaping individual and collective futures. This article is a comprehensive research report that focuses on the analysis of the challenges and opportunities surrounding the social prestige of teachers in the Greek education system. The present study aims to delve into the multifaceted dynamics that shape the status of teachers in Greek society and propose drastic strategies for reform. Methodologically, the research uses a rigorous approach, including a comprehensive review of the scientific literature, analysis of empirical data, and critical examination of historical and contemporary factors affecting the social status of teachers. The results of the study reveal the challenges faced by Greek teachers, covering financial pressure, bureaucratic obstacles and lack of professional autonomy. Austerity measures have led to stagnant wages, reduced benefits and precarious working conditions for teachers, exacerbating existing inequalities in the quality of education. Bureaucratic barriers, including burdensome administrative procedures and standardized testing regimes, impede teachers' ability to focus on their core mission of teaching and learning. Additionally, a lack of professional autonomy reduces teachers' ability to adapt their teaching approaches to the diverse needs of their students, stifling innovation and creativity in the classroom. Despite these challenges, the study identifies many opportunities to enhance the social prestige of teachers. Investing in professional development initiatives is emerging as a key strategy for empowering teachers and equipping them with the knowledge and skills needed to excel in their profession. Promoting teacher leadership roles in schools and communities can foster a culture of collaboration and innovation, while celebrating success stories can highlight the positive impact teaching has on students' lives and inspire future generations of teachers. Strengthening social support networks provides teachers with the camaraderie and support they need to meet the challenges of their profession and advocate for meaningful change. The conclusions drawn from the research underline the importance of valuing and empowering teachers as key stakeholders in the education system. Systemic reforms are needed to address the root causes of teacher dissatisfaction and disengagement, including increasing investment in education, reducing bureaucratic burdens, and fostering a culture of respect and appreciation for teachers. Recommendations are provided for policy makers, educators and stakeholders to support the revitalization of the social prestige of teachers, emphasizing the critical role of education in shaping the future of Greek society. In addition to these findings, the abstract presents additional data and insights that emerged from the study, offering a comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding the social position of teachers in Greek education.

Keywords: Greek education, teachers, social prestige, challenges, opportunities

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is not only a key element of social progress, but also a cornerstone of cultural heritage and spiritual development. Amidst the complexity of education systems worldwide, the role of teachers emerges as central, exerting a profound influence on shaping individuals and communities. In the context of Greek education, this influence was infused with respect and appreciation, reflecting a culture deeply rooted in the pursuit of knowledge. Throughout Greek history, from ancient times to the present day, education occupied a prominent place in society, with teachers seen as keepers of wisdom and guides to spiritual enlightenment.

The legacy of ancient Greek philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle underscores the intrinsic value placed on education as a means of cultivating virtuous citizens and nurturing the intellect (Tsatsaroni & Sakonidis, 2019). The Byzantine Empire further strengthened this reverence for learning, with the church assuming a prominent role in the dissemination of knowledge and the cultivation of scientific pursuits (Rahmawati, Asadori, Haris, & Mansur, 2023). Within this historical context, teachers emerged not simply as purveyors of information but as conduits of cultural heritage and moral guidance. Despite this historical adoration for education and its professionals, contemporary challenges have cast a shadow on the social prestige attributed to teachers in the Greek education system. The economic turmoil affecting Greece in recent years has put significant pressure on public sector institutions, including education (Koutouzis & Papazoglou, 2022). The austerity measures implemented to deal with the financial crisis resulted in extensive budget cuts, reduced resources and reduced salaries for teachers, thus eroding the economic attractiveness of the profession (Vergeti & Giouroglou, 2018; Tsimos & Tsiakas, 2020).

