

TEACHING AS A CAREER:

PERCEPTION, VALUE, AND CHOICE IN THE MALDIVES



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FACULTY OF EDUCATION
THE MALDIVES NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

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FOREWORD

Without a doubt, teachers play a crucial role in the development of a nation. Teachers are the ones who lay the foundation on which the national human capital is built. Teachers are the catalysts of change in the course of national growth and development. Thus, the value of high-quality education is globally recognized, as enshrined in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4. However, a critical concern confronting many countries around the world today is a teacher shortage to educate the growing youth population. Increased attrition and a decline in the number of young people choosing the teaching profession have resulted in an ageing teacher population in many countries.

This report presents the findings of a nationwide study undertaken by The Maldives National University (MNU) – led by its Faculty of Education – and supported by UNICEF to study the perceptions, values, and choice of teaching as a career in the Maldives. As this research demonstrates, the Maldives is no exception to the global trends in teacher shortage and attrition. The enrolment of students pursuing teaching courses at teacher training institutions is alarmingly low. To make matters worse, an increasing number of in-service teachers are leaving the profession. According to the research, the primary factors contributing to this state of affairs are the following: low teacher remuneration, a lack of other financial incentives for teachers, having to spend money on job-related expenses out of their own pockets, an overwhelming workload and insufficient time for family, the absence of conducive working environments in schools, a lack of managerial support, and a high level of pressure and stress teachers face on a daily basis. Furthermore, the perception of the teaching profession and the value attached to it by the community have taken an unfavourable turn over time.

If the current trend in enrolment patterns continues, a bleak future for education will manifest. The long-term costs of policy inaction to reverse the trend are frighteningly high. Due to a shortage of skilled workforce, the country may struggle to achieve its SDGs. The disparities among schools across the country may increase even further. Teacher shortages, high attrition, and the declining appeal of the teaching profession necessitate a comprehensive policy agenda to rehabilitate the profession. This report presents a timely and insightful analysis of several policy options for addressing teacher shortage and teacher attrition in the Maldives.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

The Maldives is experiencing serious concerns related to teacher shortage, attrition, and retention. More specifically, the teacher education institutions in the Maldives have been raising concerns over the low enrolment of students in the teaching courses over the last few years. This research aims to investigate the perception, value and choice of the teaching profession as a career. The research attempts to answer the following questions.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How is the teaching profession perceived as a career?
2. How has the value of the teaching profession changed overtime?
3. What factors influence the choice of teaching as a career?
4. What can be done to make the teaching profession attractive as a future career?

METHODOLOGY

This research adopted a mixed-method convergent parallel design to collect both quantitative and qualitative data, merging the results during the data analysis phase. Two methods of data collection were used: Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) for qualitative data, and survey for quantitative data of the study. Quantitative data were collected from four groups of participants: secondary students, in-service teachers, pre-service teachers and community members.

The survey in the quantitative phase was administered using both manual and online Google forms. A total of 8032 responses from the four groups were collected using self-selection sampling method. The sample of the quantitative phase represents all the atolls in the country. Using purposive sampling, participants for the FGDs were selected from seven provinces (administrative divisions) of the Maldives (used under decentralization) and 12 regions, consisting of 17 islands. A total of 41 FGDs were carried out on a face-to-face basis, each session lasting for approximately an hour. The FGDs were conducted with 8-10 members per group: 14 sessions with secondary students, 14 sessions with in-service teachers, 11 sessions with community members, and two sessions with pre-service teachers. A total of 61-hours of recording was transcribed prior to the data analysis.

Both quantitative and qualitative data were analysed separately. Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics including t-test and analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to generate the findings of the four surveys. The qualitative data gathered from the FGDs were transcribed and analysed thematically. Once both sets (FGD and survey) of data were analysed, qualitative findings were compared and triangulated with quantitative results.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The research reports the main findings based on both quantitative and qualitative results as follows.

HOW IS THE TEACHING PROFESSION PERCEIVED AS A CAREER?

Several items of the survey examined how participants perceived the teaching profession, and how it was valued. In the qualitative findings, more details and elaboration on individual and collective thoughts were discussed. Some important findings related to this question are as follows:

Community members perceived teaching as 'not an easy job' and believed that teachers did not earn a good salary despite having a heavy workload. The items related to community members' perceptions were rated under three mean scores.

Secondary students believed that teachers had a heavy workload and had a considerable amount of after-hour work.

Family members do not promote secondary students to become teachers.

Generally, a high percent of the students agreed with the statements "*Teachers have a heavy workload*" ($M=3.9$) and "*Teachers do a lot of out-of-hours work*" ($M= 3.8$).

The above quantitative findings were closely linked with the qualitative results, which indicated that participants considered the value of teaching only when salary was not considered. Yet if the salary is taken into consideration, it is seen as a less valued profession due to the heavy workload compared to what was perceived to be inadequate income. Participants have also compared the pay difference of the teaching profession with other fields such as resort jobs, health sector, and political positions.

HOW HAS THE VALUE OF THE TEACHING PROFESSION CHANGED OVER TIME?

This question was focused on identifying the change that might have been manifested in the way people perceived the value of the teaching profession over time. The quantitative survey revealed that there was a difference among the level of change perceived by different participant groups.

The greatest change was noted by the in-service teachers compared with pre-service teachers and community members. In-service teachers and community members perceived the job worthiness quite differently. Community members did not agree that social respect for teachers had decreased due to the status of the teaching profession. Further, in-service teachers and pre-service teachers perceived much lower occupational prestige than those perceived by community members compared with the past and present days.

The above quantitative findings were supported with more details generated via qualitative data. Participants' conversations indicated that the society has become more open to criticism about each other and that may have impacted how people (such as teachers) are valued. The extracts also highlight the changes to society in terms of considering the rights of children that may negatively affect teachers' practices of teaching. The ideas also signal that children's behaviours and values are not given much emphasis at present time. The conversations note that teachers have less control and power over students unlike early days, which may indirectly influence the value of the teacher and the teaching profession itself. Most conversations mentioned above illustrate how society's view can impact the value given to teaching. Further details were discussed in the focus groups identifying that a huge change has been observed in the working environment and

the classroom teaching practices. Many extracts also show the changes to the classroom that have occurred over time due to the advancement of technology, introduction of the National curriculum, and changes in student behaviours. This means that managing students' behaviour may have become much more complicated now. This also means that the teaching profession is much more demanding compared to the early days.

WHAT FACTORS INFLUENCE THE CHOICE OF TEACHING AS A CAREER?

This question focused on identifying factors influencing the choice of teaching as a career. Results of the survey revealed several facilitating factors such as social contribution and personal intrinsic value and negative factors such as family or gender influence. The results related to factors are summarised below:

For all the items of social status, in-service teachers rated lower than pre-service teachers; for example, pre-service had a mean value of 5.20 and in-service teachers. The results point to the following conclusions:

- Making a social contribution ($M=5.62$ and $M=5.36$) was the most influential factor for both pre-service and in-service teachers in their choice of teaching as a career, followed by intrinsic career value-enhancing social equity by helping under-privileged, and socially disadvantaged students.
- Prior teaching and learning experiences ($M=5.13$ and $M=5.13$) include cases where the respondent had an inspirational teacher, had good teachers as role models, and had positive learning experiences at school.
- Intrinsic career value ($M=5.90$ and $M=6.03$) is the second most influential factor for both pre-service and in-service teachers in their choice of teaching as a career.

- The qualitative findings provided more details on the quantitative findings mentioned above. Qualitative findings showed that the opportunity to work on one's own island can be both a social contribution and a personal value. Nearly all teachers who participated in the focus groups stressed the idea of working in their own islands as one of the considerations that determined their choice. Moreover, teachers also saw the teaching profession as a dual rewarding job for Now and the Hereafter. The dual rewarding can be also seen as a personal value given to the teaching profession as participants in many instances described the dual rewarding work from which they have gained satisfaction.
- Some quantitative findings also showed that 11.5 percent of the boys had considered becoming a teacher whereas the percentage for girls was only 3.9 percent. The ratio of students who had considered becoming a teacher was slightly higher in the case of students who did have a teacher in their family compared to those who did not have a teacher in their family: 8.97 percent versus 6.42 percent, respectively. The qualitative findings demonstrated that the female gender was seen as a leading factor in teaching. The conversations indicated that teaching was not seen as an appropriate profession for males. This belief seems to have stemmed from the perceived low income that the teaching profession provides.

HOW TO MAKE TEACHING ATTRACTIVE AS A FUTURE?

The focus of this question is on seeking ways to make the teaching profession more attractive to prospective students. Both quantitative and qualitative findings identified ways that need to be considered to improve the status of the teaching profession, as outlined below:

- More than half of the respondents (77.93 percent) mentioned an increase in salary and allowances.
- Almost half of the respondents mentioned “equal allowances for both local and expatriate teachers” and “ensuring safety and wellbeing”.
- Both in-service and pre-service teachers suggested ensuring overtime allowance for teachers as in other professions as the most crucial change needed (87.65 percent in-service teachers and 81.44 percent pre-service teachers), followed by an increase in salary and allowance (86.20 percent in-service teachers and 77.27 percent pre-service teachers).
- In-service teachers ranked ‘ensuring a reasonable workload’ (55.64 percent) as the third essential change, while pre-service teachers ranked ‘improving management practices’ (62.88 percent) as the third crucial area where reform is required.

In line with the above findings, qualitative data points to similar recommendations as given below:

- Most of the recommendations provided by students relate to an increase in the salaries for teachers if the profession is to be promoted to them.
- Several participants discussed the importance of reducing teachers’ working hours as an important part of making the teaching profession attractive.
- Several participants lamented over the existing work environment suggesting the need

- A to make the work environment of schools more attractive for the current and future teachers. This included providing required resources and facilities for teachers such as computers, individual workspace, the internet, and stationery.
- Teachers also noted the importance of building healthy and collegial relationships within the school community, including the leadership team and middle management team.
- Marketing the teaching profession for young people with more teaching-specific career guidance, allowing school leavers to enter the teaching career as work experience, and promotional incentives such as scholarship for teaching.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Ensure equal overtime pay for teachers as in other professions.
2. Transform teaching into a highly paid profession in the country.
3. Ensure that the workload for teachers is reasonable.
4. Provide a conducive working environment for teachers.
5. Promote teaching as a valuable profession.
6. Conduct programmes to attract school leavers.
7. Strengthen school leadership and management practices.
8. Develop incentive schemes for teachers.
9. Provide opportunities for professional growth of teachers.
10. Strengthen teacher training programmes.

INTRODUCTION

The Maldives is experiencing serious concerns related to the teacher shortage, attrition, and retention. The Education Sector Plan 2019-2023 (ESP) identifies the need for trained teachers to provide equitable education for all. According to the Statistical Yearbook of the Maldives (2018), the student-teacher ratio was 10:1 in 2017, with the teaching force including 733 (15 percent) out of a total of 4691 being untrained teachers across the republic. In 2020, though the student-teacher ratio was 9:1, out of a total of 10424 teachers in 2019, 13 percent were untrained and 2,040 were expatriates (Statistical Pocketbook of Maldives, 2020). Moreover, the records of Higher Education (2019) have also warned that the enrolment of teacher candidates gradually declined compared to other disciplines. It is yet to be found what percentage of the graduates have been employed after graduation or what percentage have remained in the teaching profession. These trends alarmingly identify the need for trained teachers at different levels and subject areas (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). It is also noteworthy to mention that the value given to the teaching profession by society or students' interest in becoming a teacher could beget more serious questions and concerns.

Some anecdotal evidence on social media and other platforms reveals that the lack of interest shown by O/L and A/L graduates towards the teaching profession has become a grave concern for the authorities. At the same time, teacher education institutions and parents have also widely raised their concerns about the value attached to the teaching profession. The concerns that young graduates are "reluctant to enter the teaching profession" and "in mid-career capable teachers leave for more attractive jobs because of low teacher salary" were highlighted as far back as in 2012 (Athurupane & Shojjo, 2012). In their paper the authors identified improving "competitiveness of teaching salaries" and "the image and status of teaching" as key intervention strategies to enhance the quality of education in the Maldives.

This scenario has worsened as can be observed from the enrolment data from the Faculty of Education of The Maldives National University (MNU) (see Chart 1.1). Teacher candidates over the last few years have remarkably declined particularly for the secondary. As can be seen from the Figure 1, enrolment in Diploma and Bachelors courses took a considerable dip in 2011. The higher numbers seen in Bachelor of teaching enrolment in 2016 is due to the 3000 mandatory teachers upgrading of in-service teachers. Since 2018, enrolment in teaching courses has declined at an alarming rate.

