

WHAT DOES THE VISUAL IMAGE OF A TEACHER HAVE TO DO WITH THE PRESTIGE OF THE TEACHING PROFESSION? SOME RESEARCH EXPERIENCE ON THIS ISSUE IN LATVIA

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ABSTRACT

Aim. Our study explores how 14-15-year-olds in Latvia perceive the visual image of the teacher, highlighting contribution of visual communication to the prestige of the teaching profession. Our research poses two questions: (RQ1) Which indicators of occupational prestige are attributable to teacher's visual image? (RQ2) How do pupils evaluate a teacher's image based on these indicators, and what does this reveal about their expectations for visual communication with teachers?

Methods. We conducted a qualitative study analysing the responses of 290 Latvian adolescents aged 14-15 to the question, "What does a typical teacher look like?" The analysis focused on four components related to the visual image of a teacher

that reflect indicators of occupational prestige: gender, age, physical appearance, verbal communication (e.g., tone of voice), and non-verbal communication.

Results. Pupils generally viewed teaching as a female-dominated profession, associating women teachers with kindness and care, and men with greater strictness. Age stereotypes were strong: teachers were often seen as “old,” with older staff described as strict, tired, or outdated, while younger teachers were valued for their energy, friendliness, and approachability. Pupils paid close attention to teachers’ communication styles, appreciating smiling, joking, and calmness, but criticising shouting, anger, and visible fatigue; they respected both cheerfulness and professional seriousness. In terms of appearance, neatness and modesty were preferred, and female teachers expected to be well-groomed but not sexualized.

Conclusions. Pupils’ responses highlight areas where visual communication can be improved: the findings indicate that respondents expect teachers to appear at least morally – if not physically – youthful, maintain a neat and discreet appearance, communicate in a cheerful manner, and avoid raising their voice to a shout.

Originality. Although extensive research has explored both the image of teacher and the prestige of the teaching profession, the relationship between these two phenomena has received only limited attention. Our study reveals that a teacher’s professional prestige contains indicators influenced by the teachers themselves: specifically, our findings highlight elements of visual communication that educators can critically assess to enhance the prestige of their profession.

Keywords: teacher, image of the teacher, occupational prestige, visual communication

INTRODUCTION

When we submitted the project on the study of the perception of the visual image of teachers among Latvian pupils for assessment with the, in our opinion, obvious assumption that the results of the study would contribute to raising the occupational prestige of teachers, the project assessors expressed doubts regarding the connection between the image of teachers and the occupational prestige. Although the link between the visual image and publicly mediated stereotypes of the teaching profession has been convincingly documented in the image research community (e.g., Bolo-tin Joseph, 2001; Fisher et al., 2008; Polat, 2023; Weber & Mitchell, 1995), this small ‘brick’ in the construction of occupational prestige – visual image – is, apparently, not highly valued by other education experts and policymakers. This prompted two research questions: (RQ1) Which indicators of occupational prestige are attributable to teacher’s visual image? (RQ2) How do pupils evaluate a teacher’s image based on these indicators, and what does this reveal about their expectations for visual communication with teachers? Historical research has examined the prestige of the teaching profession as part of the teachers professionalisation (e.g. Depaepe et al., 2006; Ga-

rai & Németh, 2017; Lee & Winandy, 2023), but in recent years occupational prestige has been the focus of several policy-initiated studies. The results raise alarms about the low prestige of the teaching profession in society, especially among educators themselves, which inevitably leads to the growing shortage of teachers at all levels of schooling and talented young people avoiding work at school. In 2018, 65% of Latvian schools reported teacher shortages, with around 2,000 vacancies ahead of the 2022/23 school year. Latvia ranks poorly within the EU, with only 11.8% of teachers aged 25-34, while 33.7% are aged 45-54 (European Commission's..., 2023). Addressing this, the Latvian Trade Union of Education and Science Employees (hereinafter LIZDA, as per the Latvian acronym), recommended enhancing traditional prestige indicators – pay, support for new entrants, legislative changes – and promoting a “positive image of the profession” (LIZDA, 2024, pp. 5, 14).

The shaping of the “positive image” of the profession has so far been the subject of four studies relevant to this article: (a) in 2016, LIZDA conducted an online survey on the prestige of teaching in Latvia, which was attended by 1,773 teachers, 352 secondary school pupils and 502 respondents representing “public opinion”; (b) in 2014, the Polish Educational Research Institute conducted a study explaining how the prestige of the teaching profession is perceived by teachers themselves and by others involved in the field of education. The participants in in-depth interviews included 52 teachers and 29 former teachers, while the views of school principals, students’ parents, local government representatives, and employers were sought in 103 in-depth interviews and 23 focus group interviews (Smak & Walczak, 2017); (c) One of the first large-scale studies in Latvia on the prestige of teaching took place in 2007 when 19 interviews and 8 focus group discussions sought the views of diverse groups of society. The participants included teachers, pupils and parents, students and lecturers of pedagogical programmes, education policymakers, representatives of teachers’ social organisations, and education experts (Misāne et al., 2007); (d) The multifaceted theoretical aspects of the teaching profession, including the status of the profession and the factors influencing it, have been examined by Monteiro (2015) drawing on legislation, educational research, reports from professional meetings of teachers and policymakers. These studies made important contributions to the identification of indicators of occupational prestige.

While the prestige of teaching has been less studied, the image of the teacher has attracted significant attention from historians and contemporary researchers. Soner Polat (2023) notes 48 English-language articles on teachers image in the Web of Science from 2002 to 2022, with the number increasing. Image studies can be categorised into three strands, depending on the source of the data: (a) Historical visual images of teachers as sourced from textbooks, fiction, and photos (e.g. Bolotin, 2001; Nóvoa, 2000; Vick, 2000). These studies assisted in identifying image components used also in the teacher’s image research in Latvia (Kestere & Kaļķe, 2021); (b) Research on contemporary perceptions of teachers’ visual images has been conducted through

interviews, drawings, and surveys. This trend began with David Wade Chambers (1983), who asked students from various countries to draw a typical scientist. Similar methods have since been applied to study the image of teachers (e.g., Bombi et al., 2020; Harrison et al., 2007; Langobardi et al., 2017; Martikainen, 2019; McGrath et al., 2017; Niikko, 2020). This experience was used in the study of 2011/2012 when research on the visual image of the teacher was conducted in Bulgaria, Greece, Mexico, Pakistan, Serbia, Slovenia, England, South Africa, Turkey, and Latvia under the supervision of university academic staff. In each country, around 100 pupils aged 15 were asked to describe and/or draw a typical teacher. The results were published in a book, with data for each country reported in a separate chapter (Kestere et al., 2012); (c) Mass media sources such as films, the press, and advertisements have also been studied, such as teacher portrayals in *The Simpsons* (Kantor et al., 2001). Other notable works include Sandra Weber and Claudia Mitchell's (1995) book, which covers all three strands of research, and Polat's (2023) article, which analyses numerous image studies and provides insights into different methodologies.