This economic precariousness has implications not only for teachers' livelihoods but also for their perceived status within society, as financial remuneration often serves as a barometer of social value and respect (Zmas, 2015). In addition to financial challenges, teachers in Greece face a maze of bureaucratic obstacles that hinder their ability to effectively fulfill their pedagogical duties (Gounari & Grollios, 2012). Excessive administrative burdens, standardized testing requirements, and top-down directives undermine the core mission of teaching and learning, relegating educators to mere functionaries within a bureaucratic apparatus. This erosion of professional autonomy not only undermines teachers' sense of efficacy and fulfillment, but also reduces their perceived authority and expertise in the larger social context (Symeonidis, 2020).

In addition, the centralized nature of the Greek education system poses challenges for innovation and adaptability, as regulatory policies and teaching mandates limit the flexibility and flexibility of teachers in responding to the diverse needs of their students (Chatzipanagiotou, & Katsarou, 2023). The absence of meaningful opportunities for professional growth and development exacerbates feelings of frustration and disempowerment among teachers, further undermining their social prestige and position in society (Symeonidis, 2020).

Amidst these challenges, however, lie opportunities for revitalizing and reaffirming the social prestige of teachers within the Greek education system. By investing in professional development initiatives that foster continuous learning and growth, educators can enhance their expertise and efficacy in the classroom, thereby garnering greater recognition and respect within society (Ifanti & Fotopoulou, 2011). Moreover, by promoting teacher leadership roles and providing avenues for meaningful participation in decision-making processes, schools can harness the collective wisdom and experience of their faculty, elevating the status of teachers as leaders and innovators within their communities. Celebrating and amplifying success stories within the teaching profession serves not only to inspire future generations of educators but also to underscore the invaluable contributions of teachers to the fabric of society (Tsimos & Tsiakas, 2020).

Finally, by fostering robust support networks and communities of practice, educators can cultivate a sense of solidarity and camaraderie, bolstering morale and resilience in the face of adversity (Karakus, Toprak, Caliskan, & Crawford, 2024). In the pages that follow, this article will delve deeper into the challenges and opportunities surrounding the social prestige of teachers in Greek education, drawing upon scholarly research and empirical evidence to illuminate key issues and propose actionable strategies for reform. By critically examining the multifaceted dynamics shaping teachers' status within Greek society, we aim to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between economic, bureaucratic, and cultural factors in shaping educational outcomes and opportunities.

2. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The historical roots of education in Greece are deep, intertwined with its cultural, philosophical and spiritual heritage. From the ancient civilizations of Athens and Sparta, Greece's educational heritage has left an indelible mark. Understanding the historical perspective of education in Greece provides invaluable insights into the enduring knowledge and evolving role of educators in Greek society (Rahmawati, Asadori, Haris, & Mansur, 2023).

Ancient Greece stands as a beacon of spiritual enlightenment, with its philosophers, scholars and educators laying the groundwork for Western thought and culture. Central to this intellectual ferment were the revered figures of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, whose philosophical inquiries and pedagogical methods continue to resonate throughout the centuries (Tsatsaroni & Sakonidis, 2019; Rahmawati, Asadori, Haris, & Mansur, 2023). In the Platonic dialogues, Socrates emerges as a role model of the committed teacher, challenging his students to question assumptions, explore ideas, and pursue truth through dialectical inquiry (Rahmawati, Asadori, Haris, & Mansur, 2023). Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Lyceum functioned as living centers of learning, attracting students from far and wide in pursuit of knowledge and wisdom.

The ethos of ancient Greek education extended beyond the boundaries of formal institutions, permeating every aspect of urban life and social interaction. In the city-states of Athens and Sparta, education was considered necessary to cultivate virtuous citizens capable of active participation in democratic governance and military service, respectively (Tsatsaroni & Sakonidis, 2019). Athenian democracy, with its emphasis on informed citizenship and public debate, relied heavily on the educational efforts of teachers known as sophists, who imparted rhetorical skills and critical thinking abilities to aspiring politicians and politicians (Tsatsaroni & Sakonidis, 2019). Similarly, in Sparta, the edict education system relied on discipline, obedience, and martial prowess in young men destined for military service, with teachers overseeing their rigorous training program (Tsatsaroni & Sakonidis, 2019).