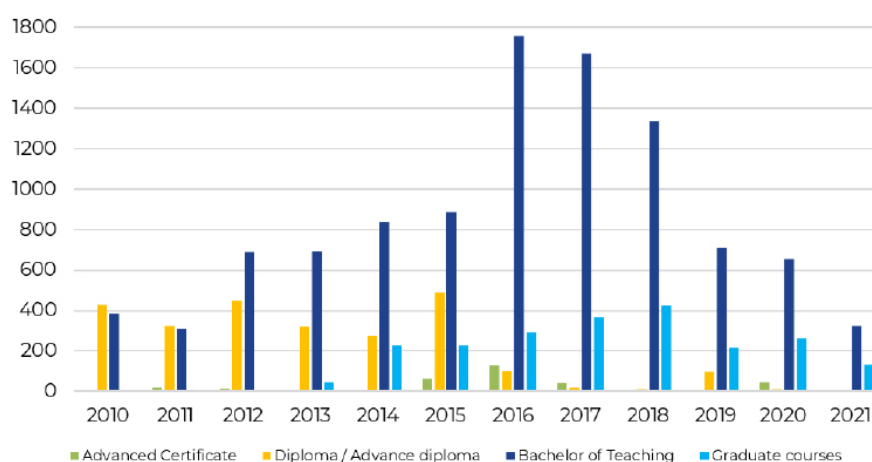


Figure 1: Faculty of Education: Enrolment 2010-2021

Other teacher education institutions in the Maldives have been raising concerns about the decreasing number of freshers enrolling in teaching courses. Although data from other higher education institutes is needed to confirm the extent to which the trend may apply to teacher enrolment, Department of Higher Education statistics (2019) also show the decline in enrolment in teaching courses compared to other sectors. While teacher training is included in the National training needs list 2021 (MoHE, 2021), research on school-leavers and their career choices (MoHE, 2020) shows that out of fifteen different areas, careers in education ranked seventh in the school leavers' interested fields of study, after Tourism and hospitality, healthcare, Engineering, Accounting and Finance, Business and Management, and Sports. This has been the case despite the fact that the Ministry of Education and respective authorities including The Maldives National University offered attractive packages including scholarships to attract youth and school graduates to the teaching profession.

While enrolment in teaching courses declined, schools across the country continue to experience shortage of local teachers in secondary classrooms. School Statistics published by the Ministry of Education (2019) shows that in March 2019, out of 9102 teachers in service, 1322 were untrained teachers out of which 1192 were temporary teachers. A further 1559 (22 percent) teachers at primary and secondary school levels were expatriate teachers. Data from 2004 to 2019 (MoE, 2019) shows that there has been a tremendous increase in expatriate teachers especially at lower and higher secondary levels. Furthermore, out of 356 SEN teachers in 2020, 12 were without qualification, and 65 were relief or contract teachers. These figures underline the urgent need for more local teachers (Department of Inclusive Education, MoE, 2020). These figures also raise important questions as to the underlying reasons behind the low enrolment in teaching courses.

Another significant finding from school statistics is the dominance of females among local teachers. Across the country there are 1515 male teachers compared to 5256 female teachers. It is seen that no male teachers are at pre-primary level, but 835 male teachers and 2715 females in primary classrooms, 544 males and 1160 females in lower secondary, and 136 males and 227 in higher secondary. The Department of Inclusive Education statistics (2020) shows that even among SEN teachers, out of 356 across the country, only 13 are males. This is another perspective from which the teacher shortage and community perceptions towards teaching needs to be studied.

As far as teacher quality is concerned, the time when the teaching profession attracted the 'cream of the crop' has long passed and now it is a struggle for the concerned authorities to find quality teacher candidates who are interested in the teaching profession. From the 1950s till the early 1980s, the teaching profession was ranked as one of the most popular and demanding professions due to its role in promoting national harmony and development with a high sense of efficacy and responsibility (Achimiugu, 2005). The dedication and the commitment that resulted from good socio-economic status and the conducive working environment are worthy to note. Teachers were highly respected and immensely honoured by parents and society in general (Lawal, 2012). These views suggest that teachers were seen as persons of knowledge and were valued by the community in the early days. However, the perceived view of the teachers has nosedived over the years for its low esteem compared with other professions such as nursing, medicine, law, and engineering. Due to the low income, lack of professional autonomy, and freshers' lack of interest in teaching led to the devaluing of teaching in society (Lawal, 2012). Furthermore, the teacher shortage in the school system is more obvious and acute, leaving a greater impact on rural areas (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). These views identify the importance of understanding the value given to the teaching profession and exploring community's perceptions and values towards it.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several research has revealed that teaching profession is no longer attractive for younger generations, and that this eventually leads to teacher shortages in many countries (Strauss, 2015; Armstrong, 2009; Tandon & Fukao, 2015; Symeonidis, 2015) and an ageing teaching workforce worldwide (OECD, 2014). Some researchers also raise questions regarding the reasons behind the minimal enrolment of college students in teaching degrees (Strauss, 2015) and a high attrition rate of teachers (Hayes, 2017). In a very recent survey carried out across 48 countries, OECD (2020) reports that only 25.8 percent of teachers believed their profession was valued by society. Such findings pose several questions such as why the teaching profession is not highly valued, and what reasons or factors are involved in society's negative perceptions about teaching. An understanding of factors influencing teaching career choice is particularly relevant to the Maldivian context where a low percentage of students who graduate from secondary schools apply for teaching degrees. Since this low enrolment rate does not only impact the supply-demand of teachers in schools but also influence the quality of teachers that are entering the teaching profession, an understanding of individual-level and community-level factors impacting career choice has become indispensable to teacher educators and policymakers to encourage students who are academically strong to pursue the teaching profession.

The literature identifies various factors that are influential in construing a profession as favourable to individuals. These include willingness and enthusiasm about the profession, value given to the profession, the amount of work, respect for the profession and the working condition (Wang,

2004). In the context of teaching as a career choice, Saks, Soosaar and Ilves (2016) found that the reputation of the profession, public attitude towards it, and students' motivation and interest in teaching determine whether students would opt for teaching as a career. A much recent study, however, found that the most influential attractor for teaching jobs was the long holidays and the chance to give something back to the society. The biggest deterrent, according to the particular study, was the relatively low salaries teachers earned (Gorard et al., 2021).

Based on the traditional notion of motivation, some researchers (e.g., Heinz, 2015; Hayes, 1990) have proposed a tripartite set of factors that help to explain young people's decision to choose teaching as a career. These include intrinsic motives, altruistic motives, and extrinsic motives. According to Heinz (2015), intrinsic motive is when a person considers teaching as a career because it is personally appealing for its own sake. A person is altruistically motivated when teaching is seen as a noble service to the society, a contribution to nation building and a way to make an impact on the lives of young people. On the other hand, when extrinsic motives drive teaching-as-a-career choice, teaching is considered for its external value as expressed by salary, social status, job security, and working conditions. In a scoping review of empirical studies on why people choose teaching, Fray and Gore (2018) provide a summary of the intrinsic, altruistic, and extrinsic factors mapped across different studies. These are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: “Multiple motives” for considering teaching as a career (based on Fray & Gore, 2016)

Intrinsic factors	Altruistic factors	Extrinsic factors
A passion for teaching and interest in the subject matter (Struyven et al., 2013)	Service to others (Osguthorpe & Sanger, 2013; Yuce, Sahin, Kocer, & Kana, 2013)	The ability to balance work and family commitments (Struyven et al., 2013; Weiss & Kiel, 2013)
Interest in or enjoyment of teaching (Butt, MacKenzie, & Manning, 2010; Heinz, 2013; Low, Lim, Ch'ng, & Goh, 2011; Mtika & Gates, 2011; Reeves & Lowenhaupt, 2016; Roness & Smith, 2010)	Help and support others (Chung & Huang, 2012; Jungert, Alm, & Thornberg, 2014; Pop & Turner, 2009; Struyven, Jacobs, & Dochy, 2013)	Flexible working hours (Aksu, Demir, Daloglu, Yildirim, & Kiraz, 2010; Jungert et al., 2014)
Being suited to the career (Chong & Low, 2009)	Make a difference (Afrianto, 2014; Gao & Tent, 2009; Gu & Lai, 2012; Struyven et al., 2013)	Holidays (Aksu et al., 2010; Gu & Lai, 2012; Struyven et al., 2013).
Liking or feeling accomplished in a specific subject (Chong & Low, 2009; Gao & Trent, 2009; Green & Greive, 2007; Jungert et al., 2014; Low et al., 2011; Ralph & MacPhail, 2015; Spittle & Spittle, 2014; Spittle, Jackson, & Casey, 2009)	Contribute to society (Afrianto, 2014; Azman, 2012; Bullough & Hall-Kenyon, 2011; Chong & Low, 2009; Flores & Niklasson, 2014; Jungert et al., 2014; Mtika & Gates, 2011)	Job security (Aksu et al., 2010; Jungert et al., 2014).
Development of knowledge and skills (Struyven et al., 2013)	Answer a calling (Ch'ng, & Goh, 2011; Osguthorpe & Sanger, 2013)	Good working conditions (Sinclair, 2008; Yuce et al., 2013)
Intellectual stimulation or participation in something that is interesting (Chong & Low, 2009; Jungert et al., 2014; Sinclair, 2008; Struyven et al., 2013)		A reliable or good income/salary (Balyer & Ozcan, 2014; Cheung & Yuen, 2016; Chong & Low, 2009; Gu & Lai, 2012; Jungert et al., 2014; Low et al., 2011)
Personal development (Struyven et al., 2013)		Job opportunities (Flores & Niklasson, 2014; Roness & Smith, 2010) and career prospects (Bruinsma & Jansen, 2010; Cheung & Yeun, 2016; Chong & Low, 2009).
A desire to work with children or young people (Balyer & Ozcan, 2014; Butt et al., 2010; Flores & Niklasson, 2014; Roness & Smith, 2010; Sinclair, 2008)		
Enjoying the company of children (Weiss & Kiel, 2013).		

Altruistic factors such as those listed in Table 1 have been identified as exerting the single most important influence on the career-choice decision (Heinz, 2015; Massari, 2014; Reeves & Lowenhaupt, 2016; Watt et al., 2012; Sinclair, 2008). However, to ensure a high retention rate of teachers in the field, both intrinsic and extrinsic factors are considered complementary by some researchers (e.g., Bergmark et al., 2018) while others suggest a balance of intrinsic, altruistic, and extrinsic factors (Struyven, Jacobs, & Dochy, 2013; Brookhart & Freeman, 2012). Some authors further argue that the relative importance of these factors vary depending on the socioeconomic and cultural contexts, with extrinsic factors being more prominent in developing countries while intrinsic and altruistic factors being more influential in developed countries (Watt et al., 2017; Saks, Soosaar, & Ilves, 2016). Low et al. (2017) also stated that motivations for career choice differ from individual to individual as well as culturally. This suggests that there is no universal pattern of motives (Klassen et al., 2011) and the need for research in different cultural contexts.

Applying influential models from the motivational literature such as the expectancy-value theory, Watt and Richardson (2007) developed the comprehensive set of factors influencing teaching choice (FIT-Choice) scale as a multi-culturally validated tool to measure factors influencing the choice to teach, initially among a sample of 1653 Australian preservice teachers, but later empirically tested in different countries to research why individuals choose teaching as a career. In addition to intrinsic career value, FIT-Choice scale considers prior teaching and learning experiences encompassing social influences and social dissuasion, task demand and task return, self-perceptions (of teaching ability), personal utility value (akin to extrinsic factors discussed earlier) and social utility value (akin to the altruistic factors mentioned earlier) as factors influencing the choice of a teaching career (Watt & Richardson, 2007). FIT-Choice scale not only provides a useful guide to research why

people choose teaching as a career but also help understand why people shy away from considering teaching as a profession.

Alongside the factors identified in the FIT-Choice scale, several researchers have sought to find out possible causes for students' lack of interest in teaching as a career. For example, in terms of social influences and social dissuasion, Audu and Egharevba (2016) found that parents' thinking about teaching as a low status, and society's negative perception of the teaching profession are partly responsible for discouraging young people from considering a teaching career. In line with the same idea, Ogumogu (2006) believed that even parents who could encourage their children to go into the teaching profession did not do so because it was seen as a low-profile profession due to the low economic value attached to it. In a more recent study, researchers reported that although the teaching profession is considered a highly respectable job by people or parents, its value by society is neither economically nor socially recognised (Jiménez, & Hinestroza, 2020). These researchers raise concerns regarding the economic value of the profession arguing that the low salary compared to the amount of work it involves could negatively impact on young people's perceptions and attitudes towards the teaching profession (Gorard et al., 2021; Yuh & Choi, 2017; Hammet, 2008; Scott et al., 2001; Sokolova, 2011). Recent studies have found that teachers' perception of the teaching workload was a strong predictor of their decision to leave the teaching field (Gorard, et al., 2021; Highton et al., 2017). In a similar vein, Dee and Goldhaber (2017) argued that low pay was a major factor to which high attrition rate of teachers could be attributed. Besides low salary, teachers' lack of ability to manage stress under a staggering workload was the main reason for a high turnover of teachers (Cooper-Gibson Research, 2018).

