

Teachers' Status in Israel: Effect of COVID-19 crisis

Research Report

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Executive Summary

Background

Ever since the beginning of the education system in Israel, huge efforts have been made to improve the status of teachers, out of awareness of the many implications it has on education and society. These efforts continue today and the question of teachers' status in society remains at the center of educational and public discourse. Standard measurement tools are needed to objectively examine teachers' status and evaluate changes that have taken place as a result of planned initiatives and unplanned events affecting it. Six years ago, Levinsky College of Education developed a questionnaire to measure teachers' status and has followed its outcomes through an annual survey. This year, a particular issue relating to teachers' status was added, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which powerfully shook up the education system and necessitated rapid and significant changes in teachers' activities in all educational institutions. This year's survey examined teachers' status using the standard questionnaire, administered every year, for the purpose of examining whether any changes had occurred. In addition, open questions were added about the effects of the transition to distance teaching on teachers' status.

Methodology

Participants were 500 respondents over the age of 18, making up a representative sample of the Jewish population in Israel. Data were collected from a structured questionnaire comprising two parts: (a) standard questionnaire measuring teachers' status, developed by Levinsky College of Education to follow teacher status in Israel¹. The questionnaire examines teachers' status, compared to five other professions – doctors, lawyers, high-tech personnel, social workers, and military personnel – using seven dimensions describing the social status of professionals: contribution to society, prestige in society's eyes, prestige in respondents' eyes, professionalism required in profession, professional development, attractiveness (desire that child will take up profession) and suitability of salary. Respondents were asked to assess each profession, in each dimension, on a six-point scale. (b) The second part focused on the COVID-19

¹ Gilat I & Weingrowitz N., "Teacher Status in Israel Today, (2018), *Dapim*, 68, 11-27

period. It included a direct question about the effect of COVID-19 on teachers' status, and attitudes toward teachers' functioning during the COVID-19 period. The questionnaire was distributed in February 2021, a year after the transition to distance learning because of the pandemic.

Findings

- a. Teachers' social status, as calculated by the global measure based on all dimensions included in the questionnaire, was 3.92 on a six-point scale. It was lower than that of doctors (5.22), high-tech personnel (5.04), lawyers (4.36) and military personnel (3.98) and higher than that of social workers (3.71). This ranking was identical to findings in all previous years in which survey has been conducted.
- b. **Comparison between previous and current year, in status of different professions, showed a small (but almost significant) improvement in the status of teachers and doctors.** There was no change in the social status of other professions. It is possible that this improvement derived from the fact that doctors were at the forefront of the fight against COVID-19 and teachers carried the burden of continuing to operate the educational system, with all the complexities characterizing the last year.
- c. Comparison between previous and current year in different dimensions making up the overall teachers' status score showed **a small, but statistically significant improvement in three dimensions: professional development the profession enables, attractiveness of the profession and suitability of salary.** The improvement in professional development could be explained by the fact that teachers expanded their pool of teaching skills to an online environment. The improvement in desire that children would take up teaching could be explained by teachers' occupational security, as expressed in the COVID-19 crisis.
- d. An interesting finding with regard to teaching during the COVID-19 period, was expressed in the fact that **more than half of respondents (54%) observed, to a great degree, teachers' lessons on Zoom.** Hence, Zoom lessons brought classrooms "into the home" and enabled parents and other family members, to be impressed directly by teachers' work. This phenomenon was demonstrated in one respondent's comment: "*We saw the role and mission of the teacher on Zoom, you get a one-time glimpse into the crazy world of teachers coping with a large number*

of children, disruptions, impolite discourse and parents' huge contempt mainly for teachers' and the system's demands". Until the COVID-19 period, parents had formulated their views of teaching from indirect information such as reports from children or other parents and now they had more reliable information on which to formulate their attitudes.