The research on teacher image and occupational prestige has only briefly explored their relationship. Our paper seeks to bridge that gap by examining which components of a teacher's visual image relate to occupational prestige and how pupils in Latvia perceive and evaluate these in daily communication.

INDICATORS OF OCCUPATIONAL PRESTIGE AND THE PLACE OF THE VISUAL IMAGE OF THE TEACHER THEREIN

To elucidate the influence of perceptions of teachers' visual image on their occupational prestige, we identified the components of that prestige that are specifically associated with visual image (RQ1).

The indicators for assessing teachers' occupational prestige have evolved with the professionalisation of teachers in Europe since the 18th century, and their "classical" set is still relevant today: professional group's training or qualifications, legal and social position, salary, and degree of control over the profession (Çiydem, 2023; Depaepe, 2000). With the development of the teaching profession, and especially its research, prestige indicators have become more nuanced, diverse, and conceptually rich. Recent academic publications on occupational prestige have been increasingly including the views of teachers themselves, affirming that teachers have a 'voice' and potential in assessing and therefore influencing their own occupational prestige: the image of the group is shaped by the individuals who belong to the group (LIZDA, 2016; Misāne et.al., 2007; Polat, 2023; Smak & Walczak, 2017). This, in our opinion, is the most recent and important finding in the field of prestige indicators, i.e. the teacher is no longer seen as a passive object to whom something is presented

or taken away from outside, an object regulated by the existing power, social elites and the opinion of a certain community, but as an individual, as an actor who can independently contribute to the prestige of their profession (Smak & Walczak, 2017). It should be added here, however, that the study of 2016 conducted in Latvia indicates that teachers do not yet value their role and are rather sceptical about their own ability to influence their occupational prestige (LIZDA, 2016).

Drawing on previous research on teacher prestige, we identified four indicators of occupational prestige that are related to the appearance of the teacher, as they correspond to components identified in visual image research, namely gender, age, appearance, verbal and non-verbal communication (Martikainen, 2019; Polat, 2023; Vick, 2000; Weber & Mitchell, 1995). These four indicators are:

- *Professional ethics. Attitude, verbal and non-verbal communication. Relationships with pupils, colleagues, parents, and other community members.* Researchers emphasise the critical role of ethical standards in elevating professional dignity and prestige. Teachers are expected to encourage collaboration and act as role models for students. Unlike other professions, teaching requires a unique blend of professionalism and empathy, as teachers cannot maintain the same professional distance given the inherently nurturing character of their role (LIZDA, 2024; Monteiro, 2015).
- *Workplace appearance.* People communicate not only verbally, but also visually. The individual appearance of group members creates a collective image of the group. If the visual image is positive, if it can serve as an example, then it contributes to the overall prestige of the group. The appearance sends a message about a person's character, emotions, competence, and attitudes (Martikainen, 2019; Smak & Walczak, 2017).
- *Occupational reproduction. The number of new entrants to the profession.* All kinds of positive information about the profession fortify its prestige in society. Teachers work daily with pupils who are potential teachers, hence teachers' enthusiasm, including their ethical behaviour, can influence the future availability of teachers at schools (LIZDA, 2016; Misāne et al., 2007).
- *Number of men in the profession.* In a society that values the prestige of the profession in terms of pay, teaching as a modestly paid female occupation has low prestige (Darling-Hammond et al., 1995; Misane et al., 2007; Monteiro, 2015; Smak & Walczak, 2017).

Two of these prestige indicators (appearance and communication) can be influenced directly by the teacher, and two can be influenced indirectly by communicating the profession in the public space, spreading positive or negative information about it. In the following, we will analyse pupils' views on these four components of the visual image as indicators of the teacher's prestige. The methodology will be detailed in the second section of this article.

Different social groups perceive teachers differently based on their expectations (Smak & Walczak, 2017). Pupils also have their say here. Pupils are, in our opinion, an important group for the multiplication of views, i.e. while pupils' perception of teach-

ers may influence a relatively narrow circle (e.g. parents) today, in the future, they are potential journalists, writers and producers of TV series and films, parents, teachers, etc. It is safe to say that teacher stereotypes formed today will persist, impacting the social prestige of the profession in the future.

METHODOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS

To address the RQ2 of our study, we examined how pupils evaluate a teacher's image based on four previously identified indicators of teacher prestige: gender, age, appearance, verbal/non-verbal communication. This analysis further informs our understanding of pupils' expectations regarding visual communication with teachers, based on previous research by Niikko (2020), Martikainen (2019), Longobardi (2017), Weber and Mitchell (1995), and our prior studies (Kaļķe, 2012; Kestere & Kaļķe, 2015). The research data were obtained through an in-person, paper-based survey in which pupils responded to a single question. The participants received an A4 sheet containing study details and the prompt, "What does a typical teacher look like?", encouraging both written and visual representations. This method was intentionally selected to minimize, or ideally exclude, the use of artificial intelligence in the responses.

The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Latvia on 13 March 2024 (Approval No. 71-43/39). All data was anonymised and confidential.

The survey targeted 290 Latvian pupils aged 14-15 and was conducted from mid-March through April 2024. This age group was chosen because, in Latvia, they are still in general education and have not yet transitioned to vocational institutions. They have developed abstract thinking and have relevant experience with teachers, free from the biases of younger or more rebellious age groups (Rutka, 2012). Respondent demographics (e.g., gender, residence, nationality) were not recorded. We deliberately excluded correlations with social characteristics, as several studies have already shown that girls and pupils with higher academic achievement and, consequently, from more advantaged families develop a more positive teacher image (Harrison et al., 2007; Longobardi et al., 2017; McGrath et al., 2017; Polat, 2023). Testing these outcomes obtained in other countries could be a topic for future research in Latvia.