Some researchers also argue that teaching has become less favourable to the public and society (Audu & Egharevba, 2016; Hayes, 1990). Saks,

Soosaar, and Ilves (2016) examined 18–19-year-old students' perceptions and attitudes towards the teaching profession, identifying that although students valued it as a profession, they did not want to pursue it as a career. These researchers report that although students have seen family members as role models of teachers, their interest in becoming a teacher was not considered due to the difficulties and challenges associated with the job of teaching. In fact, Andin, Harun, Hamzah, and Johari (2017) found that the most significant factors linked with students' negative perceptions of the teaching profession and their limited personal value to it includes social influences, followed by poor job conditions. Furthermore, Akosah-Twumasi et al. (2018) and Audu and Egharevba (2016) report that students' perceptions and attitudes towards teaching are influenced by parental views about teaching, which ultimately impact on students' willingness to take up the teaching job. Conversely, it is believed that a family member who is a teacher (Heinz, 2015) and good teachers at school can inspire people to go into teaching (Gorard, et al., 2021).

At a more individual level, some other researchers assert that choosing teaching as a job is associated with factors such as students' perceptions of the Practice of Teaching Skills [whether capable of becoming a teacher or not] – self-perceptions in FIT-Choice scale – and the value given to their intention of choosing it as a future career – that is, personal utility value in FIT-Choice scale (Saptono & Suparno, 2019). Pang (2014) believes that collectivistic values can influence with extrinsic [seeing the economic value as well as conditions of service and social status] altruistic and intrinsic value [seeing teaching as a socially worthwhile and important job] when students choose to study teaching as their future career (Afzal, et al., 2010; Balyer & Özcan, 2014; Yüce, Şahin, Koçer, & Kana, 2013). These views can help the present research in identifying what type of intrinsic or extrinsic factors could be more influential when it comes to students' choice to study teaching as a career. Balyer and Özcan (2014) mention that some students who had more

siblings chose the profession for extrinsic reasons such as crowded families who sought job security. Balyer and Özcan (2014) conclude that economic reasons can determine students' career choices in low-status families. These views indicate that a number of personal as well as socioeconomic factors construe fresh students' perceptions about and the value they attach to the teaching profession and in turn determine their decision to choose teaching as a career.

The above research highlights important aspects the current research could further investigate, such as what makes the teaching profession valued by younger generations and how a positive mindset that is conducive to teaching could be fostered by parents and society. It could be seen that the decline of teacher candidate enrolment may relate to the economic value given to teaching as a profession. The above-mentioned researchers directly or indirectly link their arguments with many issues that could be relevant for the context of the Maldives, where many other factors may relate to how the teaching profession is viewed by society. There is a paucity of research on understanding value given to the teaching profession and factors that determine its value and choice in the Maldivian context.

However, the need to attract good quality graduates to the teaching profession to address the worldwide concerns related to diminishing teacher quality (Schleicher, 2011) has been recognized even in the Maldives, as evident in the documentation and strategic planning (Ministry of Higher Education, 2020; Ministry of Education & Ministry of Higher Education, 2019). Some developed countries have addressed the need for teacher shortage by elevating the status of teaching, as well as offering responsibility and leadership roles to teachers in addition to offering attractive salaries (Andere, 2015). Miller et al. (2019) suggest specific recruitment practices targeting enrolment in specific programmes to fill the teacher shortage gap in rural areas. In Singapore for instance, measures are taken not only to attract the top

one-third of secondary school graduates but also having carefully tailored programmes to mentor and develop teachers to various paths within the education system so that graduates who join the profession has a diverse experience from early on in their careers (Schleicher, 2011; Darling-Hammond & Rothman, 2011).

In their study of undergraduate students' views concerning the choice of teaching career, Gorard et al. (2021) found that in addition to increasing teacher salaries, "being paid a salary while receiving training" and "a tax-free bursary or scholarship for training to teach" were rated as the most potential strategies to attract young people into the teaching field. In favour of financial incentives, See et al. (2020) also conclude that there is some evidence of the effectiveness of raising pay in attracting new candidates who are already considering entering the teaching profession but also warn that financial incentives may not be sufficient to sustain teacher motivation. In fact, Dreer (2021) argues that job-content teachers are more likely to stick to their profession until the veteran stage even given the various challenges of the job and the low pay. He found that teachers get job satisfaction from positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement.

Similarly, Keeley and Sui (2020) divided factors influencing teachers' job satisfaction into individual factors and environmental factors. Individual factors include job motivation, self-efficacy beliefs, teaching competencies and workplace-related basic need fulfilment. Environmental factors, on the other hand, include working conditions such as collegial cooperation, supervisor characteristics and support, and school composition. Greenlee and Brown (2009) studied strategies attempted by different school districts to recruit and retain teachers. Findings of the study show that financial incentives, working conditions, and principal behaviors play important roles in teacher retention. Similar findings were reported by Padhy et al. (2015), and Avgousti, (2017) that indicated a positive impact on teachers' motivation to remain in the

field. A report published by the European Union (2013) cites several of the above-mentioned factors to define the attractiveness of the teaching profession. Traditional motivation methods (such as merit pay and differentiated staffing), work environment-related elements (such as working conditions and class size), and work content elements (such as remuneration and promotion) have been identified as influences on teacher motivation (Iliya & Ifeoma, 2015). The study concluded that while the factors that attract students to teaching are not necessarily the drivers for joining the profession, these two sets of factors were related, and the influence of former teachers had a strong impact on career job choice. Another study identified the possibility that lack of commercial job opportunities may manoeuvre students, especially high achievers, towards the teaching profession while they wait for better career opportunities (Young, 1995). This could be a possible scenario in the Maldives on which the present research could provide some insights.

Attracting new candidates to the teaching profession and motivating in-service teachers to stay longer in the profession are some of the main concerns relevant to the Maldives. Perryman and Calvert (2020) explained that one of the reasons behind teachers' decision of leaving the teaching profession was their heavy workload. More specifically, these researchers further elaborated that the pressures of accountability and high expectations on teachers to improve student learning were also concerns that teachers had on their everyday routines. Furthermore, Ecclesiastical (2019) found that teachers were constantly targeted on social media by both parents and students with regard to what happened in classrooms. The above researchers assert that such concerns may lead to teachers being neglected and their value being overlooked. Some researchers have noted other factors including the need to earn, job security, collegial and administrative support, teachers' working conditions, as well as self-sacrificial leadership by principals as leading factors to teachers' leaving the job (Foulds, 2017; Murphy &

Hammond & Rothman, 2011; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). More concerns regarding professional support have been highlighted as being influential such as mentoring new teachers and teamwork (Rodgers, & Skelton, 2014). In a more recent study, Holmes, Parker, and Gibson (2019) argued that weak school structures, student behaviours, community, or district practices about teacher mobility, as well as teachers' perspectives regarding administrative support may influence teacher retention. The arguments raised by the discussed literature are likely concerns that may be raised in the context of the Maldives. However, it is yet to be explored how Maldivian teachers may explain their reasons for leaving the teaching profession.

In short, the literature discussed above comes to an agreement that the popularity of the teaching profession declined in many societies offering some insights on how students' ranking of teaching compared to other career choices and what factors tend to construe teaching as a low-profile profession. The research also highlights several important reasons for choosing teaching as a career as well as those that influence teacher retention. Taking these ideas into consideration, it is imperative to investigate the community's views regarding the teaching profession to help formulate policies designed to restore its fame and glory. More specifically, using the FIT-Choice scale – albeit with slight modifications to cater for cultural/contextual differences – this research seeks to explore the perceptions and values towards the teaching profession, in the context of the Maldives, to accomplish the following objectives:

- Investigate the perceptions and values towards the teaching profession;
- Explore the changing value of the teaching profession among community members;
- Identify factors that influence the choice of teaching as a career;
- Investigate factors that contribute to teachers' retention; and,
- Identify the change(s) required to increase

A students' motivation towards the teaching profession.

In pursuing the above objectives, the main research question that this research seeks to answer is: What perception and value does the Maldivian community hold towards teaching as a career? This is followed by sub-questions as given below:

1. How is the teaching profession perceived as a career?
2. How has the value of the teaching profession changed over time?
3. What factors influence the choice of teaching as a career?
4. What can be done to make the teaching profession attractive as a future career?

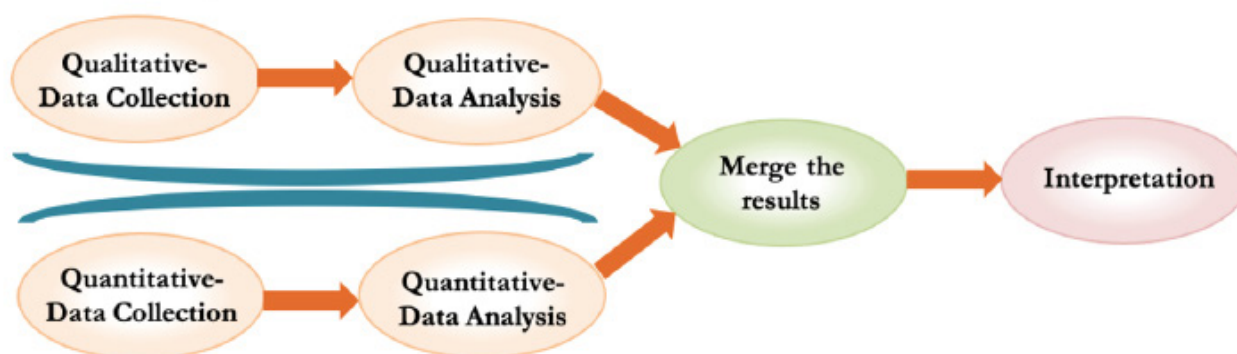
METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

The present research adopted a mixed-method convergent parallel design (Creswell, 2014). It is a useful approach to collect both quantitative and qualitative data and combine the results to understand a new phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As the focus of this study is to investigate the perception, value, and choice of teaching profession as a career, this design helps the researchers to seek an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon qualitatively and identify influential factors quantitatively. Incorporating quantitative and qualitative methods also enables researchers to generalise the findings of the study to the present research context. Figure 2 represents the outline of the research design for the current study. As shown in Figure 2, two methods of data collection are used, namely Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and survey. FGDs were used to collect qualitative data while survey generated quantitative data.

Qualitative

41 Focus Group Discussion



Survey- entire population

Quantitative

Figure 2: Research Design of the Study

PARTICIPANTS

The study used participants from four different population groups. They are: i) community members, ii) secondary students, iii) in-service teachers, and iv) pre-service teachers. These participant groups were chosen as they can provide a holistic perspective of the teaching profession in the Maldives. The sampling procedure for both quantitative and qualitative data collection was decided as follows:

01 Quantitative Data

Participants of the survey included members from local communities (islands/cities) of all the atolls, students studying in grades 10 to 12, local in-service teachers currently working in both public and private schools, and pre-service teachers who were enrolled in teacher training programmes at local higher education institutes. A self-selection sampling technique was used to collect quantitative data from the research participants.

02 Qualitative Data

Using purposive sampling, participants for the focus group discussions (FGDs) were selected from seven provinces (administrative divisions) as given in Table 2.

Province	Selected Atoll/Region
Upper North Province	Haa Dhaalu, Shaviyani
North Province	Noonu, Raa, Baa
North Central Province	Alif Dhaalu, Greater Male' Area
Central Province	Meemu, Dhaalu
South Central Province	Laamu
Upper South Province	Gaafu Alif
South Province	Gnaviyani

Table 2: Atolls/Regions selected for FGDs

When specific locations (islands/cities) of the FGDs were carefully chosen, priority was given to the islands in the list of 'the nation-building scholarship' announced by The Maldives National University (MNU) to train high-quality teachers for primary education. However, diverse community sizes were carefully considered such as large, medium, and small sized island communities. The focus group composition was as follows:

- 104 community members grouped into 13 FGDs (the community FDG composition comprised of parents, former teachers, council members, people from other sectors, husband or wife of a teacher);
- 112 secondary students from the public and private schools divided into 14 FGDs (students from each of the following grades, namely 10th, 11th, and 12th grade, were included).
- 112 local in-service teachers and leading teachers currently working in schools organized in 14 FGDs.
- 14 pre-service teachers enrolled in teacher education programmes divided into two FGDs.

INSTRUMENTATION

Survey Questionnaires: The instrument used for the qualitative data collection consisted of four survey questionnaires adapted to suit each of the research participant groups. Some items for both in-service teacher survey and pre-service teacher survey questionnaires were adapted from the instrument developed by Watt and Richardson (2007). Some items were also adapted from Odike and Nnaekwe (2018), and other items developed by the research team. For both community and student survey questionnaires, selected items were adapted from Watt & Richardson (2007), and other items were developed by the research team. All the instruments were translated into the Maldivian native language (Dhivehi) to make the instrument items clearer for the participants as all of them were Maldivians. The four instruments were piloted, validated and reliability of the items were checked before commencing the actual data collection.

