

## GUEST AUTHOR

In every edition of RITE, we publish a contribution from a guest writer who has links with UEL's School of Education and Communities.

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schools, using the term Educational Isolation to explain how a school's place can limit access to resources. Tanya has maintained a special focus in her research on teachers and issues relating to their recruitment and retention.

# A status-based crisis of teacher shortages?

Exploring the role of 'status' in teacher recruitment and retention

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There is an international crisis in teacher supply. Recruiting and retaining enough teachers to meet school needs has been challenging the agencies that control teacher supply for many years. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Sustainable Development Goal 4.c (2022) is to 'substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers' to support an equitable education system. In England in 2021, 40% of teachers left the profession by year ten, 23% by year three, while teacher recruitment in 2022 was 50% below the target for trainee teachers. In the United States, Education Secretary, Miguel Cardona warned of disruptions caused by teacher shortages, with the National Education Association reporting that 55% of educators are ready to leave the profession in 2022. In Australia, states are reporting that Covid has

worsened existing teacher shortages. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) concurs with international reporting on the impact of Covid having worsened existing challenges in teacher supply.

Schools appear stuck in a cycle of struggling to recruit teachers to plug the gaps left by those that leave. Governments attempt to support schools by focusing on financial packages to attract new teachers (especially in subjects perceived in the previous year to be falling short of required teacher numbers), while failing to secure the retention of experienced teachers. Teaching is not a preferred graduate profession and those that do enter teaching continue to leave in large numbers. This paper offers a theory of status-based teacher shortages. It is argued that teaching and teacher status is complex, developed in multiple objective and subjective

### KEYWORDS

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teacher attrition

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contexts, and is impacted by a number of social factors. The agencies that control teacher recruitment and oversee teacher retention have not realised the importance of 'status' in establishing a set of circumstances that contribute to declining trainee teacher numbers and increasing teacher attrition.

## INTRODUCTION

*‘Teachers are the key to achieving all of the SDG4-Education 2030 agenda... the equity gap in education is exacerbated by the shortage and uneven distribution of professionally trained teachers, especially in disadvantaged areas. As teachers are a fundamental condition for guaranteeing quality education, teachers and educators should be empowered, adequately recruited and remunerated, motivated, professionally qualified, and supported within well-resourced, efficient and effectively governed systems.’*  
(UNESCO, 2015, p. 54)

There is an international crisis in teacher supply (Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2020; EURYDICE, 2021; Ovenden-Hope, 2021). Recruiting and retaining enough teachers to meet school needs has been a challenge for, and challenged by, the agencies that control teacher supply for many years (See 2022). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization’s (UNESCO) Sustainable Development Goal 4, launched in 2015 as part of the Education 2030 Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2015, p. 21) wanted to ‘ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong opportunities for all’; with 4.c committing to ‘substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers’. 4c is clearly not happening: teachers have not yet been ‘adequately recruited’ (UNESCO, 2015, p. 54) in developing or developed countries. In England in 2021, 40% of teachers left the profession by year ten, 23% by year three, while teacher recruitment in 2022 was 50% below the target for trainee teachers (DfE, 2022). In the United States, Education Secretary Miguel Cardona warned of disruptions caused by teacher shortages, with the National Education Association reporting that 55% of educators are ready to leave the profession in 2022 (Camera, 2022). In Australia, states are reporting that Covid has worsened existing teacher shortages (Ore & Hinchliffe, 2022). The United Nations concurs with international

reporting on the impact of Covid in worsening existing challenges in teacher supply globally (United Nations, 2022).

The primary cause, or even key causes, of this international crisis that has left schools stuck in a cycle of struggling to recruit teachers to plug the gaps left by those that leave is difficult to evidence. There are few robust longitudinal studies exploring the reasons for teacher shortages (See *et al.*, 2020a), or solutions (See *et al.*, 2020b) to address the recruitment and retention problem. Governments attempt to support schools by focusing on financial packages to attract new teachers (especially in subjects perceived in the previous year to be falling short of required teacher numbers), while failing to secure the retention of experienced teachers (See 2022). Ideally, teaching would be a graduate profession of choice, but it is not, as the challenge to train, recruit and retain enough teachers each year demonstrates (Worth *et al.*, 2022). This paper offers a theory of status-based teacher shortages. It is argued that the agencies that control teacher recruitment and oversee teacher retention have not realised the importance of ‘status’ in establishing a set of circumstances that contribute to declining trainee teacher numbers and increasing teacher attrition. Teaching (occupational) and teacher (individual) status is complex, arising from multifaceted social and personal contexts. By understanding status, professionalism and teacher supply we can start to solve the crisis that exists internationally in recruiting and retaining teachers.