The surveys were conducted in 11 randomly selected Latvian schools, ensuring that the sample covers both urban and rural areas. Two authors of this article, also teachers, coordinated the survey. Teachers from the participating schools were briefed on the study's purpose and administration. Questionnaires were completed during school hours, and pupils were informed of the study's purpose but not directed in their responses.

Of the 290 pupils, 268 (92.4%) described and drew a teacher, yielding 300 individual drawings as some respondents chose to draw more than one teacher.

This marked an increase from the 2012 study where only 60% drew a teacher (Kaļķe, 2012). Indeed, we live (or have we returned to?) in a “pictorial age” and therefore the importance of visual communication is increasing (Marshall, 2007; Martikainen, 2019). As research indicates, it is often drawings that reveal emotions that people do not want or feel comfortable expressing in words (Longobardi et al., 2017; Martikainen, 2019).

This study included quantitative data for general trends and comparison, and qualitative content analysis for deeper insights. The matrix data were coded according to pre-established categories, which in this case were derived from research on the prestige and visual image of the teaching profession. The primary coding was related to the prestige of the teacher: the data were grouped into four large categories, according to the indicators presented by the visual image of the person, namely gender, age, verbal and non-verbal communication, and appearance.

Once the coded data were selected into the relevant categories, the data were re-coded to develop sub-categories within the major categories. Having analysed the previous studies and the data from the questionnaires, first separately and then jointly, the authors of this article devised the subcategories, further subdividing them during the data processing phase based on what the respondents wrote and drew. This resulted in seven sub-categories, including (a) emotions: facial expressions, gaze, gesture, gait and posture, tone of voice expressing positive, negative, and neutral emotions, (b) communication characteristics related to the gender and age of the teacher: how a male teacher and a female teacher are characterised, ‘young’ and ‘old’ teachers, (c) the six age groups of teachers and the categories related to teachers’ appearance, namely (d) body: height, hairstyle, make-up, and hygiene, (e) clothing: clothing style, colour choice, footwear, (f) accessories, and (g) jewellery. Smaller response groups within subcategories were quantified ($n=...$), while larger trends were reported in percentages.

Since the study of the visual image of the teacher is a study of a person’s view of a person and this information is further interpreted by the researcher from their own perspective, the interpretation of the teacher’s image is a complex and also subjective process (Martikainen, 2019), possible from different perspectives and in different contexts. It should also be emphasised that the perception of a visual image is not free from age-specific characteristics, in this case, the way the image is perceived by 14-15-year-old pupils (Levine & Smolak, 2002).

We used theoretical frameworks on visual literacy (Burke, 2001; Davey, 1999; Marshall, 2007) and emotion comprehension (Fried et al., 2015; Longobardi et al., 2017; Martikainen, 2019; McGrath et al., 2017; Schutz, 2014; Zembylas, 2003), alongside social perspectives on teaching (Davey, 1999; Gasparini & Vick, 2006; Longobardi et al., 2017; Martikainen, 2019; McGrath et al., 2017; Marshall, 2007; Tröhler, 2016; Weber & Mitchell, 1995). Visual impressions are shaped by cultural and experiential filters, making them context-dependent (Marshall, 2007; Marti-

kainen, 2019). Thus, Latvian teacher images were analysed considering the profession's social characteristics in Latvia's context.

While comparisons with studies in Finland, Italy, and Poland, or with our earlier research, were not the primary aim, notable similarities and differences in the 2024 responses were addressed just to provide a broader perspective. This study did not compare verbal and visual teacher representations, leaving it as a potential avenue for future research.

Section 3 of this article is organised around the four components of the visual image of a teacher (gender, age, non-verbal communication, and appearance), which are closely linked to occupational prestige, as explained in Section 1.

RESEARCH FINDINGS. THE VISUAL IMAGE OF THE TEACHER IN THE CONTEXT OF OCCUPATIONAL PRESTIGE

Gender

Following Weber and Mitchell (1995, p. 10), to speak of a teacher is to speak of “women and women's culture.” According to the textual and drawing data, 58.3% of pupils in Latvia see the typical teacher as a woman, 6.6% have marked both genders, and 22.5% – a man. The gender in 12.5% of the responses cannot be determined due to the lack of a drawing or the use of the word ‘teacher’, a masculine noun in Latvian, or the plural ‘teachers.’ In the study conducted in Latvia in 2011/2012, 59% of respondents considered a woman to be a typical teacher, 11% – a man, but the answers mentioning both genders as typicality were not recorded (Kaļķe, 2012). This statistical data allows us to draw a cautious conclusion that in Latvian schools, a male teacher is gradually taking his place alongside a female teacher. At least, this is what the pupils believe. However, Latvian statistics show a strong female predominance in the profession: in 2023, 87.0% of all teachers in comprehensive schools were women (Official Statistics of Latvia, 2023). Latvia ranks first among EU Member States in the number of female teachers in general and vocational education institutions (excluding pre-schools). However, female teachers are also typical in other EU countries, with an average of 72.7% of teachers in EU schools being female (Official Statistics of Latvia, 2023). According to Latvian teachers themselves, men do not find the teaching profession attractive due to low salaries (LIZDA, 2016). The respondents associate certain communication characteristics with the gender of the teacher: in the study of 2011/2012, pupils reported that a male teacher was considered too strict, while a female teacher was associated with smiles, tenderness, and caring (Kestere & Kaļķe, 2015). This is also the case in 2024. Female teachers are described as “nice” (n=5): e.g., if pupils behave nice towards the teacher, then

“they [teachers] treat you very well, usually the women” and women teachers have “a higher level of patience than men.” Pupils see a gender difference in appearance, with some (n=5) noting that female teachers take more care of themselves – wearing interesting clothes, jewellery and styling their hair nicely: “All the women teachers always have their nails done, their hair done” and “Women teachers dress very colourfully, while men teachers dress neutrally, they don’t like very bright clothes.” One respondent notes that the typical teacher “looks like a beautiful woman”.