- e. In the analysis examining the effect of COVID-19 on teachers' status, respondents were divided into a group who had viewed Zoom meeting a lot and those who had not. Each group provided different findings: in the group with high Zoom viewing, the positive effect (32%) was almost twice that of the negative effect. In the low viewing group, the negative effect (24%) was slightly higher than the positive effect (21%).
- f. Analysis of the justifications for the **positive effect** on teachers' status revealed two reasons: (a) **teachers' dedication to their work**. For example: *"Teachers had to teach themselves immediately, how to teach completely differently. To adapt to something they had not been taught, in addition, they have their own families to take care of at the same time as teaching. Hats off"*. (b) **Quality of teaching**. Example: *"Even so I valued it a lot...and then, with COVID-19, when I was at home – I saw my daughter's homeroom teacher (8th grade) in action, I was lucky enough to be a fly on the wall a few times – it was really exciting. Amazing. The warmth and love she shone on her pupils without harming her professionalism and authority, and overall I saw the challenges in teachers' work"*.
- g. Analyzing justifications for the **negative effect** on teachers' status revealed two reasons: (a) **low professional ability**. Example *"Status shrunk more and demonstrated the weakness of the teacher in his ability to interest and control classroom education"*. (b) **gap between remuneration and investment**. Example: *"In my opinion, they shouldn't get a full salary, when parents fulfill a large part of their role, and some of them at least abuse this and don't invest as they should in children"*.
- h. An analysis of the question examining teachers' functioning during the COVID-19 period revealed that a large majority of respondents (85%) believed that teachers' dedication to their work was high, about 75% were satisfied with the emotional aspect – relationships between teacher and child and between teacher and parent, and about 60% of respondents believed that the level of teaching on Zoom was high. Satisfaction with a-synchronic teaching (such as using short films and presentations

sent to children) was higher than satisfaction with synchronic teaching (Zoom sessions).

- i. Two major conclusions arose from the research: (a) teachers' functioning during the COVID-19 crisis was evaluated highly, especially among those who directly viewed their teaching. (b) despite this high evaluation, the change in teachers' status was minimal. It is possible that status has been constructed in Israeli society's mind over years, and only fundamental planned changes in the education system (such as providing greater autonomy) are likely to significantly change it.

Teachers' Status in Israel: Effect of COVID-19 crisis

Background

It is possible to see that teachers' status in society is at a crossroads, into which key issues in the educational field flow and at the interface between education and society. These issues include, among others, characteristics of those who choose education as their occupation, quality of teaching, pupils' achievements, and the quality of school graduates. In light of this, one can understand the never-ending efforts invested – in Israel and worldwide – to raise teachers' status in society. The state of Israel has been making these efforts since the education system was established. One expression of this is the work of more than fifteen committees established for the purpose of improving the education system, and set improving teachers' status as one of their core targets. To examine the success of efforts to improve teachers' efforts, appropriate measuring tools are necessary, which allow, as much as possible, an objective examination of changes that have occurred in teachers' status over time and link these changes with significant events occurring in the country. These events also include initiated reforms, such as “New Horizon” (“Ofek Hadash”) and “Courage to Change” (“Oz Letmura”) as well as unplanned events powerfully affecting the education field, such as the COVID-19 crisis, which has been with us since February 2020.

The Levinsky College of Education developed a questionnaire to measure teachers' status in society². This questionnaire has been distributed for the past six years – at the same time – in February – and allows examination whether changes have occurred in teachers' status. Findings have shown that over the past six years there have been no significant changes in teachers status. In February 2020, the education system was seriously shaken as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, when teaching transitioned comprehensively and rapidly to distance learning. This change was unprecedented in its scope and potential intensity on all components making up the education system. The questionnaire was distributed three weeks after the transition to distance learning and results did not show any change in teachers' status, compared to previous years. However, in a direct question about the effect of COVID-19 on teachers status (added

² Gilat I & Weingrowitz N., “Teacher Status in Israel Today, (2018), *Dapim*, 68, 11-27

to the usual questionnaire) it emerged that about a third of respondents had positively changed their opinions. The previous survey, as mentioned, was distributed about three weeks after the sudden transition to distance teaching, when the entire education system was in a state of transition and getting itself organized for a new reality, both organizationally and pedagogically. This time period was too short to assess the implications of such a significant change, on teachers' status, which had been consolidated in the Israeli public's consciousness over decades.

The survey presented in this report, was conducted about a year after COVID-19 broke out. During this year a large part of school lessons were through distance teaching and the education system was at the center of public discourse with regard to its functioning in this new reality. Teachers themselves were exposed much more genuinely to the population of parents, as a result of synchronized lessons on Zoom, at which parents could form impressions of teachers' teaching skills as well as their emotional connection with pupils. Such exposure can affect perceptions of teachers' status in society. The current survey examined whether there was any change in teachers' status in light of changes in the education system following the COVID-19 crisis. To answer this question, we employed the standard questionnaire, which allowed a comparison between results at the current point in time and previous years. Direct questions examining this topic were added to acquire richer information about the effect of the transition to distance learning.