## STATUS

In order to understand how status could affect teacher recruitment and retention, it is important to define what status means in this context. The word ‘status’ has a Latin origin meaning ‘standing’ (Hargreaves & Flutter, 2013), and this meaning has been adapted in its common use as a noun to be understood as the ‘respect and importance given to someone or something’ (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022). Therefore status has

meaning in relation to both teaching (the way it is experienced by the profession as an occupation) and teachers (the way it is experienced by the individual teacher).

Status is complex, in that occupational and individual status are experienced both objectively (for example, social entitlements of the teaching profession and/or teacher) and subjectively (for example, the way an individual experiences the status of being a teacher, and/or the way the teaching profession is perceived by individuals). There have been studies that differentiate between occupational prestige, esteem and status (e.g. Hoyle, 2001) in an attempt to categorise objective experiences of status. For teaching, ‘prestige’ would refer to public perception of teaching’s ranking in the hierarchy of occupations; ‘esteem’ to the regard teachers bring to the profession in the eyes of the public; and ‘status’ as that attributed to teaching by knowledgeable groups in society (Hoyle, 2001).

The International Labour Organization (ILO) and UNESCO in 1966 established a recommendation for understanding the status of teachers, which was reaffirmed in 1997 for higher education teachers (ILO/UNESCO, 2016, p. 21):

*‘The expression ‘status’, as used in relation to teachers, means both the standing or regard accorded them, as evidenced by the level of appreciation of the importance of their function and of their competence in performing it, and the working conditions, remuneration and other material benefits accorded them relative to other professional groups.’*

The ILO/UNESCO definition of status applies an objective meaning to status, incorporating Hoyle’s (2001) ideas of occupation prestige and esteem, but does not engage with the subjective experience of status that teachers have and that may affect their decision to remain in or leave teaching. Therefore, while the nuanced approach to status that

considers prestige and esteem is worth noting, understanding the full role of status in the teacher supply crisis requires focus on objective and subjective status, or teaching as a profession and teacher as professional, and status is therefore defined as:

*Status is used in relation to teaching as an occupation, and teachers as individuals, and means respectively the level of regard and entitlements objectively given to the occupation by the public and other professions, and the subjective level of esteem given to the occupation by an individual.*

The complexity in the establishment of teacher status is compounded by the fluidity between objective and subjective contextual issues, for example, teacher pay, which is established by policy-makers, operationalised by schools, experienced by teachers and observed by the public, thereby flowing between the objective and subjective status domains of teaching and teachers. As Hargreaves & Flutter (2019) stated, 'Internationally, the status of teachers is fraught with ambiguity, contradiction, and complexity.'

### PROFESSIONALISM

Status cannot be discussed without reference to teaching as a profession and teachers' professionalism. Teaching is considered to be complex, requiring specialist knowledge, training and skills (Ingersoll & Gregory, 2018), and would therefore be assumed to have a similar status to professions that are similarly complex and specialist, such as medicine and the individual professionalism associated with this. The reason for the ILO/UNESCO 1996 recommendation for the status of teachers was a wish to secure global recognition of teaching as a profession deserving of high standing and regard in society. A profession in the Cambridge Dictionary (2022) is stated to be 'respected because it involves a high level of education and training'. Teaching and teachers' professional identity is 'marked by both confusion and contention'

(Ingersoll & Gregory, 2018), because teaching has variable levels of training and increasing numbers of unqualified teachers internationally (Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2020; Ovenden-Hope, 2021), and because teachers lack control over their own terms and conditions (with agencies making decisions on issues of pay, conditions, quality and curriculum in many countries (Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2020) and experience high accountability with a lack of autonomy (Worth & Van den Brande, 2020).