FGD Protocol: Four different focus group discussion protocols were developed by the research team to collect qualitative data. The protocols were

written in both English and Dhivehi language. The focus group discussion protocol consisted of semi-structured questions based on main research questions of this study. The protocol was developed with a focus group guide, which has fundamental information to facilitate a focus group discussion under three sections: i) beginning the FGD, ii) during the FGD, and iii) ending the FGD. The FGD protocol was validated by research team members and external experts in the Quality Assurance team. The FGD protocol or guide was piloted before conducting actual FGDs. Finally, the guide was discussed among the research team members and necessary instructions were communicated in a meeting.

DATA COLLECTION

Prior to the data collection, approval was obtained from the Quality Assurance (QA) team of this study. In addition, data collection approval was obtained from the Ministry of Education. Once the approvals were received, respective institutions (schools, colleges, and institutions) and authorities (island/city councils) were contacted to obtain gatekeeper access. The data collection was divided into two tiers, using both qualitative and quantitative methods as given below:

1. Quantitative Data Collection: Four different survey questionnaires were administered to the entire population: 1) parents and community members; 2) secondary students (both O' level and A' level); 3) in-service teachers and leading teachers, and 4) pre-service teachers at higher education institutes in the Maldives. The community data was collected through both paper forms and through a Google Form. Online survey was posted on social media groups of the island communities. Data from the other three groups were collected through online surveys using a Google form. A focal point from each school was assigned to facilitate the data collection from students and teachers in the respective schools.

2. Qualitative Data Collection: 43 focus group discussions were conducted at 12 different regions of the Maldives. These 12 sites, consisting of 17 islands across seven provinces and three major cities, include island communities of different sizes. Research team members travelled to the selected islands and all the focus group discussions were conducted face-to-face. In the Greater Male' area, research team members obtained qualitative data from Male', Villimale', and Hulhumale' as well.

The researchers conducted focus group discussions to explore and understand the perception, value, and choice of the teaching profession as a career with the purposefully selected participants of this study. Focus group discussions were organised with the four selected groups: 1) parents and community members; 2) secondary students (both O' level and A' level); 3) in-service teachers, and leading teachers, and 4) pre-service teachers at higher education institutes. Every FGD was carried out with at least two members of the research team. FGD meeting time lasted for about an hour on average depending on the context and conversations. All the focus group discussions were recorded and transcribed before the data analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS

Both quantitative and qualitative data were analysed separately. Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics including t-test and analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to analyse the data collected through the four surveys. The quantitative data from the survey questionnaires were analysed by using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and graphs were drawn using Microsoft Excel.

The qualitative data gathered from the interviews were transcribed and analysed thematically following the thematic analysis framework by Braun and Clarke (2006). The core themes were generated by reading through the transcripts manually, attempting to capture the specific

details of the conversations related to the focus of the study. The next level of coding took place using the grouping of the core themes into a form of categories. In the drafting phase, the themes were more carefully refined to capture the whole picture of the data sought. Once both sets (FGD and survey) of data were analysed, qualitative findings were compared and triangulated with quantitative results.

VALIDATION PROCESS

Prior to commencing the research process, a Quality Assurance (QA) team comprising of 6 members was formed for the study in collaboration with UNICEF Maldives office. The QA team included one independent researcher representing a research organization, one member from National Bureau of Statistics, one member from another public university, one member from the Ministry of Education, and two members from UNICEF. Initially, the research proposal was presented to the QA team, and then instruments were shared and approved by the QA team. After the data collection, findings were presented to the QA team. Research team members also participated in the validation meeting. QA team validated the key findings in the meeting held on 3rd January 2022. Finally, all findings and recommendations appearing in this report were endorsed by relevant stakeholders present at the series of validation workshops.

ETHICS IN RESEARCH

This study adhered to research ethics standards used by UNICEF and the Maldives National University, gaining approval from the Quality Assurance team. Additionally, research quality assurance procedure and minimum standards mentioned in the 'UNICEF PROCEDURE FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN RESEARCH' were assured. Further, gatekeeper access was sought from the Ministry of Education before conducting the data collection with students and teachers.

Since this research also involved collecting quantitative data via a large-scale survey, the National Bureau of Statistics (Maldives) was consulted and the necessary permission to conduct the research with the population of the Maldives was secured. All the data collection instruments, translated instruments in Dhivehi and other required documents along with the proposal were submitted to the National Bureau of Statistics at the time of approval.

The major ethical concern in this research involved access to participants (gaining voluntary participation), avoiding harm (respecting participants' privacy/reputation/academic integrity), and maintaining confidentiality and anonymity (protecting participants' identity) when reporting and presenting the research findings. These principles and practices were closely observed throughout the research process. Participation in the research was voluntary and they were assured of the confidentiality of the information they provided on questionnaires and during focus group conversations using the informed consent protocol. The purpose of the research and the identity of the research team was clearly communicated to the research participants through an informed consent statement. All participants were treated equally and given equal chance to speak during the FGDs. The FGDs were conducted in Dhivehi language – the native language of the participants – so as to encourage them to speak more openly and at length. The survey data files, recordings and transcripts of the FGDs were accessible only to the members of the research team and they were securely stored in a digital folder.

FINDINGS

QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF THE RESPONDENTS

The study used a total of 8032 responses out of 8149 people who responded to the study invitation. The respondents from four different samples include: 4660 community members, 1581 in-service teachers, 264 pre-service teachers, and 1527 secondary students (Figure 3).

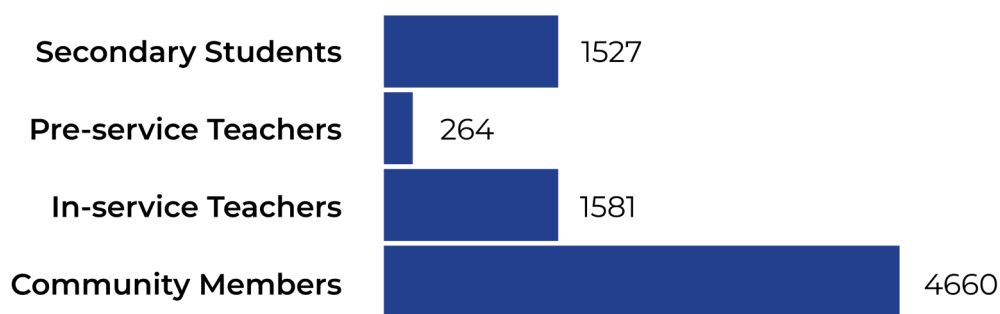


Figure 3: Number of respondents from each sample group

The response distribution by gender was quite similar with a large percentage of female respondents in each of the sample groups (Figure 4). The respondents of the community survey were mainly females (87 percent) while only 13 percent were males. Among in-service teachers, 77.4 percent were female and 22.6 percent were male. Additionally, 89.4 percent females and 10.6 percent male teachers were pre-service teachers. Compared with the other three groups, the gender ratio among respondents of the secondary student survey was smaller: 63.5 percent female and 36.5 percent male.

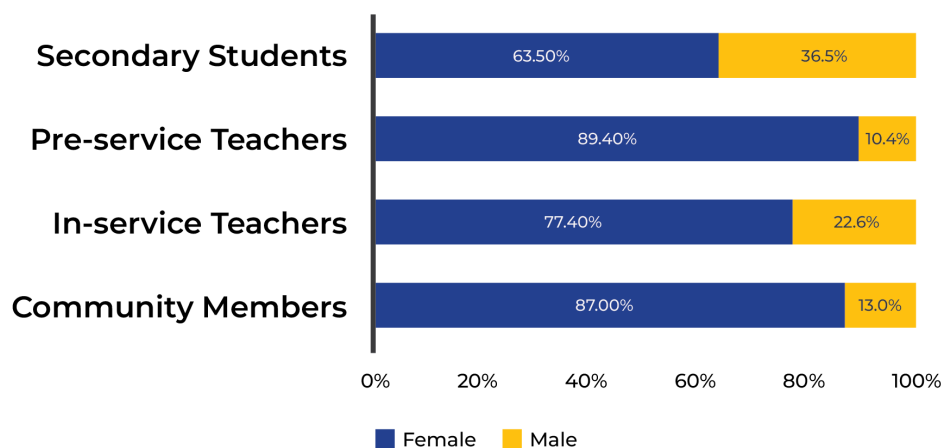


Figure 4: Response by gender in each sample group

The high percentage of female respondents from the community could be due to their interest to provide information in this survey and females having a high representation of parents in schools. The reason for a higher participation of female in-service and pre-service teachers could be that in the Maldivian education system, female dominance is greater among in-service and pre-service teachers.

The community members were above 18 years

across all the age groups, including the young and elderly. More than half of the community participants were of 31 – 40 age group, which is the highest representation within the community participants. More than a quarter of the (community) participants were from the 41–55 age group. Majority (87.2 percent) of the secondary students were from the age group below 18, and 12.8 percent of the students were from the age group of 18 – 22 years (Figure 5).

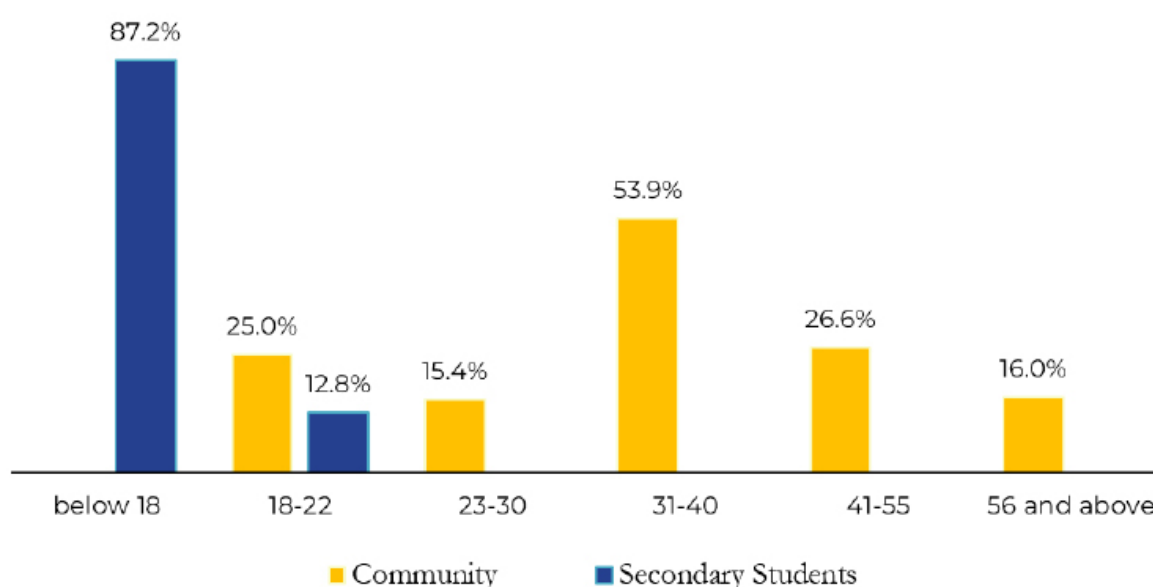


Figure 5: Response by age group of community and students

The respondents from both in-service and pre-service teacher groups came from all the age groups (Figure 6). Surprisingly, a nearly equal percentage of in-service (26.1 %) and pre-service teachers (26.9 %) responded to the survey, which is more than a quarter of them. Pre-service teacher participants (22.3 %) were remarkably more from the 18 – 22 years of age group compared with in-service teachers. However, more in-service teachers responded from the age groups 23 – 30 (31.8 %) and 31 – 39 years (35.9 %).

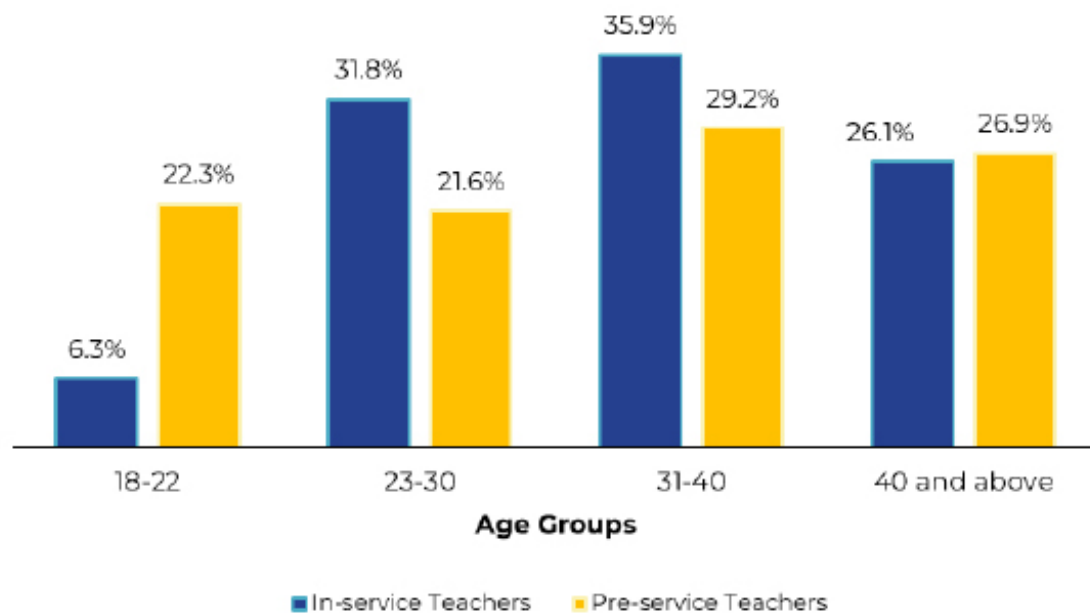


Figure 6: Response by age group of in-service and pre-service teachers

Response distributions among the atolls for each of the four groups show that the responses were received from all the 20 atolls and there is a fair distribution among most of the atolls except Alif Alif (AA), Alif Dhaalu (ADh) and Vaavu (V) atoll (Figure 7). Most community participants were from the Kaafu (K) atoll including Greater Male' area (747),

followed by Raa atoll (538) and Gaafu Alifu (408). Most of the respondents of the secondary student survey were from Kaafu atoll (200), followed by Baa atoll (178) and Seenu atoll (158). Most of the in-service teacher participants were from Haa Dhaalu atoll (163) and Raa atoll (163), followed by Shaviyani atoll (156).