Methodology

Description of sample

500 respondents participated in the survey, constituting a representative sample of the Jewish sector³, half of whom were women. Participants' religious affiliations were: 46% secular, 34% traditional, 13% religious and 9% ultra-Orthodox. Participants' mean age was 42.72 (SD = 15.70), with the youngest respondent aged 18 and the oldest aged 84. Participants' average number of years study was 14.1 (SD = 3.3), education personnel constituted 15% of respondents. The percentage of parents with children enrolled in the education system (from kindergarten to 12th grade) was 47.

³ The survey did not include respondents from the Arab population in Israel. A separate survey will examine teachers' status in the Arab sector.

Tools

Data was collected using a questionnaire specifically developed by the Levinsky College of Education for the purposes of developing a measurement to assess teachers' status in society. Respondents were asked to evaluate six professions, including teachers, in relation to seven dimensions included in the theoretical meaning of social status of a profession. The following dimensions: (1) the professional's status in society; (2) the professional's contribution to society; (3) level of professionalism a professional requires; (4) the professional's in respondents' eyes; (5) degree to which the profession enables personal development; (6) degree to which they would want their child to follow the profession; (7) degree to which salary a professional gets is appropriate. Professions assessed, other than teachers, were: doctors, high-tech personnel, lawyers, permanent military personnel and social workers. Respondents were asked to answer every question on a six-point scale.

To examine in greater detail the effect of distance teaching on teachers' status, we added a number of questions: firstly, a direct question, to which respondents were asked to choose between three options and justify their choice: (1) positive effect (2) negative effect on teachers' status (3) no effect on teachers' status. Secondly, attitudes toward teaching during the COVID-19 period. These were measured using statements referring to didactic and emotional aspects of teaching, such as: **“Teaching level in Zoom sessions was high”** and **“I am satisfied with the connection between the teacher and my child during the COVID-19 period”**. For each question, respondents were asked to indicate the degree of their agreement with statements on a six-point scale.

Findings

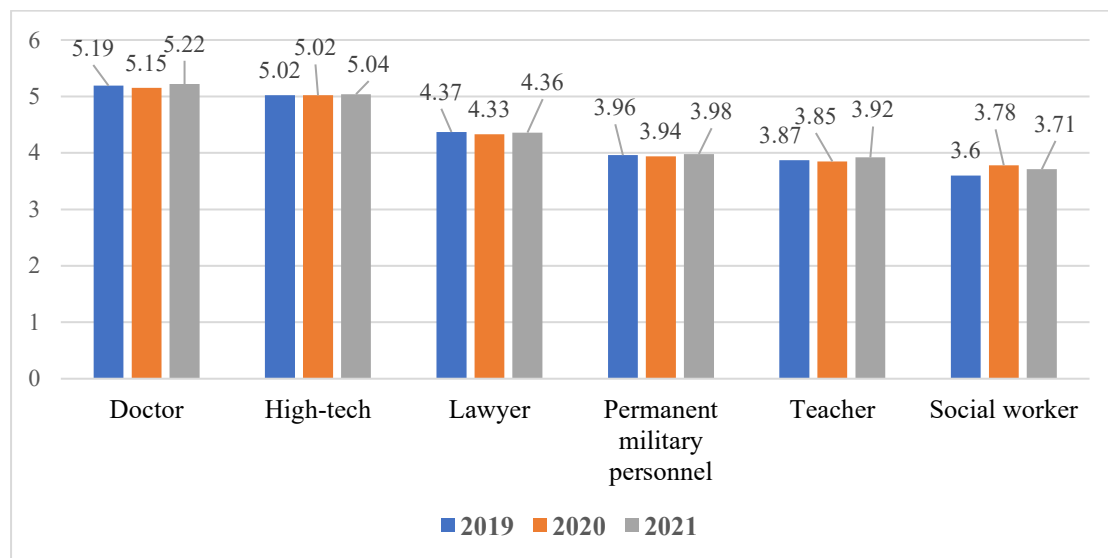
Respondents attitudes to teachers' status compared to other professions

First, we examined respondents attitudes to different professions by calculating a **general professional status measure**, calculated as mean score attitudes to the various dimensions detailed above. Scores ranked between 1 (low status) and 6 (high status). Table 2 presents the general measure's means of the six professions, in the current year, compared to the two previous years. Means are also presented in Figure 1.