These issues that impact on teaching as a profession are directly related to status for teaching and teachers. It is interesting to consider that teaching affords many teachers 'a route out of the working class toward a more professional status' (Hargreaves & Flutter, 2019), unlike medicine that typically supports class privilege through entry criteria into the profession. Hargreaves and Flutter (2019) concluded that teaching 'remains at best a semi-professional occupation', which may be explained, given the class factors still in play in accessing different professional 'ranks', by considering Bourdieu's position on status being aligned to the social reproduction of social class-related 'habitus', defined as:

*A subjective but not individual system of internalised structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class. (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 86)*

In other words, the professionalism of teachers, and the status that accompanies it, both at a public and individual level is reinforced by class constructs internalised and actioned by each group, or class, within the society. It is worth noting that part of this social construct is the 'feminisation' of teaching, which is associated with lower status for a range of stereotypical reasons:

*Feminisation... has resulted in a lack of professionalisation within teaching, leading the profession to be associated with low pay, lack*

*of authority and discipline, loss of accumulated experience as women left the profession to marry – all of which has resulted in a low status. (Kelleher et al., 2011, p. 13)*

While this may sound deterministic, realising the strength of habitus in sustaining behaviours and expectations, policies and practices that have resulted in a reduced professionalism of teaching and teachers can help in developing thinking on the status of teaching and teachers.

### CURRENT STATUS OF TEACHING AND TEACHERS

The status of teaching and teachers internationally, both objectively and subjectively, is low, ranking midway (7th out of 14 professions) in the Global Teacher Status Index in, 2018 (Dolton et al., 2018), with no indication that this status has improved in recent years. The Covid-19 pandemic and worldwide lockdowns created additional burdens on teachers to sustain hybrid models of virtual and face-to-face teaching, with little recognition at public level of the challenges being faced in doing this. During the height of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, agencies and governments briefly acknowledged the important role that schools, teaching and teachers played in supporting the world economy as 'a fundamental building block to national success' (Cordingley & Crisp, 2020, p. 146). Howson (2020, p. 19) observed that:

*A modern economy needs an educated workforce. It should not be beyond the powers of politicians to ensure such a workforce is available to teach every child that the state is responsible for educating by designing a system that provides sufficient well-trained teachers, with the highest quality preparation, and where they are needed by schools.*

The status of teaching and teachers was therefore briefly experienced objectively and subjectively as a higher-ranking profession in most developed countries.

Schools were seen to support vulnerable children and those of keyworkers to engage in the economic and health-related activity needed to keep the world as we know it turning. However, this pandemic-afforded rise in status for teaching and teachers was short-lived, and representation throughout the media soon reverted to portraying teachers as a problem, schools as closed and supporting neither struggling parents (Walters, 2022) nor the economy. This representation did little to enhance the reputation of teaching, or teachers, as a high-status profession in society.

The status both of teachers as individuals and of teaching as an occupation was affected by the pandemic. Understanding this current status is more complex than how the teacher 'feels' about their status, or society feels about teaching as a profession, because individuals in society may also perceive the status of teachers and/or teaching in different ways based on personal and social experiences of them during the pandemic. These experiences would have built on previous perceptions, such as teaching being poorly paid when compared to other professions as a consequence of global economic recession and the knock-on effect of this on teacher well-being and job security (Hargreaves & Flutter, 2013). Despite broad international efforts, such as those by the ILO and UNESCO since 1966 to establish the 'status' of teaching as a profession (UNESCO, 2015; ILO/UNESCO, 2016), social and individual beliefs about the value of teachers/teaching within a hierarchy of professional standing are informed by habitus and social constructs.

The status of teaching and teachers is therefore directly affected by politics and educational policy, which in many countries demonstrates an increasing move toward accountability (e.g. school inspection, league tables of school and student performance) that reduces teacher and school autonomy in the name of raising standards and outcomes. There are countries that buck

the trend of teaching being a lower-status profession, where the status of teaching and teachers remains high 'because parents and communities value teachers for their contribution to their children's development and future' (Symeonidis, 2015, p. 22), for example in Flanders (Belgium) (Hargreaves & Flutter, 2013). However, the majority of countries perceive teaching as a lower-status profession that is remunerated accordingly, a situation that needs addressing if teacher shortages are to be tackled:

*The need to address the linkages between a diminishing respect or status of the profession and the association that this has with teacher remuneration is crucial, as this will in time have subsidiary impacts on quality... More so, higher status of the profession along with better remuneration will not only generate interest in teacher training courses among graduates but is more likely to ensure a fall in attrition rates more broadly. (Kelleher et al., 2011, p. 76)*

## A STATUS-BASED THEORY OF TEACHER SHORTAGES

Teaching and teacher status is complex, established through many objective and subjective contexts, both social and individual. As Hargreaves & Flutter (2013) stated, status 'may be determined by certain factual variables such as levels of education and pay, but is experienced as a psycho-social phenomenon that can be perceived only by its reflections from various surfaces or interfaces' (p. 36). These 'surfaces and interfaces' that reflect teaching and teacher status are what have been identified to consider a status-based theory of teacher shortages.