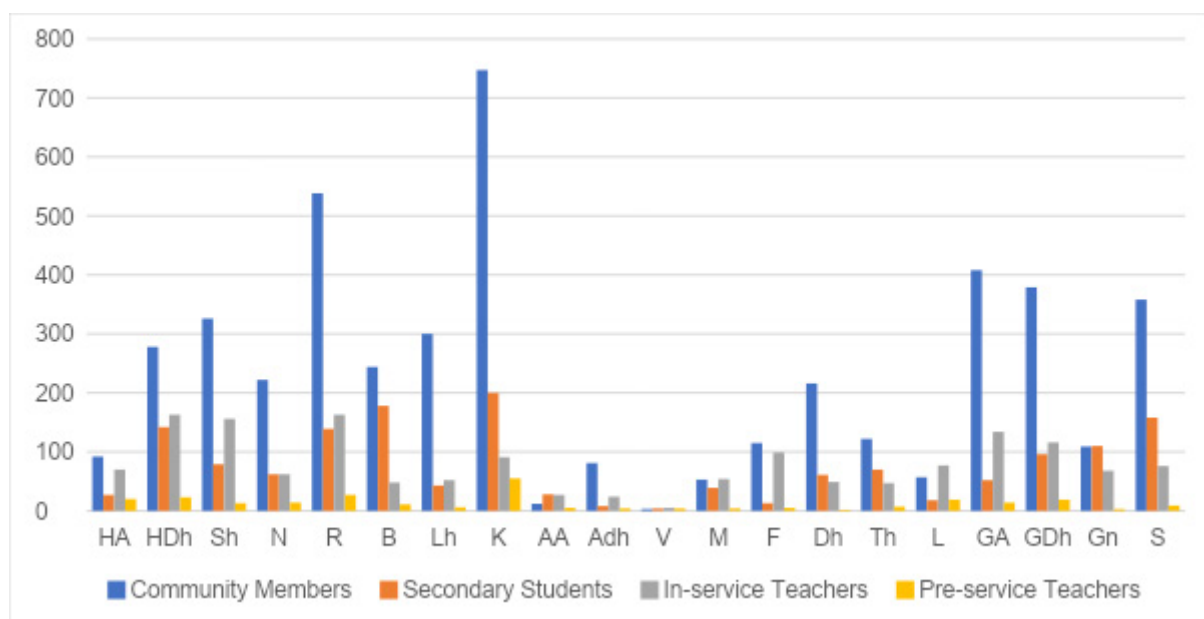


Figure 7: Distribution of respondents by Atolls

Half the participants who responded to the community survey had secondary school attainment as their highest educational qualification. While 23 percent of the respondents had tertiary qualifications, 13 percent had other qualifications. The other qualification included skill-accredited certificates

(Figure 8). Majority of the secondary students responding to student survey were studying at lower secondary (70%) level (Grade 9 and 10), and only 30% were at higher secondary level (Grades 11 and 12) (Figure 8).

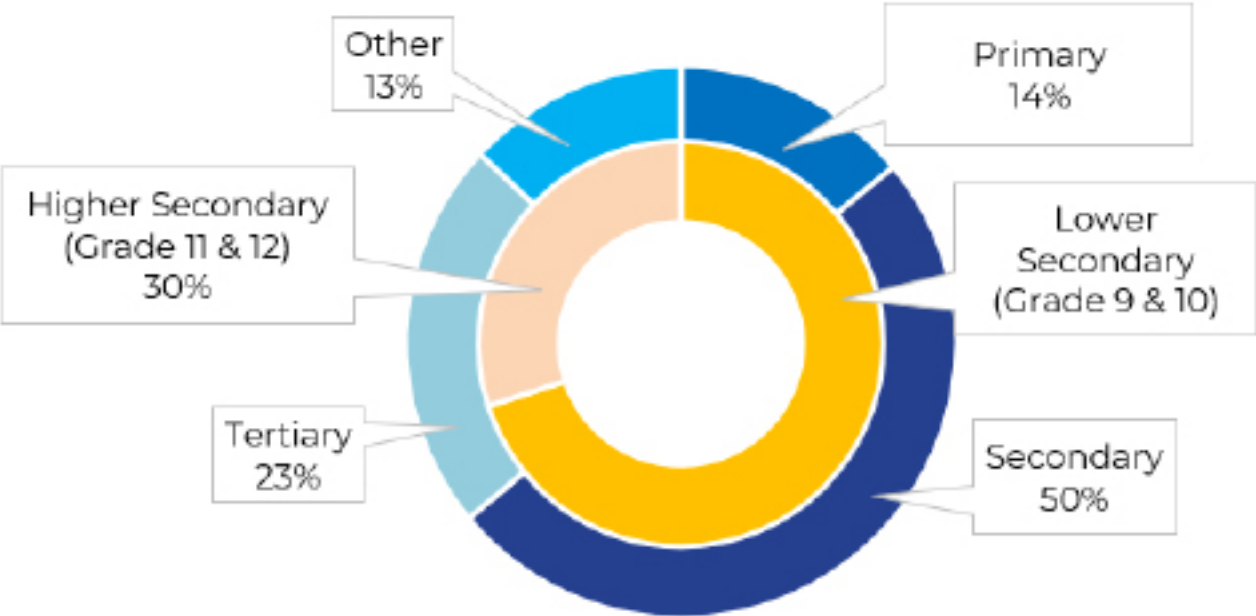


Figure 8: Response by Education (community)-outer circle and Response by level of study (students)- inner circle

Most of the in-service teachers had Master's degree (36.6%), followed by Bachelor's degree (32.%), and 23% teachers had a diploma as their highest educational qualification (Figure 9). Most of the pre-service teachers who responded to the survey had obtained a diploma (44.3%).

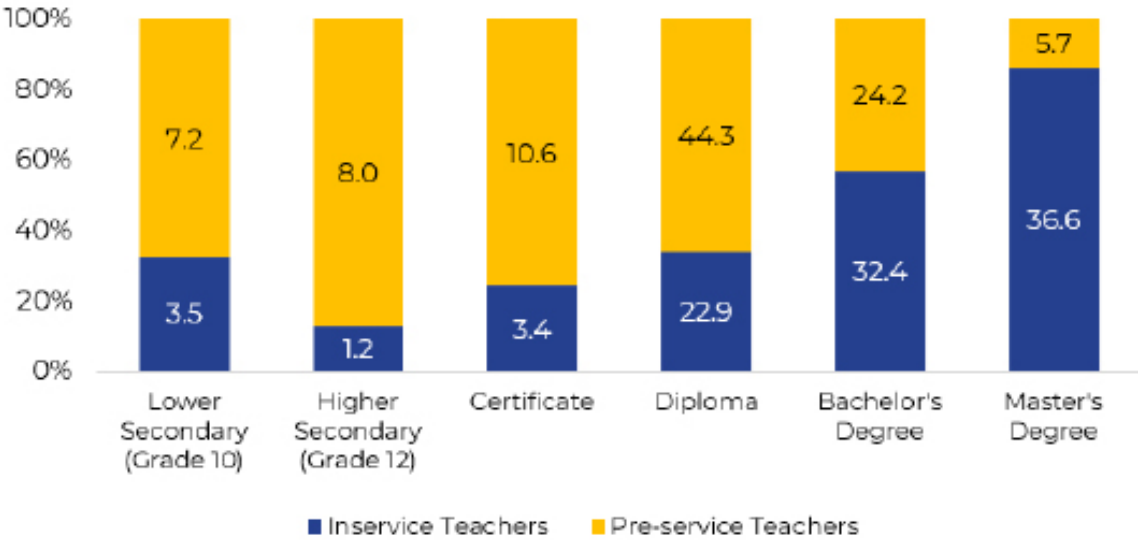


Figure 9: Response by educational qualification of in-service and pre-service teachers

About 5 percent of participants who responded to in-service teachers' survey had either lower secondary (3.5%) or higher secondary educational attainment (1.2 percent). Teaching qualification of in-service teachers can be validated because 4.9% teachers did not have any teaching qualification (Figure 10). This result could be due to relief teachers engaged to work

in schools after their secondary education to cater to teacher shortage.

In terms of teaching qualifications, 32.3% in-service teachers had master's degree and 29.9 percent teachers had bachelor's degree in education or teaching. Additionally, 22.9% teachers had a diploma in teaching (Figure 10).

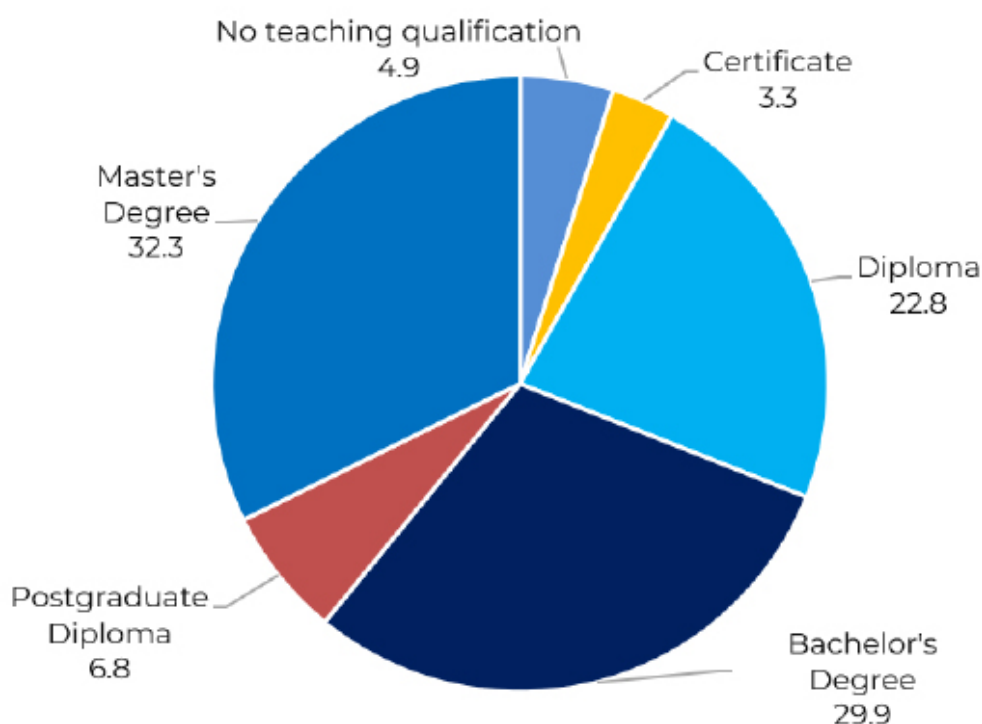


Figure 10: Response by teaching qualification of in-service teachers

As shown in Figure 11, most of the in-service teachers (39.8%) who responded to the survey, had worked as a teacher for 11 years and more, followed by 6 – 10 years (24.2%) and 3-5 years (22.6%). Thus, the least number of responses was received from beginning teachers (13.4%) who had less than 2 years of teaching experience.

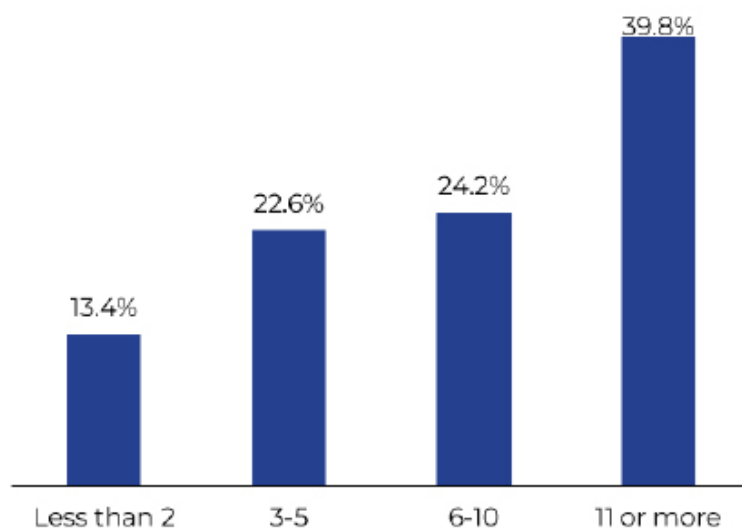


Figure 11: Response by teaching experience of in-service teachers

The majority of secondary students (53%) who completed the survey had chosen science stream, followed by business stream (36.9%) and BTEC stream (9.2%) (Figure 12).