Table 2: Means (and standard deviations) of professions' status measure, 2019-2021

	2019	2020	2021
Doctor	5.19 (.56)	5.15 (.60)	5.22 (.57)
High-tech	5.02 (.65)	5.02 (.67)	5.04 (.64)
Lawyer	4.37 (.80)	4.33 (.83)	4.36 (.80)
Permanent Military	3.96 (.85)	3.94 (.90)	3.98 (.83)
Teacher	3.92 (.71)	3.85 (.71)	3.92 (.73)
Social Worker	3.60 (.81)	3.78 (.77)	3.71 (.76)

Figure 1: Means of professions' status measure 2019-2021



To examine differences between professions regarding the general measure of their status, an analysis of variance was performed and it showed a significant effect, ($F(5,2510) = 566.70, P < .001, \eta^2 = .53$) deriving from the fact that doctors' status was highest, followed by status of high-tech personnel representing the closest attitude to the highest, followed by that of lawyers representing a reasonably high status, followed by that of permanent military personnel which was also separated from all the other professions with the exception of teachers' status and for both attitudes were average and finally status of social workers representing a reasonable low to average status.

To examine differences between the various professions' status between the current and previous years, T-tests were performed and these showed a significant difference between doctors' status ($t = 1.89, p < .05$) and near-significant change for teachers' status ($t = 1.54, p < .06$). In these two cases there was an improvement – profession status after "COVID-19 Year" was slightly higher than it had been one year previously.

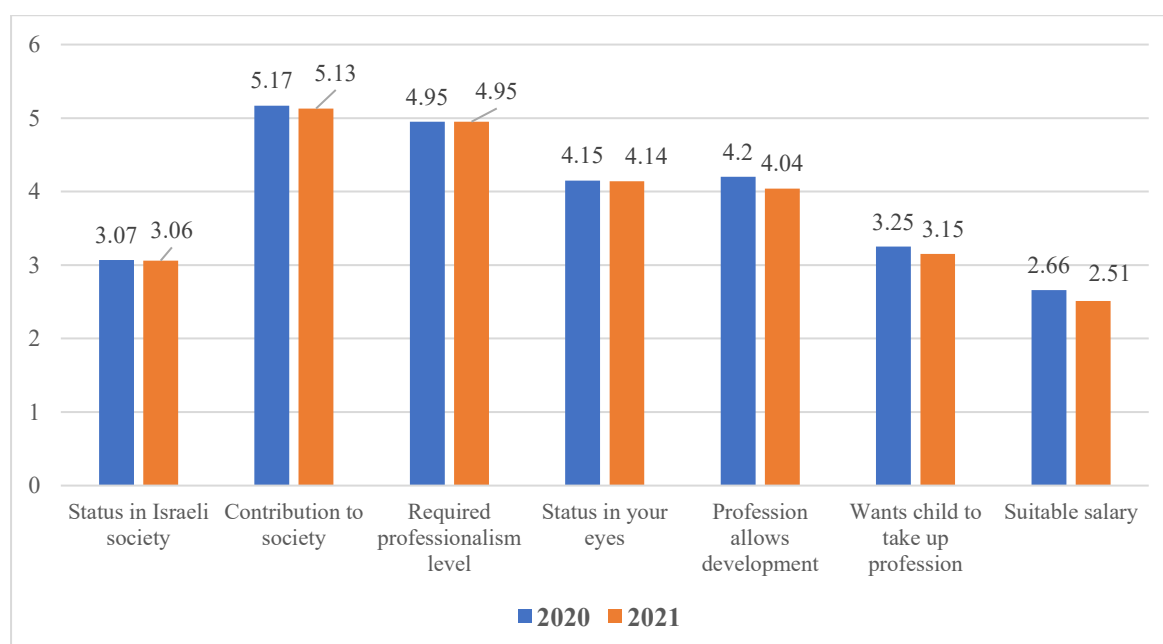
Respondents attitudes to teachers' status – analysis according to dimensions

The general measure of profession is made up of seven dimensions, as described in the Methodology chapter. To examine the profile of teachers' status according to these dimensions, and changes that occurred during the COVID-19 year, means and standard deviations were calculated for each dimension in the current year in contrast to the previous year, and T-tests were performed to examine significance of change. Table 3 presents the means and standard deviations of dimensions, in the last two years. The range of scores is between 1 (low) and 6 (high).