The 'agencies' that control the supply, conditions and development of teachers, as well as the curriculum taught and inspected in schools, such as the Department for Education on behalf of the government in England and the

government and Swedish Association for Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) in Sweden (Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2020), have established a dull surface on which the status of teaching and teachers can reflect. The control of teaching by central government agencies has contributed to a status-based crisis of teacher shortages by enabling a perception of teaching to become established in society and in individuals (habitus) that teaching is low-status, so much so that the profession itself cannot be trusted to determine its own pay, conditions or curriculum, reinforced by low pay relative to other professions and external scrutiny of inspections.

Howson (2020, p. 19) has noted that agencies in England since the 1970s have 'not coped well with external circumstances that have affected teacher supply', with teaching becoming less attractive to graduates as an occupation. Agencies responsible for recruiting and retaining enough teachers in other countries appear similarly responsible for teacher shortages due to policies that fail to raise the status of teaching, instead focusing on financial incentives for training that only provide a short-term fix (See et al., 2020). In Jamaica, for example, where education policy has resulted in 'poor working conditions, feelings of disempowerment, low professional autonomy, lack of meaningful professional preparation' (Gentles, 2020, p. 197), additional bursaries do little to mitigate the damage to the status of teaching and teachers in order to attract teachers.

It could be argued that agencies controlling teaching have created a status that is akin to teachers being a 'commodity', rather than professionals (Ovenden-Hope, 2021). This market-driven 'surface' for reflecting teacher status does not match the surfaces of other higher-status professions, such as medicine or law. Treating teachers/teaching as a commodity, or product/service, to be managed establishes less a profession and more a product (delivered by number of teachers trained) and service (teachers

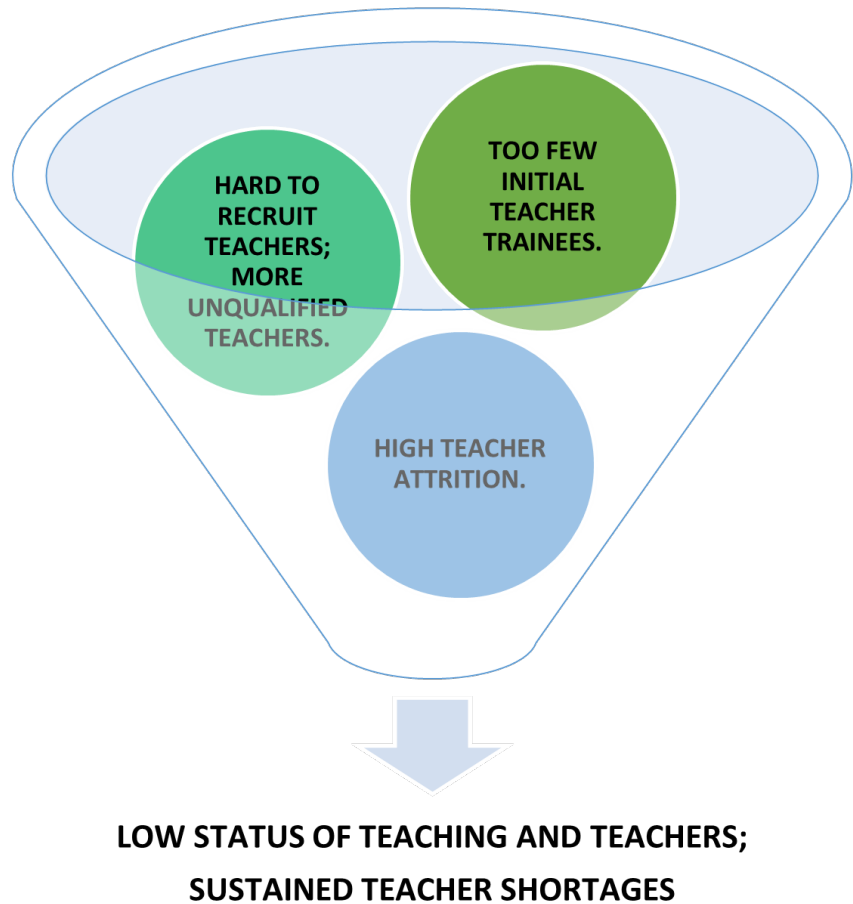


delivering a set curriculum in a certain way). Agencies have focused government policy on 'enough teachers to meet demand, to secure the product (teacher) and to provide the service (teaching)' (Ovenden-Hope, 2021), pp. 72–3). Unfortunately this focus has also meant that more unqualified teachers are being recruited to schools, further supporting the demise of the status of teaching and teachers, as the high level of training and skills expected of a profession is no longer seen as essential (Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2020).