Age

The age of the teacher is mentioned in 25.1% of the teacher’s image descriptions, of which a specific age is mentioned in 44 questionnaires. By applying the Eurostat age classification and pooling the responses into six respective groups (European Commission’s..., 2023), we see that (1) 4.3% of respondents believe that teachers are not older than 25, (2) 10.5% – are between 25 and 34, (3) 22.8% – are between 35 and 44, (4) 28.0% – are between 45 and 54, (5) 20.1% – are between 55 and 64 and (6) 16.0% believe that teachers are older than the age of 65. If we compare the respondents’ answers with the statistics on the age of teachers in Latvia in 2021, the pupils are largely accurate in identifying the 45 to 54 age group as most represented; official statistics also confirm that 33.7% of teachers are in this age group (European Commission’s..., 2023). The biggest discrepancy is in the 65+ age group, where only 3.4% of Latvian teachers are officially included (European Commission’s..., 2023), but the respondents listed there almost five times as many.

The perception of the typical teacher as “old” among 15-year-olds is also confirmed by a detailed analysis of the questionnaires. The texts explicitly refer to the typical teacher as “old” 24 times (e.g., “A typical teacher looks like a granny”; “She has lived through Soviet times”; “90% of my teachers taught my mum and some taught my granny”), while it is twice as rare to refer to a teacher as “young” – 12 times (e.g., “A typical teacher is “a young student just out of university, 20-25 years old”). It should be noted here, however, that determining the age of a teacher at the age of 15 is not an easy task, as a person after 30 seems to be already ageing; for example, pupils wrote that the teacher is “already 30-something” (Kalķe, 2012, p. 111).

Young and old teachers are compared in 9.6% of the questionnaires. (See Figure A1) In some cases (n=8) the word “old” is synonymous with an unattractive image of a teacher – unpleasant, tired, old-fashioned, out of step with the times in both outward and inward appearance: e.g., old teachers “have outdated views (...) and they talk about their views”; they see and hear poorly, but “it isn’t really a problem because it’s easier to cheat for pupils then.” Their clothes are “from the USSR.” Sometimes the older generation of teachers is viewed neutrally (n=6): e.g., old teachers “are not nasty, but just peculiar”; “Old teachers’ shirts often look strange to me, there are always

lots of drawings and colours on these shirts”; “They look like sweet aunties.” However, sometimes older teachers are valued even positively (n=4), recognising that their experience is an advantage both in communication and in teaching: e.g., an old teacher is “caring and responsive to their pupils”; “I like old teachers because they have experience, they express themselves more clearly than the younger ones.” One respondent suggests that age differences are reduced when entering the teaching profession, i.e. all teachers start looking alike: a teacher “can be recognised very quickly (...) because all teachers whether young or old have a mature and professional air around them.” As we will see further in the article, the view of teachers being identical and stereotyped is quite popular among pupils.

The younger teachers are described (n=7) as being closer to the pupils, nice, and approachable in both communication (“Younger teachers shout less, reprimand without offending the youngster”; “Sometimes you want more young teachers because they are more understanding and always help”), and appearance (“Young teachers wear make-up and dress very cool”), but their lack of experience in dealing with pupils is viewed negatively: young teachers “cannot always maintain discipline and are not taken seriously by pupils.” Pupils want an energetic, attractive, active teacher, and these qualities are associated with the young. One respondent describes the situation at school as where “old teachers are often angry and young teachers are on maternity leave”, while another respondent ends up the questionnaire with a plea: “Please help us get young teachers!” Unfortunately, this wish of the younger generation is unlikely to be fulfilled in Latvia in the coming years, as the number of new teachers in Latvia is growing slowly (LIZDA, 2024).

Non-verbal Communication and the Teacher’s Voice. Emotions

The body is a “very revealing practical surface” through which human emotions are performed and manifested, showing how individuals communicate emotions through body posture, gestures, mimicry, and gaze (Lhommet & Marsella, 2014; Nagy, 2019; Schutz & Pekrun, 2007; Zembylas, 2003). These nonverbal cues consciously or unconsciously convey reactions such as those to pupils’ behaviour and may be detected in a teacher’s demeanour (Martikainen, 2019). When analysing the pupils’ responses, we added one verbal communication component to the non-verbal communication signs, namely the teacher’s voice, as it was mentioned so frequently in the questionnaires (n=107) that it was impossible to ignore. Teacher communication styles were described 392 times in the questionnaires, appearing in 62.7% of texts and 71.3% of drawings. General descriptions of teacher emotions were noted in 72.7% of the texts, facial expressions in 5.3%, posture in 4.8%, eye gaze 4 times, and gestures 3 times. The teacher’s voice was highlighted in 36.9% of the responses.

In the course of further research, we excluded from the analysis of non-verbal communication (a) wishful statements (e.g., “It is important that [the teacher] is in a good mood”; “I would like teachers to be less pessimistic and to enjoy life”), (b) comments on the teacher’s personality (e.g., “They are very kind people at heart”; “All [teachers] have principles”), (c) descriptions of professional competence (e.g., “The biology teachers usually walk outside and enjoy the air and nature”; “Please don’t assign homework for Monday. (...) Reduce homework assignments!!!”), (d) ambiguous and inconclusive statements (e.g., teachers “look a bit mysterious at work”; teacher “blooms like a flower from compliments”; teachers have “bright eyes—boring into the soul”; teachers “have no light left in them because children have extinguished it”). Using the above-mentioned research on teachers’ emotions, we established 8 groups of emotions, from which we agreed to exclude 3, namely excitement/amusement (n=2), sadness (n=2), and indifference (n=7), as these emotions were only mentioned in a few texts. As a result, we created 5 groups of emotions, whose manifestations are presented in Table 1. Since the image attributed to teachers in the drawings is inevitably our (researchers’) interpretation, these data are not included in the table.