Table 3: Means and standard deviations of dimensions making up teachers' status in past two years

	2020	2021
Status in Israeli society	3.06 (1.10)	3.07 (.98)
Contribution to society	5.13 (1.02)	5.17 (.96)
Required professionalism level	4.95 (1.12)	4.95 (1.14)
Status in your eyes	4.14 (1.38)	4.15 (1.34)
Profession allows development	4.04 (1.34)	4.20 (1.35)
Wants child to take up profession	3.15 (1.43)	3.25 (1.45)
Suitable salary	2.51 (1.25)	2.66 (1.30)

Figure 2: Means of dimensions making up teachers' status, in past two years



The table and figure show a large difference between various dimensions: contribution to society and required level of professionalism were seen as high; status in eyes of respondents and possibilities of development were seen as average – high; status in eyes of society, profession’s attractiveness (desire for child to take it up) and salary suitability were seen as average. The profile for the current year is very similar to the previous year (and also to previous years since the survey started in 2013).

An examination of differences in each dimension between 2020 and 2021, through T-tests, showed a significant improvement in two of them: suitable salary ($t = 1.86, p < .05$) and profession allows development ($t = 1.88, p < .05$) and a close to significant effect in the attractiveness (desire for child to take up teaching) dimension.

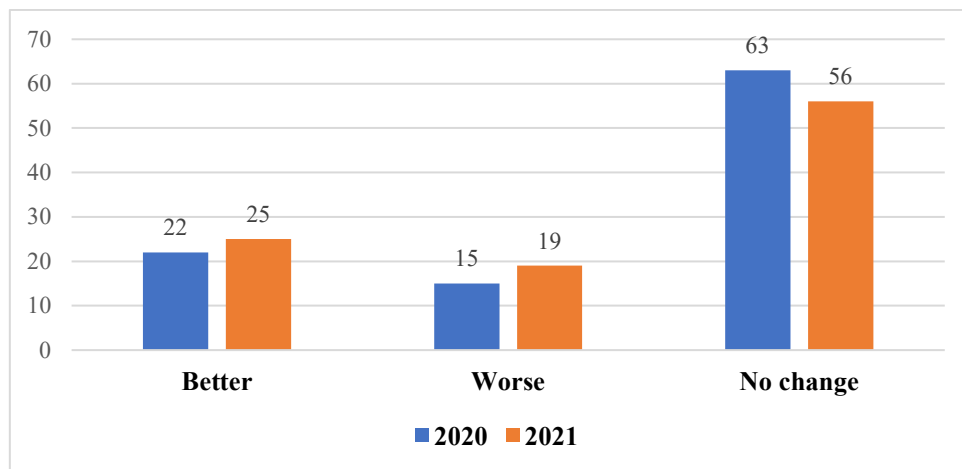
Effect of COVID-19 crisis on teachers’ status

As stated in the Methodology chapter, participants were asked to choose one of three possibilities with regard to COVID-19’s effect on teachers’ status in their eyes. Respondents’ distribution was calculated for these possibilities.

Table 4: Respondents’ distribution with regard to COVID-19 crisis’ effect on teachers’ status in 2020 and 2021 (percentages)

2020 (N=500)			2021 (N=500)		
Better	Worse	No change	Better	Worse	No change
22	15	63	25	19	56

Figure 3: COVID-19 crisis’ effect on teachers’ status



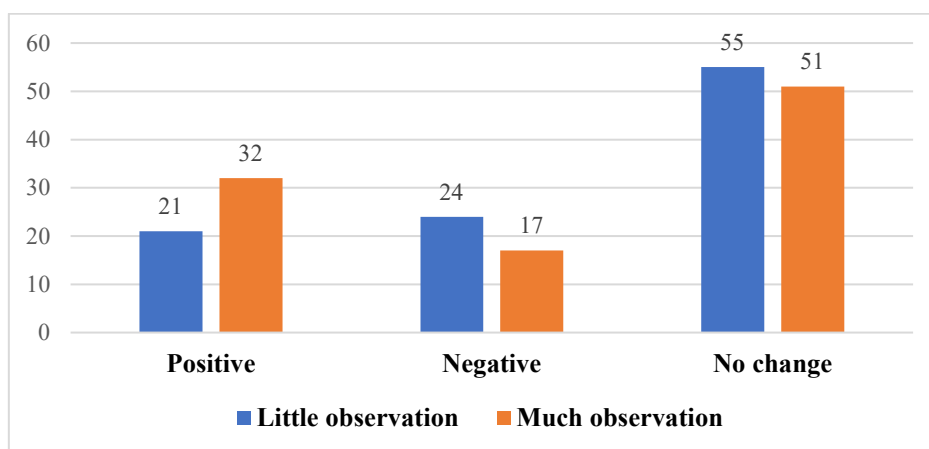
The table showed the COVID-19 crisis’ a higher effect on teachers’ status (positive and negative) this year (44%) compared to the previous year (37%). This difference is