The legacy of ancient Greek education found new expression in the Byzantine Empire, where the church assumed a central role in the preservation and dissemination of knowledge. With the establishment of monastic schools, monks and scholars worked tirelessly to transcribe and illuminate classical texts, preserving the intellectual heritage of antiquity for future generations (Rahmawati, Asadori, Haris, & Mansur, 2023). The codification of Roman law by

the Byzantine emperor Justinian and his patronage of educational institutions underlined the close relationship between religion, law and education in the formation of Byzantine society (Tsatsaroni & Sakonidis, 2019). Within this context, teachers occupied a respected position as stewards of faith and custodians of tradition, imparting religious doctrine and moral imperatives to their students (Rahmawati, Asadori, Haris, & Mansur, 2023).

The Ottoman occupation of Greece in the fifteenth century marked a significant break in the continuity of its educational traditions, as Greek culture and identity were threatened by assimilation and oppression (Tsatsaroni & Sakonidis, 2019). Despite the imposition of Ottoman rule, the schools, which became known as the hidden school, emerged as bastions of resistance, preserving the Greek language, history and orthodox faith against the encroachments of foreign rule (Tsatsaroni & Sakonidis, 2019). Teachers, often drawn from the ranks of the clergy and intellectuals, were instrumental in maintaining these hidden educational networks, risking their lives to impart knowledge and instill a sense of national consciousness in their students (Tsatsaroni & Sakonidis, 2019).

The dawn of the modern era saw a revival of Greek nationalism and the revival of educational institutions as vehicles of social and cultural renaissance. The Greek War of Independence in the early nineteenth century sparked a renewed interest in education as a means of forging a coherent national identity and promoting civic participation (Tsatsaroni & Sakonidis, 2019). The establishment of the modern Greek state heralded the advent of public education systems, with the establishment of schools, high schools and universities with the aim of spreading secular knowledge and consolidating democratic values (Tsatsaroni & Sakonidis, 2019). Teachers, imbued with a sense of mission and purpose, assumed the mantle of nation-builders, equipping future generations with the tools and ideals necessary for the realization of Greece's aspirations as a modern, progressive society (Tsatsaroni & Sakonidis, 2019).

3. CHALLENGES FACING TEACHERS' SOCIAL PRESTIGE

Despite its rich historical legacy and cultural reverence for education, the Greek teaching profession confronts an array of multifaceted challenges that undermine the social prestige traditionally associated with educators. These challenges, rooted in economic, bureaucratic, and structural factors, have contributed to a perception of teachers as undervalued and marginalized within Greek society. Understanding these challenges is essential for devising effective strategies to revitalize the social standing of teachers and reaffirm the importance of their role in shaping the future of the nation.

One of the most pressing challenges facing Greek teachers is the enduring impact of economic austerity measures implemented in response to the country's protracted financial crisis. Since the onset of the crisis in the late 2000s, Greece has grappled with severe fiscal constraints, necessitating deep cuts to public spending across various sectors, including education ((Vergeti & Giouroglou, 2018; Koutouzis & Papazoglou, 2022). These austerity measures have resulted in stagnant wages, reduced benefits, and precarious employment conditions for teachers, eroding the financial incentives associated with the profession (Tsimos & Tsiakas, 2020). As a result, teaching has become less attractive as a career choice for young graduates, leading to a shortage of qualified educators and exacerbating existing disparities in educational quality (Zmas, 2015).

Moreover, the economic strain has manifested in inadequate funding for schools, resulting in dilapidated infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, and insufficient resources for teaching and learning (Zmas, 2015). Teachers are often forced to contend with limited access to instructional materials, outdated technology, and inadequate support staff, hampering their ability to deliver quality education and meet the diverse needs of their students (Koutouzis & Papazoglou, 2022). The pervasive sense of financial insecurity and resource scarcity not only undermines teachers' morale and job satisfaction but also detracts from their perceived status within society, as the financial remuneration and material conditions of their work signal a lack of societal appreciation and value (Tsimos & Tsiakas, 2020).