Table 1

Characteristics of the Teacher’s Non-Verbal Communication and Voice in the Texts (n=292)

No	Emotions	Signs	Examples
1.	Happiness, positivity – 32.1% (n=94).	Smiles. Laughter, joking. Friendly atmosphere.	“With a smile on their lips.” “May laugh [with] the pupils.” “Jokes a lot so that the pupils have a good relationship with them.” “Friendly manner of speaking.” “Music and art teachers are in a better mood than others.” “English teachers are the most stylish and the most fun.”
2.	Calmness – 14.7% (n=43).	Negative emotions are not displayed. Speaking calmly.	“Can control themselves when losing patience [with pupils].” “Some have a gentle and calm [tone of voice].” “The voice is steady.”
3.	Moodiness, annoyance, tiredness – 8.9% (n=26).	Gloomy, depressed facial expression without a smile.	“Without positive emotions.” “Don’t like being laughed at.” “Desperate.” “Frustrated.” “Tired voice.” “Sometimes they look very tired.” “A typical teacher looks depressed, poor and in a bad mood.”

No	Emotions	Signs	Examples
4.	Anxiety, agitation, anger – 35.9% (n=105).	Angry facial expression. Raised, angry voice. Shouting.	“When annoyed by children, shout at them.” “If everyone doesn’t listen, shout.” “They shout a lot.” “At any moment they can start shouting at pupils.” “Scary voice.” “Always angry.”
5.	Seriousness – 4.4% (n=13).	Appearances suggest a serious, professional attitude.	A teacher has a “serious face” “serious posture”, “serious voice”, “serious appearance.”

Source. Own research.

The Table 1 highlights two positive and two negative emotions, while seriousness is perceived neutrally: pupils want cheerful teachers but recognise seriousness as a necessary professional trait (e.g., a teacher must “be serious about the work they do, but [be] kind at the same time”). Emotionally neutral or serious teachers have historically always been socially accepted, with Soviet-era norms potentially influencing current perceptions in Latvia (Kestere & Kalķe, 2021).

Several respondents (n=13) acknowledged teacher diversity, noting friendly and less friendly characteristics (e.g., “Every teacher is unique. (...) Every teacher has merits and demerits!” “Teachers are all kinds of people, the variety is boundless”), indicating that there is no single, typical image of a teacher (“Teachers are people just like us”). However, some (n=5) respondents think the opposite, believing that all teachers are very similar, which means that there is a certain stereotype of the profession (“Teachers are so different, yet so similar”).

On several occasions (n=14), respondents also tend to evaluate themselves self-critically and seek justification for negative emotions exhibited by teachers: e.g., “...If you sit still in class, they will be still too”; “If the pupils are nice, obedient, the teachers will try to be like them”; “Typical teachers, in my opinion, are very angry and strict. (..) They just behave like this to instill knowledge”; “Teachers are boring, strict and loud, but they are just doing their job to educate us”; “Typical teachers look worked up because they are ashamed of pupils who laugh and get mad”; “It is not easy to be a teacher. They have so much responsibility on their shoulders—almost like a firefighter.” Amidst the criticism, there were positive evaluations (n=12), some of which thanked teachers for their work (e.g., “Most teachers are positive (...), positive teachers are loved because they are like angels”; “Every teacher should be loved and respected!” “I think teachers should be respected for teaching us, helping us”; “Thanks to teachers for their work!”), echoing studies that confirm respect for the teaching profession, even if teachers themselves doubt it (Misāne et al., 2007; LIZDA, 2016; Smak & Walczak, 2017).

As already reported, more than 100 questionnaires describe the teacher's voice and manner of speaking, impressing with imaginative and emotional descriptions that could even be attributed to the teacher's personality. Most often the teacher's voice is loud (n=25), but it can also be sonorous, good, kind, gentle, calm, slow, flat, serious, persuasive, firm, strong, deep, cold, dispassionate, sleepy, tired, unpleasant, raspy, scary, stern, terrible, and for a woman teacher, low and rough. The voice "is calm and pleasant to the ear" and "annoying, as if someone were scratching the chalkboard with their fingernails". Teachers speak slowly, quickly, correctly, confidently, firmly, gently, clearly, without slurring. Twice it is even mentioned that teachers "mumble something all the time" and "sometimes they yell out." Since teachers often raise their voices, "usually [they] are hoarse." This rich description of the voice only reaffirms what was already concluded in the study of 2011/2012 (Kaļķe, 2012) that the teacher's voice is one of the most important professional tools, even an additional instrument of power (Manke, 1997), which can be used to gain the trust and affection of pupils as well as fear and reproach.

The spatial positioning of teachers in pupils' drawings serves as a significant indicator of their perceived image. In 74.6% of drawings, teachers are "standing in the void," similar to the 2011/2012 findings (Kaļķe, 2012). In 17.3% of the drawings teachers appear at desks or chalkboards ("Dancing in front of the class"). Few drawings (n=4) featuring the teacher with pupils depict the children as significantly smaller in proportion to the teacher, a visual feature that may be interpreted as symbolising the teacher's dominant authority or superiority. (See Figure A2)

However, 5 drawings and 6 descriptions (n=11) suggest that teachers have a life outside school – examples include gardening, grilling, or drinking beer ("Rarely sick because they are physically active and take part in various extracurricular activities"; "Most often has cats at home"; "Obsessed with flowers!"). At least two Latvian teachers have a family and a car ("Teacher has 2 children and a wife"; "Lives with family in a small private house"; "Usually lives near the workplace"; "Teachers often drive a small car, neither old nor new, often a Volvo or an Audi"). However, one respondent believes that a teacher never really switches off from work: "in their free time, probably study and think."

Appearance

Teachers communicate messages through their appearance, which plays a pivotal role in shaping their image (Polat, 2023). The importance of a teacher's appearance to pupils is evidenced by its very detailed description in respondents' answers, even indicating the teacher's typical height in centimetres: the female teacher is short (n=10) or medium, about 165-170 cm tall (n=11), but male teachers are of a medium height (n=9) ("The typical male teacher is of average height and teaches Geography"). Epithets

such as polite, neat, tidy, ordinary, normal, discreet (“There is never anything dazzling or striking”), respectable, clean, well-groomed, polished, unusual (the typical teacher looks “quite unusual. He has a tie and a suitcase”), calm, handsome, a little glamorous (“Maybe even a touch of luxurious style”; “Comes to school in a dress that you have to wear to the evening balls”), plain, unkempt, shabby, have been used to describe appearance. Pupils believe that teachers look alike on the outside (“The typical teacher at school already looks like a teacher from a distance. All teachers have pretty much the same style and posture”) and generally, a plain and stereotypical appearance is met with understanding (“A teacher’s appearance reflects his professionalism and respect for his work”).