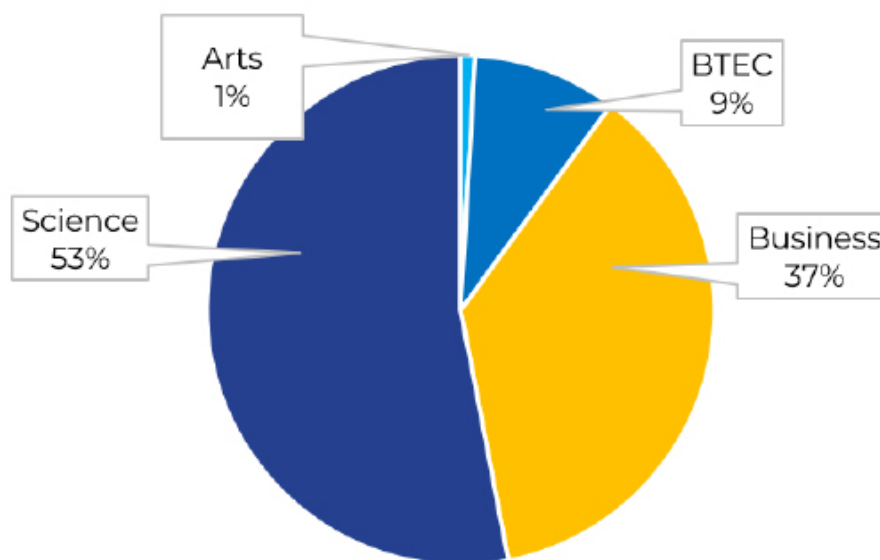


Figure 12: Response by chosen stream of secondary students

Most of the pre-service teachers (65.5%) who responded to the survey had enrolled in bachelor's degree teaching programmes, while about 25% of them were enrolled in either master's degree or postgraduate diploma programmes (Figure 13). Some of them who enrolled in master's degree and postgraduate diploma could be people who wanted to obtain a teaching qualification after their bachelor's degree.

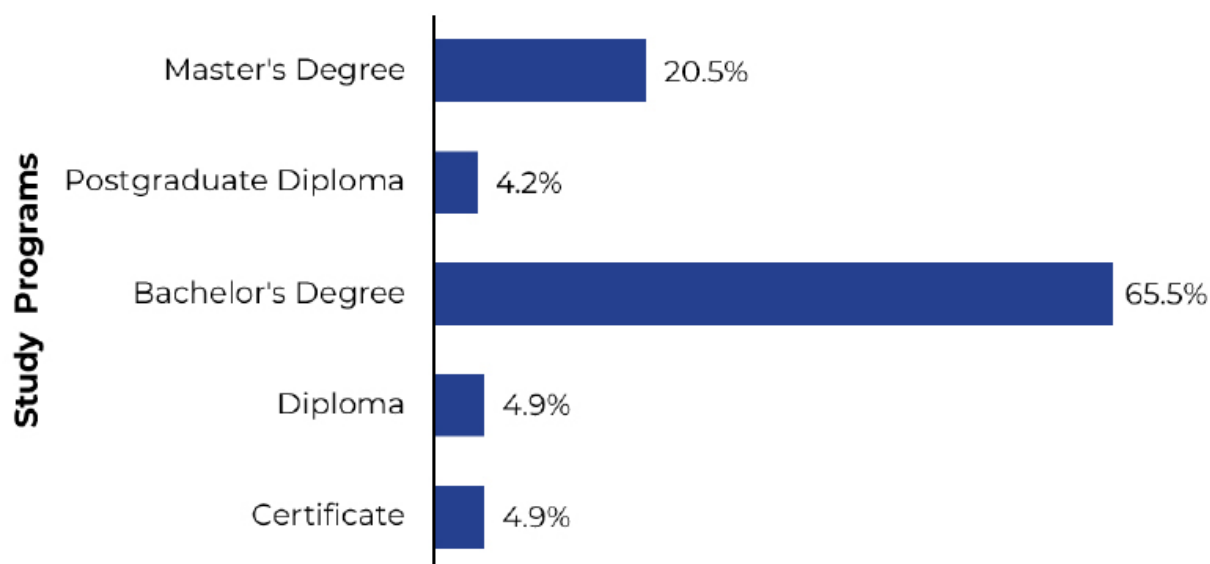


Figure 13: Response by teaching course level of pre-service teachers

Key Finding 1: There is a high rate of teacher attrition in the Maldives

It is interesting to note that more than a quarter of the respondents among the community members were previously teachers. This shows a higher attrition of teachers in the country (Figure 14).



Figure 14: Percentage of teachers in the community survey

PERCEPTION ABOUT THE VALUE AND CHOICE OF TEACHING AS A CAREER

1. COMMUNITY PERCEPTION TOWARDS THE TEACHING PROFESSION

This community survey utilised 15 items to explore community perception of the teaching profession in the Maldives. The respondents rated these items depending on their direct or indirect lived experience of the teaching field. The items are on a scale of 1 – 5 (strongly disagree to strongly agree).

Key Finding 2: Community members perceived teaching as ‘not an easy job’ and believed that teachers do not earn a sufficient salary despite having a heavy workload.

Key Finding 3: Community members perceived that the teachers need highly specialised training and that teaching enables them to have an impact on students.

Key Finding 4: Community members did not believe that the media encourages people to pursue the teaching profession.

Overall, five items have mean ratings lower than three. These are 'Teaching is an easy job' ($M=1.99$), 'Teaching provides a reliable income' ($M=2.70$), 'Teachers earn a good salary' ($M=2.48$), 'The media encourages people to pursue the teaching profession' ($M=2.89$), and 'I have encouraged others to pursue

careers other than teaching' ($M=2.73$). The highest rated three items were 'Teaching enables to have an impact on students' ($M=3.97$), 'Teachers need well specialised training' ($M=4.23$), and 'Teachers have a heavy workload' ($M=4.13$) (Table 3).

Table 3: Community perception about teaching

Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Teaching is an easy job	4640	1.99	1.01
Teaching offers a career path opportunity	4639	3.36	1.19
Teaching provides a reliable income	4646	2.70	1.32
Teaching will be a secure job	4645	3.33	1.19
Teaching enables to instil student values	4639	3.85	1.15
Teaching enables to influence the next generation	4640	3.00	1.40
Teaching enables to have an impact on students	4647	3.97	1.08
Teaching is a well-respected career	4639	3.69	1.24
Teachers need well specialised training	4646	4.23	1.10
Teachers have a heavy workload	4647	4.13	1.14
Teachers do a lot of out of hours work	4637	3.87	1.23
Teachers earn a good salary	4631	2.48	1.28
Today teaching profession has lower occupational prestige in comparison with the past	4614	3.35	1.27
The media encourages people to pursue the teaching profession	4637	2.89	1.18
I have encouraged others to pursue careers other than teaching	4643	2.73	1.20

Key Finding 5: Community members with no teaching experience perceived teaching as a well-respected career but not the teachers who left the profession.

The item 'Teachers earn a good salary' was rated low by all the participants – lower than three by both groups. Participants who had worked as a teacher had a higher mean rating for the item 'Today teaching profession has lower occupational prestige compared to the past' than those who

have not worked in the profession. This indicated that teachers who left the profession and who are working in the profession do not believe that their services are valued by society (Table 4). The mean differences for those who have worked as a teacher was statistically significant for all the items.

Table 4: T-test for equality of means for previous teachers and non-teachers

Items	Previously Teacher	N	M	SD	SE	t	df	Sig.
Teaching is an easy job	Yes	1305	1.791	0.971	0.027	-8.404	4630	0.000
	No	3327	2.066	1.017	0.018			
Teaching offers a career path opportunity	Yes	1306	3.188	1.255	0.035	-6.215	4629	0.000
	No	3325	3.428	1.153	0.020			
Teaching provides a reliable income	Yes	1305	2.211	1.247	0.035	-16.251	4636	0.000
	No	3333	2.891	1.295	0.022			
Teaching will be a secure job	Yes	1303	3.160	1.255	0.035	-5.967	4635	0.000
	No	3334	3.392	1.161	0.020			
Teaching enables to instil student values	Yes	1303	3.985	1.141	0.032	5.154	4629	0.000
	No	3328	3.791	1.152	0.020			
Teaching enables to influence the next generation	Yes	1304	3.369	1.425	0.039	11.248	4630	0.000
	No	3328	2.861	1.365	0.024			
Teaching enables to have an impact on students	Yes	1305	4.097	1.081	0.030	5.211	4637	0.000
	No	3334	3.914	1.076	0.019			
Teaching is a well-respected career	Yes	1304	3.296	1.329	0.037	-13.919	4629	0.000
	No	3327	3.846	1.160	0.020			
Teachers need well specialised training	Yes	1305	4.370	1.060	0.029	5.321	4636	0.000
	No	3333	4.180	1.107	0.019			
Teachers have a heavy workload	Yes	1305	4.277	1.150	0.032	5.578	4637	0.000
	No	3334	4.070	1.124	0.019			
Teachers do a lot of out-of-hours work	Yes	1304	4.185	1.208	0.033	11.040	4627	0.000
	No	3325	3.748	1.212	0.021			
Teachers earn a good salary	Yes	1302	2.010	1.204	0.033	-15.960	4621	0.000
	No	3321	2.661	1.263	0.022			
Today teaching profession has lower occupational prestige in comparison with the past	Yes	1303	3.599	1.343	0.037	8.421	4605	0.000
	No	3304	3.251	1.229	0.021			
The media encourages people to pursue the teaching profession	Yes	1305	2.539	1.171	0.032	-12.683	4627	0.000
	No	3324	3.021	1.158	0.020			
I have encouraged others to pursue careers other than teaching	Yes	1303	2.866	1.278	0.035	4.912	4633	0.000
	No	3332	2.674	1.160	0.020			

Irrespective of the perceived high status of teachers, participants disagree that teaching is an easy job and they equally agreed that teaching needs specialized training and it has a heavy workload. Both groups, whether they were previously teachers or not, agreed that teaching instil values in students. However, participants who did not work in the teaching field did not believe that teaching instils values and that teachers can have an influence on the next generation. The majority of the non-teaching

experience participants agreed that teaching is a well-respected career while participants who left the field less agreed with this aspect. Similar rating is observed with occupational prestige, participants who left the field think that teaching has lower occupational prestige than other fields. It was found that between 20 and 30 percent of the community survey participants agreed that they have encouraged others to join careers other than teaching.

Key Finding 6: Young, middle-aged and older adults perceived the impact of teaching on students and instiling values differently.

Key Finding 7: Community members within middle-aged groups encouraged others to pursue careers other than teaching differently.

The data set was further analysed for any differences in the items with respect to age group and education attainment. For two items statistically significant differences were observed. These two items are 'Teaching enables to influence the next generation' and 'Teaching enables to have an impact on students'. For the item 'Teaching enables to influence the next generation', there were statistically significant differences at 5 percent level between aged group 18 – 22 and other age groups. Also mean differences were statistically significant for the item 'Teaching enables to have an impact on students' for the age group between 56 and above and the two groups 23 – 30 and 31 – 40. Another item which has statistically significant mean differences is 'I have encouraged others to pursue careers other than teaching' for the age group 41- 55 and 31 – 40.

Table 5: ANOVA by Age group

Items		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Teaching is an easy job	Between Groups	1.942	4	0.485	0.475	0.754
	Within Groups	4737.429	4632	1.023		
Teaching offers a career path opportunity	Between Groups	4.694	4	1.173	0.832	0.505
	Within Groups	6533.731	4631	1.411		
Teaching provides a reliable income	Between Groups	14.190	4	3.548	2.048	0.085
	Within Groups	8033.951	4637	1.733		
Teaching will be a secure job	Between Groups	2.084	4	0.521	0.366	0.833
	Within Groups	6597.319	4636	1.423		
Teaching enables to instil student values	Between Groups	9.350	4	2.338	1.763	0.133
	Within Groups	6138.584	4630	1.326		
Teaching enables to influence the next generation	Between Groups	61.855	4	15.464	7.924	0.000
	Within Groups	9041.083	4633	1.951		
Teaching enables to have an impact on students	Between Groups	11.825	4	2.956	2.534	0.038
	Within Groups	5409.866	4638	1.166		
Teaching is a well-respected career	Between Groups	11.201	4	2.800	1.836	0.119
	Within Groups	7063.229	4630	1.526		
Teachers need well specialised training	Between Groups	6.709	4	1.677	1.394	0.233
	Within Groups	5577.752	4637	1.203		
Teachers have a heavy workload	Between Groups	1.472	4	0.368	0.285	0.888
	Within Groups	5984.992	4638	1.290		
Teachers do a lot of out-of-hours work	Between Groups	6.534	4	1.633	1.085	0.362
	Within Groups	6967.309	4628	1.505		
Teachers earn a good salary	Between Groups	7.369	4	1.842	1.123	0.344
	Within Groups	7587.064	4623	1.641		
Today teaching profession has lower occupational prestige in comparison with the past	Between Groups	4.048	4	1.012	0.625	0.644
	Within Groups	7452.877	4605	1.618		
The media encourages people to pursue the teaching profession	Between Groups	13.033	4	3.258	2.336	0.053
	Within Groups	6455.418	4628	1.395		
I have encouraged others to pursue careers other than teaching	Between Groups	29.535	4	7.384	5.164	0.000
	Within Groups	6627.852	4635	1.430		

Key Finding 8: Community members with tertiary education and other groups are different in their perception towards the teaching profession.