statistically significant as shown in a chi squared test ($X^2 = 5.09$, $p < .05$) when the direction of effect was found, this year, similarly to last year, a higher percentage of respondents reporting a positive change than a negative change. Since the effect of distance teaching on teachers' status could have been linked to the degree of respondents' exposure to teaching itself, we added to the research conducted this year, a question about degree of observing children's Zoom lessons. We divided respondents into a group of little observation (scoring 1 to 3 on a six-point scale), constituting 46% of respondents, and much observation (scored 4 and above on the scale) constituting 54% of respondents. We examined the distribution of COVID-19's effect on teachers' status in each of the two groups separately. Results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Distribution of respondents with regard to COVID-19 crisis' effect on teachers' status affiliated with observing Zoom lessons, in 2021

Little observation (N = 159)			Much observation (N = 184)		
Positive	Negative	No change	Positive	Negative	No change
55	24	21	51	17	32

Figure 4: Distribution of respondents with regard to COVID-19 crisis’ effect on teachers’ status affiliated with observing activities on Zoom



The table shows a completely different pattern of the effect of the COVID-19 crisis on teachers’ status: among respondents who observed Zoom lessons, the positive effect was almost twice as high as the negative effect, whereas among respondents who had not observed Zoom lessons, the negative effect was slightly higher than the positive effect.

Analysis of reasons

Respondents were asked to explain their answers referring to the effect of COVID-19 on teachers’ status. Separate content analysis was conducted on the reasons given for the positive and negative effects given. The results of this analysis are presented below:

Reasons for positive effect

Dedication to work and investment in pressurized conditions

- *Teachers had to teach themselves immediately, how to teach completely differently. To adapt to something they had not been taught, in addition, they have their own families to take care of at the same time as teaching. Hats off.*
- *Teachers work really hard preparing all the Zoom sessions for pupils, with help for pupils from a distance, and most have their own children whom they also have to help.*

- *We learned to value teachers who invest time working from home a little more, we got to see on a day-to-day basis teachers' dedication to their pupils, their learning and emotional aspects during this chaotic time.*
- *I saw kindergarten teachers who were much more devoted than I had thought.*
- *Well done to those in the profession – I don't think I would successfully cope with 20-30 pupils – not on Zoom and not in the classroom.*
- *Efforts teachers were asked to make were double if not more than in normal times. It is difficult to control a class anyway, how much more so on Zoom.*
- *So much more is demanded of teachers now and everybody thinks they "are working from home".*

High professional abilities

- *It turns out that despite all the expectations, teachers successfully lead pupils to do good deeds at school. Who would have believed that the screen generation would want to return to school?*
- *Distance learning is more difficult than frontal learning and the public doesn't appreciate it.*
- *We saw the role and mission of the teacher on Zoom, you get a one-time glimpse into the chaotic world of teachers coping with a large number of children, disruptions, impolite discourse, and parents' huge contempt mainly for teachers' and the system's demands.*
- *I had the opportunity to follow from up close, and I saw amazing, caring, professional, humane teachers.*
- *Now with parents more involved in studies, they see the efforts on Zoom and how children function in terms of learning – there is greater appreciation.*
- *Even so I valued it a lot...and then, with COVID-19, when I was at home – I saw my daughter's homeroom teacher (8th grade) in action, I was lucky enough to be a fly on the wall a few times – it was really emotional. Amazing. The warmth and love she shone on her pupils without harming her professionalism and authority, and overall I saw the challenges in teachers' work*

Reasons for negative effect

Low professional abilities

- *It appears that teachers ability to adapt to the reality of distance learning isn't great*
- *Many teachers aren't prepared for the technological challenge*
- *Most teachers complained about learning on Zoom and did not get on with it*
- *Status shrunk more and demonstrated the weakness of the teacher in his ability to interest and control classroom education*
- *Pupils shirk lessons and don't respect teachers*