In addition to financial challenges, Greek educators struggle with bureaucracy that hinders their ability to focus on their core mission of teaching and learning. The Greek education system is characterized by a maze of administrative procedures, reporting requirements and regulatory mandates that consume valuable time and energy, diverting teachers' attention away from educational activities (Gounari & Grollios, 2012). Educators are burdened with various data collection tasks and other compliance obligations that reduce their ability to meaningfully engage with students and facilitate deep learning experiences.

Standardized testing regimes further exacerbate bureaucratic pressures on teachers, as teachers are forced to devote significant instructional time to test preparation and administration (Gounari & Grollios, 2012). The emphasis on tests as a measure of educational quality and student achievement not only distorts teaching priorities but also undermines teachers' professional autonomy and creativity. Instead of fostering critical thinking skills, creativity, and intellectual curiosity, a pervasive focus on test scores incentivizes memorization, teaching, and practice and a narrow conception of academic success (Gounari & Grollios, 2012). Consequently, teachers may feel discouraged

and disempowered, as their expertise and professional judgment are subordinated to external measures and bureaucratic dictates.

Another important challenge faced by Greek teachers is related to their professional autonomy. Decisions about curriculum, pedagogy and assessment are often dictated by top-down directives from education policy makers and government officials, leaving little room for teacher opinion or innovation. The prescriptive nature of educational reforms and mandates stifles teachers' creativity and innovation and hinders their ability to adapt instruction to the diverse needs and interests of their students (Pettersson, 2018).

In addition, standardized curricula and educational materials reduce teachers' ability to exercise professional judgment and adapt their teaching approaches to the unique contexts of their classrooms. Rather than empowering teachers as reflective practitioners and instructional leaders, the prevailing culture of control and compliance encourages a sense of frustration and disengagement (Pettersson, 2018). Without the freedom to experiment, collaborate, and exercise professional judgment, educators may feel limited in their ability to implement meaningful instruction and encourage deep learning experiences.

In summary, the challenges they face are multifaceted and complex, including economic, bureaucratic and structural factors that undermine the perceived value and status of the teaching profession. Addressing these challenges requires an integrated and holistic approach that recognizes the interconnectedness of the economic, political and cultural dynamics that shape teachers' work and professional identity.

4. OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCING TEACHERS' SOCIAL PRESTIGE:

In the face of the formidable challenges confronting Greek teachers, there exist significant opportunities for revitalizing and elevating the social prestige of the teaching profession. These opportunities, rooted in strategic interventions and systemic reforms, hold the potential to reinvigorate teachers' sense of professional identity and restore public trust and appreciation for their invaluable contributions to society. By capitalizing on these opportunities, Greece can reaffirm its commitment to education as a cornerstone of societal progress and invest in the cultivation of a vibrant and respected teaching profession.

One promising avenue for enhancing teachers' social prestige is through targeted investments in professional development initiatives that promote continuous learning and growth (Symeonidis, 2020). By providing opportunities for teachers to engage in ongoing professional learning communities, attend workshops and conferences, and pursue advanced degrees or certifications, educators can enhance their expertise and efficacy in the classroom (Ifanti & Fotopoulou, 2011). Empowered with the latest research-based practices and pedagogical strategies, teachers can command greater respect and recognition within society, positioning themselves as knowledgeable and effective agents of educational change (Rahmawati, Asadori, Haris, & Mansur, 2023).

Moreover, professional development opportunities can foster a culture of collaboration and innovation among teachers, enabling them to share best practices, reflect on their teaching experiences, and explore new instructional methodologies. By investing in the professional growth and development of educators, Greece can cultivate a cadre of highly skilled and motivated teachers who are better equipped to meet the diverse needs of their students and navigate the complex challenges of the modern educational landscape (Ifanti & Fotopoulou, 2011).