A teacher’s appearance involves body hygiene, hairstyle, clothing, footwear, colour choices, makeup, jewellery, and accessories. Clothing often reflects a classical or conservative style (15.8%), including jackets, ties, skirts, and leather shoes: “Classic old-school dress style”; “A typical teacher dresses like a teacher who will later go to their son’s wedding.”

Dresses and skirts, typically long, are also common (n=54): “A teacher walks around in a skirt, but not the kind that flies in the air,” and young teachers have “long dresses, and old teachers have even longer dresses.” Female teachers may wear high- or low-heeled leather shoes (n=26), with some pupils finding them “loud” (n=7): “Always wear occasion shoes”; “Always walk in high heels, which can be heard from any classroom when [the teacher] walks down the hall.” Sporty attire, such as jeans, sweaters, and sports shoes, is also noted (14.1%).

Teachers’ clothing is described using a broad range of epithets: ordinary and casual (“Plain, inconspicuous, but nice clothes”), inconspicuous (“Nothing provocative”), comfortable, simple (“Dress very simple, nothing special, flamboyant”), conservative, neutral, restrained, respectable, modern, stylish, good, neat, subtle, loose, broad, conventional, traditional, “like teachers’,” decent, cultured, calm, modest, one and the same, old-fashioned, old (“Old clothes from the 16th century.” “A dress from the 10th century”), bad, cheap, quaint, not very stylish, ragged, sad, outrageous. Pupils were most likely to say that teachers’ appearance is neat and decent (n=12) and their clothes are ordinary and casual (n=15). While black is a dominant colour (n=20), pupils note teachers’ wardrobes also include colourful, flowery, light, red, or checkered items (“Dresses often have different floral prints”). One respondent suggested that teachers should have uniforms, just like pupils: “I think it would be fair to either do away with school uniforms [for pupils] or make sure that teachers wear it too.”

Accessories, particularly glasses, feature prominently in the descriptions and drawings (20.8%). The pupils have given their own interpretation of the ‘obligatory’ glasses and their observation is not much different from Mitchell and Weber’s (1999) suggestion that glasses lend authority to the teacher’s appearance: glasses are “a sign of intellectual and scientific appearance”; “This is the rule of teachers: if there are no glasses, one is not a good and true teacher.” The glasses are joined by a bag or briefcase

(n=14 in the descriptions) and even an item so rarely used in modern school practice as a pointing stick (n=25 in the drawings). In one drawing, a sword replaces the pointing stick, while in another drawing the teacher is holding a pistol. Mitchell and Weber (1999) recognised 25 years ago that the glasses, the pointing stick, and the briefcase signify the teacher's ability to control the field, and are symbols of the teacher's power and identity. Our research demonstrates that these symbols are "survivors" and have become the "visual representants" of the profession (Martikainen, 2019, p. 580). (See Figure A3)

Additional accessories include scarves, shawls (n=6), and jewellery (n=35), such as necklaces, earrings, rings, brooches, and bracelets. Jewellery is described as modest, very large ("Large neck accessories"), quirky, old-fashioned, colourful and beautiful. These details, coupled with depictions of teachers wearing beads and brooches, challenge the claim that teachers' appearances are merely ordinary (see Figure A3).

Historically, teachers have been perceived as "no-bodies," a concept rooted in medieval Christian traditions where the body was deemed sinful and dangerous to morality. This view changed with the discovery that the visual image of a person reflects life experience and that the image of a teacher can also be an important and powerful pedagogical tool (Vick, 2000). Our respondents did not shy away from describing the teacher's body through elements like weight, hair arrangement, makeup, and hygiene.

More or less subtly, 20 questionnaires mention that teachers are typically overweight: e.g., "Teachers are basically short, round with small legs"; "Since they [teachers] are inactive in life, they usually have at least some extra weight"; "Sometimes teachers are chubby". This is certainly not a compliment at the age of 15, since the aesthetic standard of teenager is a slim woman (Levine & Smolak, 2002). While in the drawings the teacher is proportionally shaped, similar to the study of 2011/2012 (Kestere & Kalke, 2015), the respondents depict women teachers with perfectly flat bodies, avoiding gender specificity: 85.4% or n=100 of 117 full-figured women drawn (see Figure A2). This, as well as the indication that female teachers should not wear too "revealing" clothing, can be interpreted as a detachment of the teaching profession from any sexuality, as also noted by Weber and Mitchell (1995). Diane Reay (2001) comments on the asexual image of the teacher as a stereotype that sexuality and femininity are incompatible with the wisdom that is the basis of a teacher's competence.

Teachers are neat and tidy (n=5), smell like coffee (n=3), but there are also untidy teachers (n=4): e.g., "Half the teachers in my school look unkempt, and the other half are very respectable"; "The male teachers in our school are always tidy"; "I don't care about appearance (...) Hygiene comes first." Female teachers style their hair neatly (n=17): "Beautifully coiffed hair"; "Scraggly, curly hair"; "Hair never loose." A teacher with a ponytail, which is not an actual hairstyle, is depicted in several drawings (n=10), further producing the occupational stereotype of "hair tied back in a neat bun" (Weber & Mitchell, 1995, p. 1) (see Figure A3). The teachers' relationship with long hair may

again be explained by the notion that a woman's long, loose hair is the demonstration of her sexuality (Manning, 2011; Hirschman & Brunswick, 2002), while the styled hair demonstrates a conscious concealment of one's sexuality. However, one of our respondents may be right in suggesting that having tidy hair is simply advantageous for a teacher because it "doesn't end up getting in your mouth."

Teachers try to complement their appearance with a modest use of make-up ("Maybe teachers don't know how to wear make-up"), mainly lipstick and nail varnish (n=10), yet some pupils (n=3) dislike excessive make-up ("They shouldn't put on so much make-up"), as well as tattoos and piercings ("Teachers should be free of tattoos and piercings because it's not decent or attractive").

We conclude our description of a typical teacher's appearance by quoting one of our respondents: "Appearances are not important, it's about the person inside."