Gap between remuneration and investment

- *They get a salary for something that doesn't contribute to pupils*
- *They care mainly about themselves; they are perceived as lazy*
- *In my opinion, they shouldn't get a full salary, when parents fulfill a large part of their role, and some of them at least abuse this and don't invest as they should in children.*
- *The less teachers work the more they are remunerated and they demand even more. When the whole economy is collapsing, and people hardly make a living, if they do, teachers sit at home with their children, enjoy themselves and are not prepared to waive a jot or repay some of the days.*

Attitudes toward teachers' functioning during the COVID-19 period

Participants were asked to express their attitudes with reference to several aspects of teachers' functioning during the COVID-19 period. Theoretical statistics of the answers to these questions are presented in Table 6. The results refer to parents who often observed Zoom sessions and the scale is between 1 (low) and 6 (high).

Table 6 – Descriptive statistics of respondents’ attitudes to teachers during the COVID-19 period (N=180)

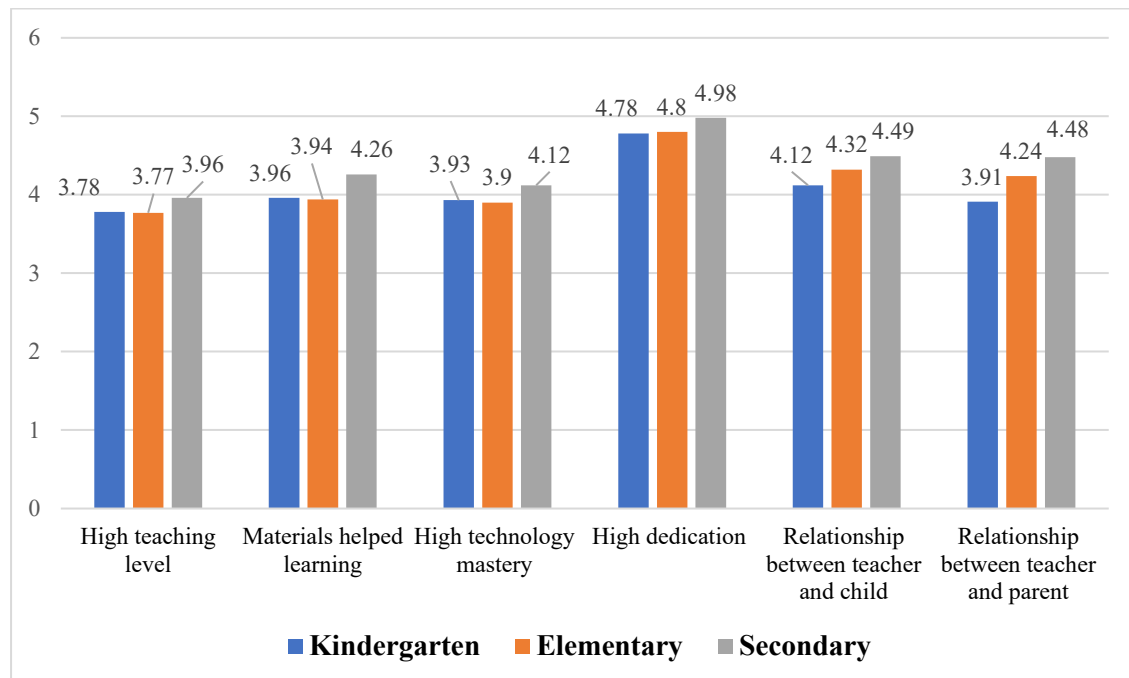
Statement	% Who agreed	Means	Standard deviation
Teaching level in Zoom session was high	57	3.82	1.34
A-synchronous learning material (presentations, short films) children received helped learning	68	4.06	1.35
Teachers' technology mastery was high	65	3.97	1.24
Teachers' dedication to their work was high	85	4.81	1.25
I am satisfied with relationship between the teacher and my child during the COVID-19 period	77	4.35	1.43
I am satisfied with the relationship between the teacher and myself during the COVID-19 period	76	4.31	1.37

The results show that most respondents evaluated teachers’ dedication to their work as high. Additionally, most respondents expressed positive attitudes with reference to the emotional aspect of teachers’ work during COVID-19 – teachers' relationships with children and parents. Attitudes towards teaching quality were on an average-high level. A comparison was conducted between parents of children in kindergartens, elementary and secondary schools about these questions. Means are presented in Table 7. The measurement scale was between 1 (low) and 6 (high).