The data set was further analysed for the significant differences between educational attainment. The ANOVA revealed there are significant differences between the groups. Tukey's HSD test shows that the significant differences were between tertiary education and other groups. Table 6 illustrates significant means.

Table 6: ANOVA by Education

Items		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Teaching is an easy job	Between Groups	53.870	3	17.957	17.805	0.000
	Within Groups	4662.428	4623	1.009		
Teaching offers a career path opportunity	Between Groups	77.647	3	25.882	18.557	0.000
	Within Groups	6446.642	4622	1.395		
Teaching provides a reliable income	Between Groups	179.633	3	59.878	35.308	0.000
	Within Groups	7848.374	4628	1.696		
Teaching will be a secure job	Between Groups	13.395	3	4.465	3.148	0.024
	Within Groups	6562.944	4627	1.418		
Teaching enables to instil student values	Between Groups	43.565	3	14.522	11.016	0.000
	Within Groups	6094.256	4623	1.318		
	Total	6137.821	4626			
Teaching enables to influence the next generation	Between Groups	670.133	3	223.378	122.864	0.000
	Within Groups	8406.818	4624	1.818		
Teaching enables to have an impact on students	Between Groups	44.608	3	14.869	12.820	0.000
	Within Groups	5367.866	4628	1.160		
Teaching is a well-respected career	Between Groups	150.986	3	50.329	33.653	0.000
	Within Groups	6910.776	4621	1.496		
Teachers need well specialised training	Between Groups	32.941	3	10.980	9.161	0.000
	Within Groups	5546.124	4627	1.199		
Teachers have a heavy workload	Between Groups	27.643	3	9.214	7.163	0.000
	Within Groups	5953.439	4628	1.286		
Teachers do a lot of out-of-hours work	Between Groups	143.545	3	47.848	32.424	0.000
	Within Groups	6813.357	4617	1.476		
Teachers earn a good salary	Between Groups	167.604	3	55.868	34.796	0.000
	Within Groups	7408.228	4614	1.606		
Today teaching profession has lower occupational prestige in comparison with the past	Between Groups	98.718	3	32.906	20.589	0.000
	Within Groups	7342.335	4594	1.598		
The media encourages people to pursue the teaching profession	Between Groups	280.943	3	93.648	70.120	0.000
	Within Groups	6167.512	4618	1.336		
I have encouraged others to pursue careers other than teaching	Between Groups	41.043	3	13.681	9.595	0.000
	Within Groups	6594.715	4625	1.426		

For the mean difference in education attainment, there was statistically significant difference for the item 'Today teaching profession has lower occupational prestige in comparison with the past' for the education attainment in tertiary ($M = 3.59, SD = 1.35$), and the other two-level primary ($M = 3.26, SD = 1.26$), and secondary ($M = 3.24, SD = 1.21$). For the item 'Teaching offers a career path opportunity' there were statistically significant mean differences between and tertiary ($M = 3.17, SD = 1.27$) and other two-levels, primary ($M = 3.50, SD = 1.15$) and secondary ($M = 3.44, SD = 1.12$). For the item 'Teaching provides a reliable income' there were statistically significant mean differences between and tertiary ($M = 2.38, SD = 1.31$) and other three levels primary ($M = 2.95, SD = 1.31$), secondary ($M = 2.80, SD = 1.29$), and other ($M = 2.57, SD = 1.34$). For the item 'Teaching will be a secure job' there were statistically significant mean differences between and primary ($M = 3.44, SD = 1.18$) and other two-level tertiary ($M = 3.28, SD = 1.23$), and other ($M = 3.25, SD = 1.24$). For the item 'Teaching enables to instil student value' there were statistically significant mean differences between and tertiary ($M = 4.01, SD = 1.13$) and other three levels primary ($M = 3.73, SD = 1.17$), secondary ($M = 3.79, SD = 1.14$), and other ($M = 3.88, SD = 1.20$). For the item 'Teaching enables to influence the next generation' there were statistically significant mean differences between and tertiary ($M = 3.61, SD = 1.34$) and other three levels primary ($M = 2.80, SD = 1.32$), secondary ($M = 2.71, SD = 1.33$), and other ($M = 3.30, SD = 1.41$). For the item 'Teachers need well specialised training' there were statistically significant mean differences between and tertiary ($M = 4.37, SD = 1.12$) and the other two-levels primary ($M = 4.12, SD = 1.09$) and secondary ($M = 4.19, SD = 1.08$).

Table 7: Mean and standard deviation of the items by education category

Item	Primary		Secondary		Tertiary		Other	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Teaching offers a career path opportunity	3.50	1.15	3.44	1.12	3.17	1.27		
Teaching provides a reliable income	2.95	1.31	2.80	1.29	2.38	1.31	2.57	1.35
Teaching will be a secure job	3.44	1.18			3.28	1.23	3.25	1.24
Teaching enables to instil student values	3.73	1.17	3.79	1.14	4.01	1.13	3.73	1.17
Teaching enables to influence the next generation	2.80	1.32	2.71	1.33	3.16	1.34	3.30	1.41
Teachers need well specialised training	4.12	1.09	4.19	1.08	4.37	1.12		
Today teaching profession has lower occupational prestige in comparison with the past	3.26	1.26	3.24	1.21	3.59	1.35		

2. STUDENTS' PERCEPTION TOWARDS TEACHING PROFESSION

Key Finding 9: Secondary students believed that teachers have a heavy workload and have a considerable amount of out-of-hours work.

Key Finding 10: Family members do not promote secondary students to become teachers.

The survey includes 11 items on perception towards teaching with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” with a midpoint of 3. Generally, the majority of the students agreed with the statement “Teachers have a heavy workload” (M=3.9) and “Teachers do a lot of out-of-hours work” (M= 3.8). The lowest mean score was to the statement “My family thinks I should become a teacher” (M = 1.91).

Table 8: Secondary students' perception about teaching

	Mean	SD
Teaching is an easy job	2.10	0.98
Teaching is a career suited to my abilities	2.40	1.18
Teaching is a well-respected career	3.63	1.21
Teaching is a well-paid job	2.59	1.23
Teaching enables to instil student values	3.74	1.10
Teachers have a heavy workload	3.97	1.15
Teachers do a lot of out-of-hours work	3.81	1.16
I am interested in teaching	2.13	1.17
My family think I should become a teacher	1.92	1.07
My teachers inspire me to become a teacher	2.20	1.13
The media encourages people to pursue the teaching profession	2.49	1.10

Key Finding 11: Female students have more tendency towards teaching than male students.

Key Finding 12: Family and teachers encourage girls to become teachers.

The secondary students were provided with 11 items of 5-point Likert scale ranging from “*strongly agree*” to “*strongly disagree*” with a midpoint of 3. The independent t-test result shows that there is a significant difference among female and male students’ perception towards the teaching profession; $t(1525) = 3.767$, $p = 0.000$ (Table 9).

Table 9: Difference in secondary students’ perception by gender

Gender	N	Mean	SD	SE	95% CI for mean		t	df	Sig
					Lower	Upper			
Female	970	2.858	0.600	0.019	0.057	0.180	3.767	1525	0.000
Male	557	2.740	0.573	0.024	0.057	0.179			

Further analysis on item differences shows that five items had significant differences in their perception towards teaching among female and male students (Figure 15). Generally, female students had a high mean value on each of the statements compared with male students indicating female students’ inclination towards the teaching profession.

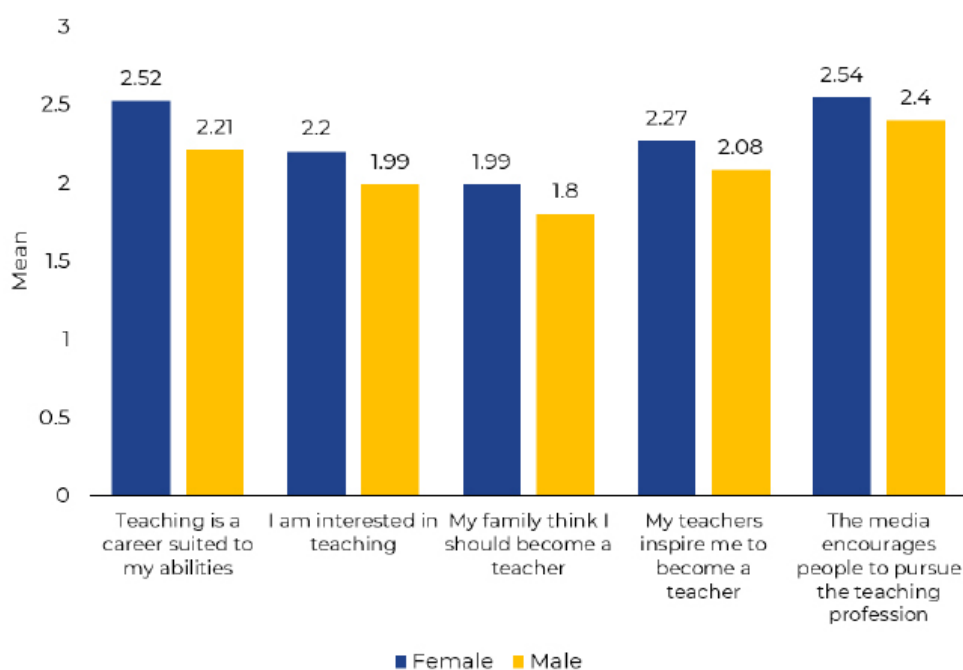


Figure 15: Perception towards teaching among girls and boys

Key Finding 13: Students below 18 years have more positive perception towards teaching compared to students between 18 – 22 years.

The age groups of the students who participated in the survey were “below 18 years” and “between 18-22 years”. The analysis reveals a significant difference between students’ age groups and perception towards teaching profession; $t(1525) = 4.324$, $p = 0.000$ (Table 10).

Table 10: Difference in secondary students' perception by age

Age	N	Mean	SD	SE	95% CI for mean		t	df	Sig
					Lower	Upper			
Below 18 years	1332	2.840	0.595	0.016	0.107	0.284	4.324	1525	0.000
Between 18 - 22 years	195	2.644	0.552	0.040	0.111	0.280			

Further analysis on item differences shows that four items had significant differences in their perception towards teaching among students below 18 years of age and between 18-22 years of age (Figure 16). Generally, students below 18 years of age had a high mean value on each of the statements compared with students between 18-22 years students indicating that more matured students have negative perception towards teaching than students below 18 years.

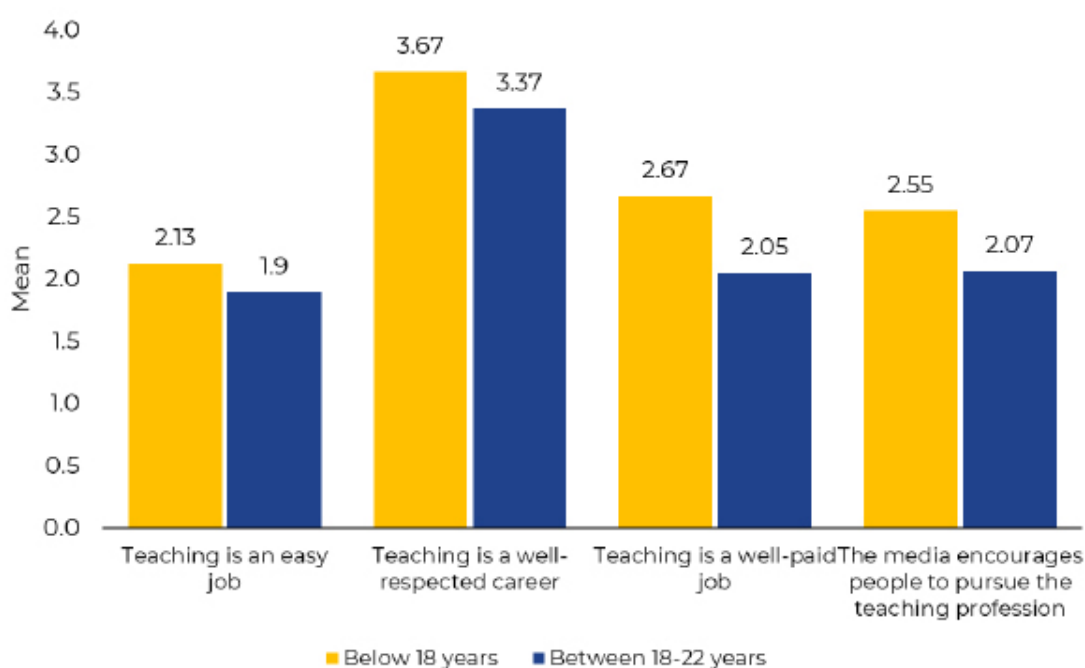


Figure 16: Perception towards teaching and students age groups

Key Finding 14: Higher secondary (A' level) students have a negative perception towards teaching compared to lower secondary (O' level) students.