The functional position of agencies that control teacher supply creates a surface that really does diminish the status of teachers and teaching. Agencies have had to ensure that there are enough teachers in schools to teach all the students, but with persistent teacher shortages this has resulted in the removal of many of the constructs we understand to constitute a professional, such as having a qualification. In Sweden in 2018, one-third of teachers were uncertified, with numbers expected to reach 80,000 in 2031 (Niklasson, 2020). In England in 2019, there were 25,078 unqualified teachers in state-funded schools (DfE, 2019a). In the United States, 8.8% of teachers were not fully certified in 2016 (Garcia & Weiss, 2019), and this is expected to have increased as the teacher shortage has increased as identified above. The challenge then becomes one of breaking a spiral of habitus-reinforced perception. In other words, what is the solution for re-establishing an occupation and the individuals that do that job as a high-status profession and career of choice within the common thinking of both society and individuals?

In societies and communities where teaching is not perceived or treated as a profession, and teaching and teachers have low status, it becomes a surface that reflects:

- Low initial teacher trainee numbers
- Challenges for teacher recruitment
- High teacher attrition



**LOW STATUS OF TEACHING AND TEACHERS;  
SUSTAINED TEACHER SHORTAGES**

Figure 1 Status-based teacher shortages

- Increased numbers of unqualified/unlicensed teachers (deregulation)

Governments that give control to agencies to treat teaching as a service that 'can be done by any seemingly competent adult (commodity) without a teaching qualification and, in some cases, a degree, undermines the status and value of teaching as a highly skilled profession' (Ovenden-Hope, 2021, p. 73). When the status of teaching and teachers is low, and typically accompanied by pay and conditions poorer than those for comparable professions, the attractiveness of teaching to those considering it as a career and to established teachers is reduced and teacher shortages prevail (see Figure 1). The low status of teaching as a profession, and of teachers, is embedded in common understanding (habitus), reinforced by media representations and individual expectations and experiences as they live their lives.

Agencies must realise that approaching teacher shortages as an exercise in meeting demand is doomed to fail. Teachers are not commodities, but by treating them as such, the status of the profession, and perception of status experienced by those in the profession, is diminished. Objective and subjective feelings about the status of teaching as an occupation and teachers as individuals are developed in society, communities and individuals in the actions towards teaching and teachers by those that control teaching (government and agencies) and systems in the superstructure that support them (such as the media). From this position, there is an international status-based teacher shortage. Status is bound to notions of habitus that are reaffirmed in education policy and practice. Change will only start when the precept of teaching and teachers as valued, trusted and respected by governments and agencies becomes part of policy and practice.

Some countries have taken tentative steps toward a new surface from which to reflect the status of teaching, aiming to make teaching a more inviting occupation and impact on teacher shortages. In England the government's Recruitment and Retention Strategy aims to 'support a career offer that remains attractive to teachers as their careers and lives develop' (DfE, 2019b, p. 24). However, this strategy has not challenged existing education policy in England that deregulated teaching in 2012 to allow the recruitment of unqualified teachers in academies, free and studio schools. In China, teachers who follow a government training programme are given support and development that raises their status; this includes 'access to furthering their education in their first five working years... necessary working and living conditions' (Liu & Li, 2020, p. 179), which is a start, but as with England, more is needed to affirm the status of teaching and teachers.

There is a global teacher shortage (EURYDICE, 2021). The status of teaching and of teachers is not comparable with that of high-ranking professions (Dolton *et al.*, 2018). As both an occupation and individual pursuit, teaching and teachers are subject to control by government and agencies, which has reduced the status to a semi-professional level (Hargreaves & Flutter, 2013). Perceptions of teaching and teachers are embedded in the policies and practices of societies and communities, with class and gender factoring into the social standing attributed by others, and the teachers themselves. Teacher shortages are affected by the status of the 'profession', a status that equates with low pay, poor conditions, high accountability and poor well-being. Until this status changes, countries will be in crisis in attracting and retaining qualified teachers and the UNESCO Sustainability and Development Goal 4, an equitable education for all, will never be achieved. ■

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