Table 7 – Comparison between parents of children at kindergarten, elementary and secondary schools

Statement	Kindergarten	Elementary	Secondary
Teaching level in Zoom session was high	3.78	3.77	3.96
A-synchronic learning material (presentations, short films) children received helped learning	3.96	3.94	4.26
Teachers' technology mastery was high	3.93	3.90	4.12
Teachers' dedication to their work was high	4.78	4.80	4.98
I am satisfied with relationship between the teacher and my child during the COVID-19 period	4.12	4.32	4.49
I am satisfied with the relationship between the teacher and myself during the COVID-19 period	3.91	4.24	4.48

Figure 5: Comparison between parents of children in kindergarten, elementary and secondary school



Discussion

The research examined teachers' status at the end of a year of dramatic changes occurring in the education system following the COVID-19 pandemic. The core change was expressed in the sudden and comprehensive transition to distance learning, which forced teachers to adapt their teaching to an online environment and learn new skills without any advance preparation. Furthermore, teachers were forced to cope with additional pressures, including much ambiguity about changes in operational formula, pupils' low motivation to participate in Zoom lessons and difficulties fulfilling the role of parents, with children at home at the same time as their teaching work. Teachers' and the education system's communicative exposure was high throughout the year and therefore, there is special interest in examining whether changes occurred in perceptions of the social status of teachers.

We examined the effect of COVID-19 on teachers' status in two ways, one using a standard questionnaire developed by the Levinsky College of Education serving to measure teachers' status annually, for the past six years. The second way was direct questions about the COVID-19 period's effect on teachers' status.

Results from the first method testified to a very small improvement in the overall grade of teachers' status in the current study, compared to last year. Of the five other professions examined in the questionnaire, that of doctors also improved, and only very moderately. It is possible that the improvement in the social status of teachers and doctors derived from the fact that they carried the yoke of coping with COVID-19 more than high-tech personnel, lawyers, permanent military personnel and social workers, who were included in the study. A more detailed analysis of the changes in teachers' status revealed an improvement in three dimensions – professional development, attractiveness of the profession (desire that one's child would choose it) and salary suitability. Even though these changes are statistically significant, they are quite weak. Results acquired from the second way revealed that about half of respondents changed their minds about teachers' status following COVID-19. Some changed their opinions in favor of teachers, and others did not. The most frequent direction of change depended on the degree of respondents' exposure to teachers' work in practice. The study revealed that more than half the respondents often observed teachers' Zoom sessions with their classes. Among those who observed these session, positive change was twice as frequent as negative change whereas among those who only rarely observed Zoom

sessions, positive change was as frequent as negative change. It is reasonable to assume that the association between observing sessions and evaluating teachers, operated in two directions: observation not only affected perceptions of teachers' status, but was also affected by it, such that avoiding observing lessons derived from preconceived negative opinions about teachers' abilities. Nevertheless, the finding among lesson observers was a much higher rate of positive change, testifying to a higher quality of teachers. This conclusion is supported by the open reasons, in which respondents described the dedication, investment, technology mastery and successful coping with the difficult task of managing classes in pressurized conditions. Positive attitudes toward teachers' functioning during COVID-19 were also found in closed survey questions. Especially high satisfaction was expressed in relation to the emotional aspect – promoting relationships between children and teachers and between teachers and parents. Most respondents were also satisfied with the pedagogical aspect, the level of teaching on Zoom and a-synchronic learning material teachers sent to pupils. One can summarize by saying, that if teachers had been marked on the functioning during the very challenging and pressurized COVID-19 period, research participants would have scored them high.

Despite the appreciation teachers earned, the improvement in their status found in the standard questionnaire distributed every year, was slight and their relative place among all professions did not change. Teachers' status is below that of doctors, high-tech personnel, lawyers, and permanent military personnel and above that of social workers. It turns out, therefore, that despite tumultuous changes in the work of teachers, who were recruited to continue teaching under unusual conditions of pressure and load, who learned from today to tomorrow new methods and applied them in class – there was no fundamental improvement in the social status of the teaching profession. It seems that teachers' status in Israel was molded into the populations' consciousness over years, and withstands changes brought about by unplanned crises. It is possible that a fundamental change in teachers' status will develop from planned changes, which have been applied elsewhere around the world and greatly improved teachers' status. These changes include, among others, providing greater autonomy to schools and teachers, raising the profile quality of those certified to teach and increasing remuneration for teachers.