CONCLUSION

The image of the teacher is a specific visual communication tool that pupils subjectively perceive, experience, and interpret in their interactions with the pedagogue. As a sustainable memory, the image is multiplied by pupil in public space today, but even more in the future, influencing the prestige of teachers as a professional group.

Among the indicators of a teacher's professional prestige, we have identified four components that make up the visual image of a teacher, namely gender, age, appearance, verbal (tone of voice), and non-verbal communication. Based on these components, we analysed the responses of 290 Latvian 14-15-year-olds to the question of what a typical teacher looks like. The answers revealed what is important for pupils in the image of a teacher, i.e. what can influence the prestige of a teacher.

We mentioned above that researchers associate a higher prestige of a profession with a significant number of men working in the profession. Our respondents did not support this indicator. Yes, they believe that teaching is a female profession, but there is no negative attitude towards this. On the contrary, pupils believe that female teachers are kinder and set a positive example by their attractive appearance.

The age of teachers is the other issue. The respondents' answers not only indicate that teachers in Latvian schools are old, but also that teachers seem old, i.e. even young teachers look and act older than their years. This view is illustrated by the respondents' claims that there are five times more teachers in the 65+ age group than in the Latvian reality. Pupils associate an old teacher with experience, but also with tiredness, annoyance, old-fashioned clothes. Such an image certainly does not create a positive impression of the teaching profession, just like an angry and unrestrained teacher.

Teaching and learning is an emotional process and, as we have learned from analysing pupils' responses, the image of the teacher is also perceived and described

in highly emotional words. Meanwhile, the spectrum of emotions illuminates the society, which ordered, produced, and/or used particular emotions (Nagy, 2019). Thus, pupils' and teachers' emotions also describe the social context in which they occur; in our case, the reality of Latvia in 2024. Although pupils acknowledge that most teachers are positive, it is not uncommon to find a bullying teacher. The finding that teachers' emotions are out of control is also consistent with other studies: 13.7% of Latvian pupils admit to being bullied regularly (European Commission's..., 2023), while in a study in Italy, teachers' emotions were even described as hate (Bombi et al., 2021). Likewise, in Finland, which is considered a leader in education, the most frequent teacher depicted in drawings is the person identified by the researcher as a "formal and authoritarian" and described by pupils as angry and frightening (Martikainen, 2019, pp. 587-588).

The reasons for the emergence of the angry teacher are understandable for the pupils themselves, as well as for education researchers, and it is safe to say that they are also understandable for the Latvian and perhaps even the whole European society: teachers' salaries are low and their workload is high, both regarding the number of lessons and the size of classes in terms of the number of pupils (European Commission's..., 2023; LIZDA, 2024). Work is often done at the expense of privacy, sacrificing personal happiness (Smak & Walczak, 2017). Teachers expect to be understood and thanked for their hardships but instead face daily reproaches from parents, children's permissiveness and excessive control over their work, which can be perceived as mistrust. In 2016, 83.4% of Latvian teachers admitted to being affected by stress and professional burnout (LIZDA, 2016).

Evidently, the teachers' lives lack harmony, they are tired, annoyed, and angry. This sentiment is often visually communicated to pupils, thus embedding negative experiences in the image of the teacher. Yet, pupils expect their teacher to be caring, kind, cheerful, patient, and polite, and then pupils will be happy (LIZDA, 2016; Niikko, 2020).

Teachers' modest pay likely affects their appearance. However, pupils are divided on the issue — some teachers are portrayed as decently dressed but not ostentatiously so, while others are portrayed as very well dressed. The pupils' sympathies lie quite overwhelmingly with the first group, i.e. they do not expect a teacher to be flamboyant. The image of the teacher as a modest but wise figure is almost iconic and, as it transpires, is still being perpetuated.

The teaching profession has evolved from "religious schoolmaster" and has for centuries been closely linked to the promotion of religious values, among which modesty is one of the main virtues. The teacher's ability to dress up has often been (and still is) hampered by their financial situation and lack of time, but the public does not expect them to be flashy. A teacher of modest but decent appearance is a role model for all young people, proving that it is not possessions that are the key to life, but intellectual achievement. This idea has always been

attractive to parents of pupils and society at large. One can only agree with Lee and Winandy's conclusion: although the modern teaching profession is secularised and focused on competence rather than on the moral qualities of the teacher, there is a longing in society for the ideal teacher, the teacher as "one of the main agencies to solve the problems of society" (2023, p. 974).

Summarising the answers to our research questions, we can conclude that pupils expect a teacher to be at least morally (if not physically) young, to look neat and inconspicuous, to be cheerful in communication, and not to use their loud and clear voice to shout. This is something that teachers can achieve themselves if decision-makers take care of the aspects of the teacher's occupational prestige that are beyond the teacher's control.