Another promising strategy for enhancing teachers' social prestige is to promote teacher leadership roles within schools and communities (Zmas, 2015). By empowering teachers to assume leadership responsibilities such as mentoring novice educators, leading professional development sessions, and serving on decision-making committees, schools can tap into the expertise and experience of their most accomplished educators. Recognizing and valuing teachers as leaders can elevate the status of the profession and foster a culture of collaboration and innovation within educational institutions.

Teacher leadership initiatives can also help to foster a sense of professional autonomy and agency among educators, enabling them to play a more active role in shaping educational policies and practices (Zmas, 2015). By amplifying teachers' voices and providing opportunities for them to contribute to school improvement efforts, Greece can harness the collective wisdom and experience of its teaching workforce, driving positive change and innovation in education.

Publicly acknowledging and celebrating the achievements of outstanding teachers can serve as a powerful tool for enhancing the social prestige of the teaching profession (Tsimos & Tsiakas, 2020). Establishing awards, honors, and recognition programs that highlight the contributions of exceptional educators can showcase the positive impact of teaching on students' lives and underscore the importance of the profession. By shining a spotlight on exemplary teachers, Greece can inspire future generations of educators and instill a sense of pride and accomplishment within the teaching community (Pettersson, 2018).

Moreover, celebrating success stories can help to counter negative stereotypes and misconceptions about the teaching profession, fostering greater public appreciation and support for teachers (Tsimos & Tsiakas, 2020). By

highlighting the dedication, passion, and innovation of educators, Greece can cultivate a culture of respect and admiration for the vital role that teachers play in shaping the future of the nation (Pettersson, 2018).

Creating robust support networks for teachers can also enhance their social prestige by fostering a sense of camaraderie, collaboration, and professional solidarity (Karakus, Toprak, Caliskan, & Crawford, 2024). Peer mentoring programs, professional learning communities, and collaborative planning opportunities provide avenues for teachers to share resources, exchange ideas, and support one another in their professional growth (Gounari & Grollios, 2012). Feeling valued and supported within their professional community can boost teachers' morale and resilience, contributing to a positive perception of the teaching profession.

Moreover, social support networks can provide a forum for teachers to advocate for their profession and articulate their needs and concerns to policymakers and stakeholders (Karakus, Toprak, Caliskan, & Crawford, 2024). By fostering a sense of collective agency and empowerment among educators, Greece can mobilize the teaching workforce as a potent force for educational change and reform (Koutouzis & Papazoglou, 2022). Opportunities abound for enhancing the social prestige of teachers within the Greek education system, from investing in professional development and promoting teacher leadership to celebrating success stories and strengthening social support networks.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the challenges facing the social prestige of teachers in Greek education are significant, including financial pressures, bureaucratic obstacles and lack of professional autonomy. These challenges have contributed to the perception of teachers as undervalued and marginalized in Greek society (Zmas, 2015).

However, within these challenges there are significant opportunities to revitalize and reaffirm the importance of the teaching profession. By investing in professional development initiatives, promoting teacher leadership roles and strengthening social support networks, Greece can strengthen the social position of teachers and affirm the value of education as a cornerstone of social progress (Ifanti & Fotopoulou, 2011; Koutouzis & Papazoglou, 2022; Karakus, Toprak, Caliskan, & Crawford, 2024). By seizing these opportunities, Greece can foster a culture of respect, recognition and appreciation for teachers, enabling them to fulfill their vital role as architects of the future and stewards of social progress (Pettersson, 2018).

Essentially, revitalizing the social prestige of teachers is not only necessary for the well-being and morale of teachers, but also crucial for the progress of Greek education as a whole. By addressing the root causes of teacher dissatisfaction and disengagement, Greece can lay the foundations for a brighter future in which teachers are valued, respected and empowered to fulfill their transformative potential in shaping the minds and hearts of future generations (Ifanti & Fotopoulou, 2011).

Through concerted efforts and strategic investments in the professional development, recognition and support of teachers, Greece can reclaim its legacy as a beacon of educational excellence and affirm its commitment to promoting a dynamic and respected teaching profession that serves as a foundation for social progress and well-being.

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