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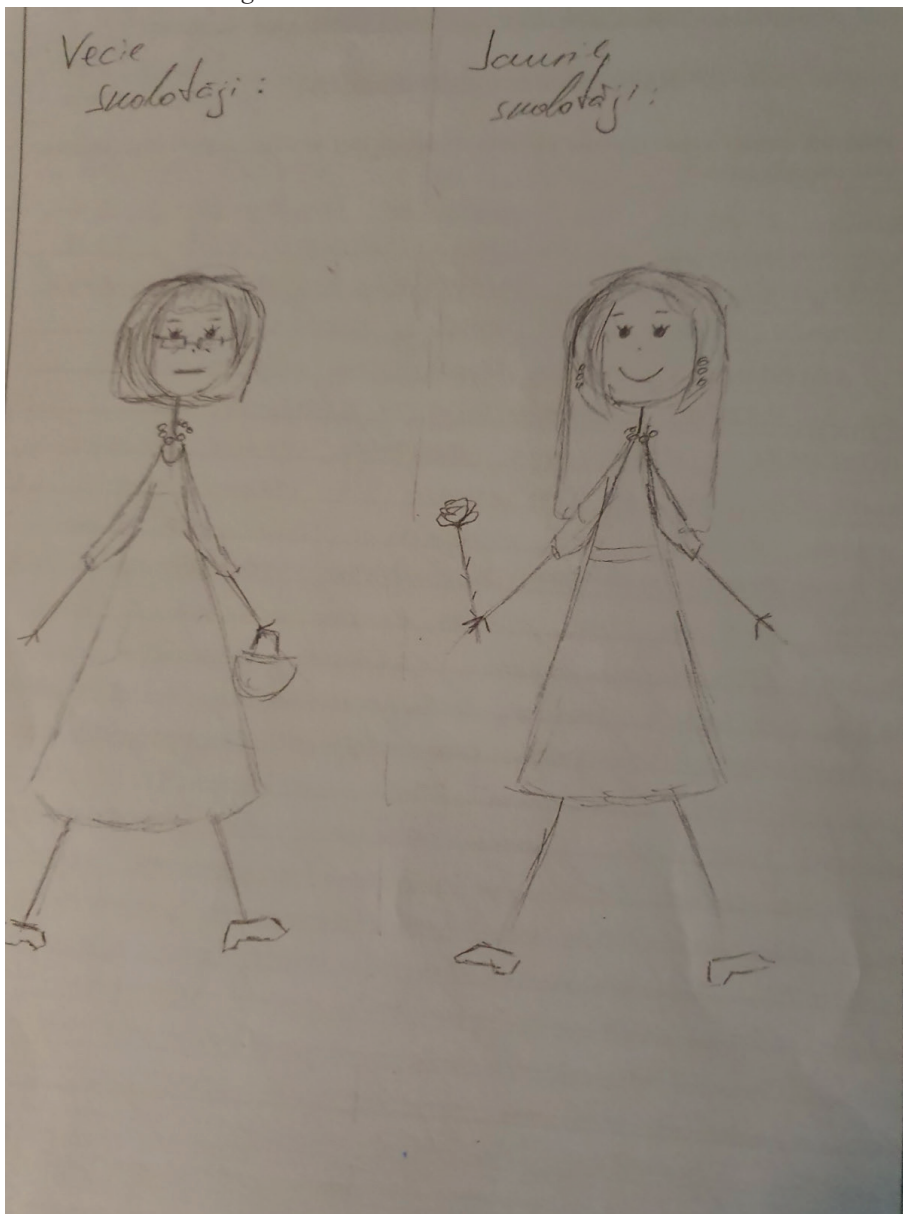
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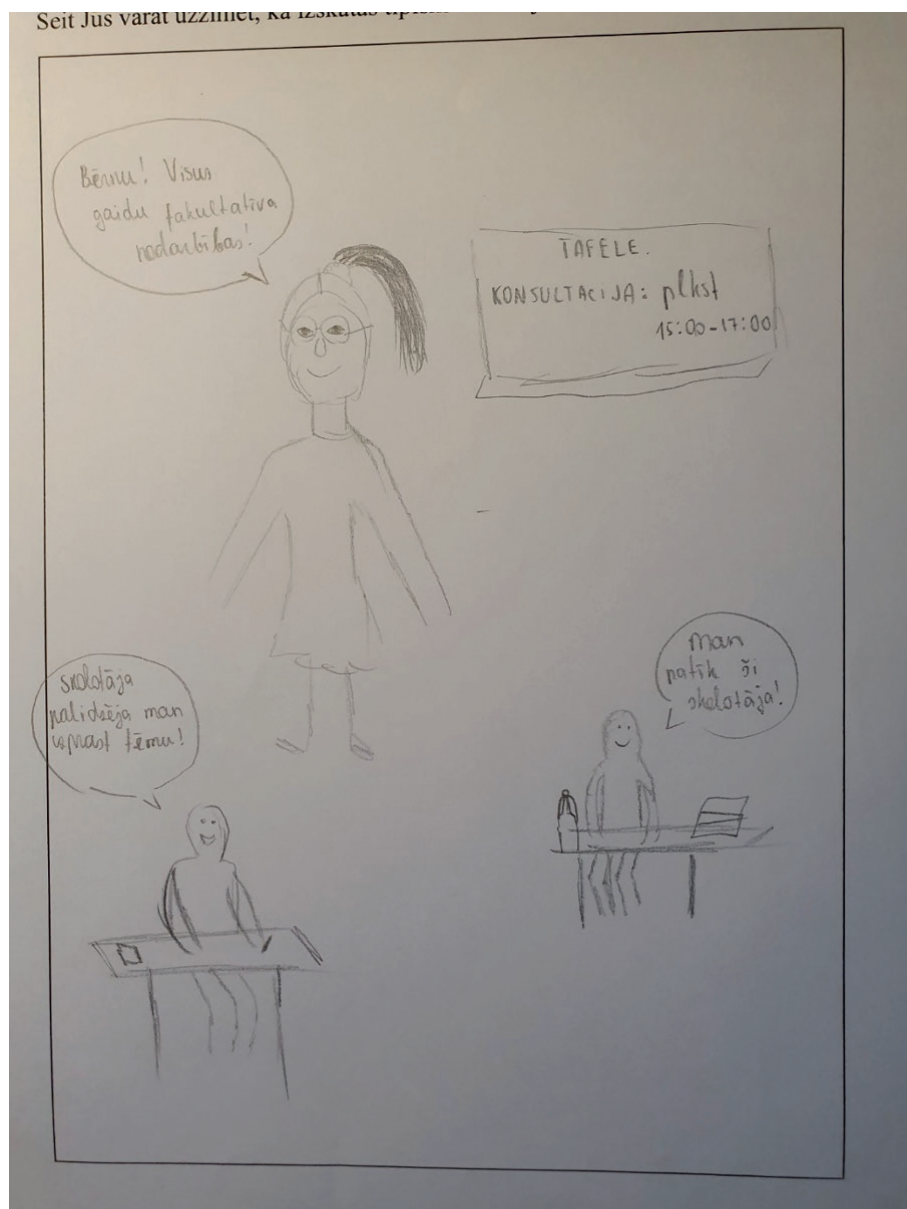
APPENDIX

Figure A1

Old Teacher and Young Teacher



Source. Own research.

Figure A2*Teacher and Pupils*

Note. Teacher: "Children! I'll see you all in the optional class!"; Pupil 1: "The teacher helped me understand the topic!"; Pupil 2: "I like this teacher!"; Writing on the blackboard: "Blackboard. Consultation from 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.".

Source. Own research.

Figure A3

A Typical Teacher



Source. Own research.