The survey questionnaire was filled by 1072 lower secondary students (70.2 percent) and 455 higher secondary students (29.8 percent). The analysis shows a significant difference between students' education level and perception towards teaching profession: $t(1525) = 5.515$, $p = 0.000$ (Table 11).

Table 11: Difference in secondary students' perception by education level

Education level	N	Mean	SD	SE	95% CI for mean		t	df	Sig
					Lower	Upper			
Lower secondary (Grade 9-10)	1072	2.866	0.610	0.019	0.107	0.236	5.515	974.729	0.000
Higher secondary (Grade 11-12)	455	2.694	0.532	0.025	0.111	0.233			

Further analysis on item differences shows that eight items had significant differences in their perception towards teaching among students below lower secondary (O' level) and higher secondary (A' level) students (Figure 17). O' level students had higher mean value for the items; "I am interested in teaching", "Teaching is a well-paid job", "Teaching is an easy job", "Teaching is a well-respected career", "Teaching is a career suited to my abilities", and "The media encourages people to pursue the teaching profession' compared with A' level students. However, A' level students had higher mean value for the items; "Teachers do a lot of out-of-hours work", and "Teachers have a heavy workload" compared with O' level students. This result indicates that higher secondary students have a more pessimistic view towards teaching than lower

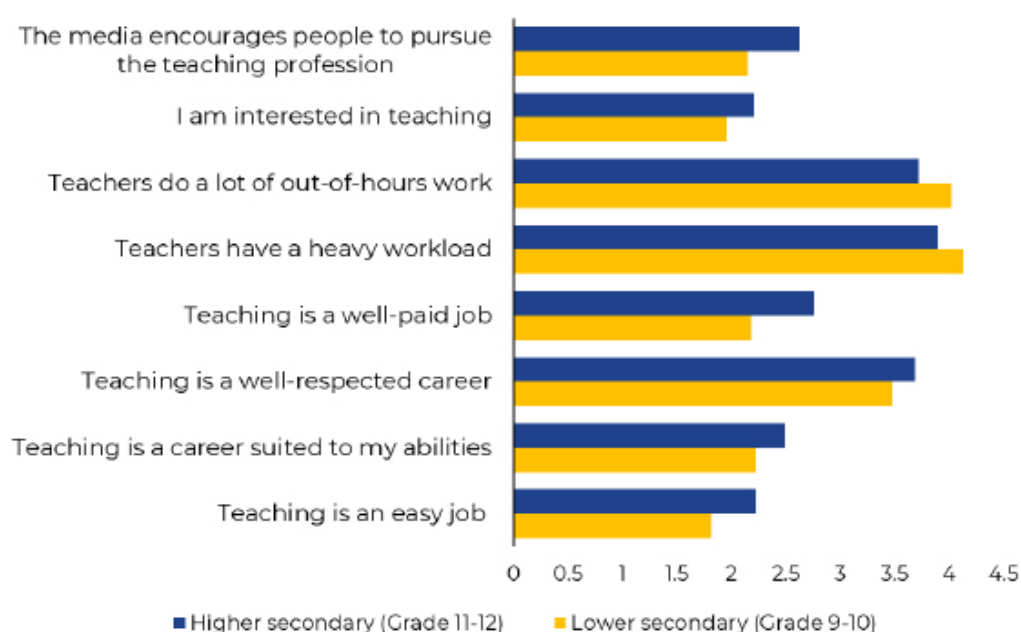


Figure 17: Perception towards teaching and students' education level

Key Finding 15: Overall, there is no significant difference in perception towards teaching profession between students studying different streams.

Secondary students who completed the survey included all four streams: Arts (1 percent), BTEC (9 percent), Business (37 percent) and Science (53 percent). One-way ANOVA was employed to examine if there is a significant difference in secondary students' perception about teaching based on their stream (combination of subjects selected). The results revealed that there is not any significant difference in perception towards teaching profession between streams ($p>.05$) (Table 12). However, when item difference was analysed, BTEC students have significantly different perception with their counterparts in science and business streams.

Table 12: Difference in students' perception about teaching, by stream

	N	Mean	SD	SE	Lower
Between Groups	1.758	3	0.586	1.669	0.172
Within Groups	534.695	1523	0.351		
Total	536.453	1526			

3. IN-SERVICE AND PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' PERCEPTION TOWARDS TEACHING PROFESSION

In-service and pre-service teachers' belief about teaching were measured on a 7-point Likert scale based on four dimensions: good salary, social status, high demand, and expert career.

Key Finding 16: Both in-service and pre-service teachers believed that teaching is an underpaid (low salaried) and a difficult job.

Both in-service and pre-service teachers believed that teaching is an underpaid profession in the Maldives with the lowest mean score of 2.28 and 2.46 for in-service and pre-service teachers, respectively (Figure 18). At the same time, they believed that teaching is a difficult job ($M=6.31$) and ($M=6.32$), with a heavy workload and it is an emotionally demanding job.

In terms of social status of the teaching profession, in-service teachers were slightly lower ($M=4.54$) than pre-service teachers ($M=4.94$). Although occupational status of teaching was not perceived very high by both the groups, they believed that teaching profession is a respected career to some extent and society perceived teachers as professionals. Additionally, both the groups believed that teaching requires a high level of expert/content knowledge and technical knowledge ($M=6.62$ for in-service teachers and $M=6.64$ for pre-service teachers). Thus, having a high expertise is perceived as a pre-requisite for teaching compared with some other professions.

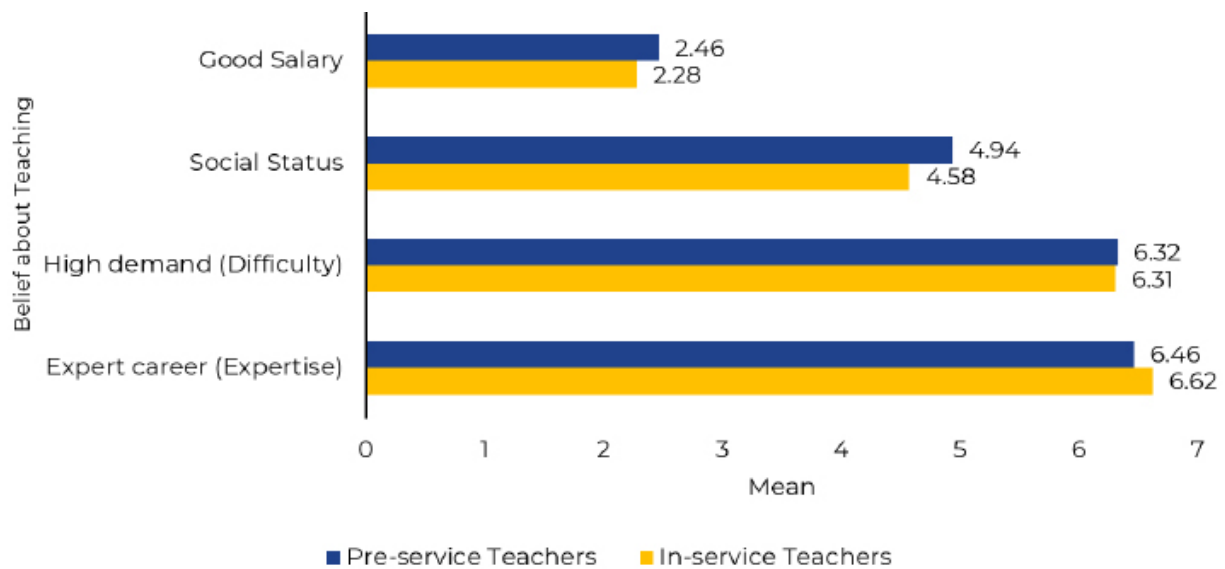


Figure 18: Belief about teaching by pre-service and in-service teachers

Key Finding 17: Both in-service and pre-service teachers believed that their work is NOT highly valued by the society.

In terms of prestige of teaching profession, both in-service and pre-service teachers rated low on a 5-point Likert scale for the item 'In general, society highly values work of the teachers' (M=2.35 and M=2.63), respectively (Figure 19). Majority of them believed that the teaching profession in other countries has higher occupational prestige than in Maldives (M=3.89 and M=3.95).

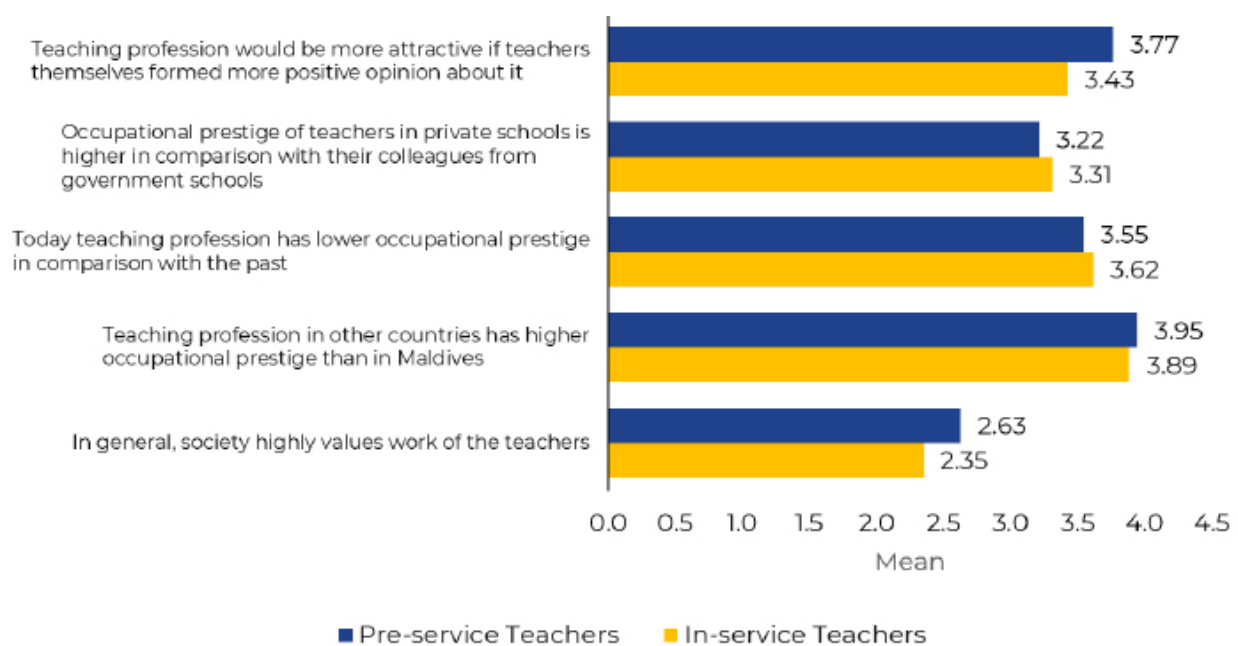


Figure 19: Pre-service and in-service teachers' perception on prestige of teaching profession

Key Finding 18: In-service teachers face a number of difficulties to reconcile work with family life due to the specifics of the profession.

Key Finding 19: Public's inability to understand the specifics of the teacher's work is perceived as a difficulty by in-service teachers.

Key Finding 20: Negative media reporting, students' permissiveness and overly high societal demands are difficulties perceived by the in-service teachers.

In-service teachers mentioned the number of difficulties that they faced in their work. Public's inability to understand the specifics of the teacher's work is perceived as a difficulty faced by in-service teachers ($M=3.52$), followed by difficulties to reconcile work with family life due to the specifics of a profession ($M=3.45$). Additionally, they reported overly high societal demands towards teachers ($M=3.24$), increased media interest in negative events in school life ($M=3.18$), and students' permissiveness ($M=3.15$) as other difficulties (Table 13).

Table 13: Difficulties faced by in-service teachers

	Mean	SD
Lack of respect from the students	2.90	1.14
Lack of respect from the parents	2.89	1.13
Lack of respect from the policymakers	2.89	1.25
Parental distrust in teachers' professionalism	2.79	1.19
Students' permissiveness	3.15	1.29
Overly high societal demands towards teachers	3.24	1.23
Increased media interest in negative events in school life	3.18	1.30
Difficulties to reconcile work with family life due to the specifics of the profession	3.45	1.33
Overly strict control and supervision over teachers' work	2.97	1.28
Public's inability to understand the specifics of the teacher's work	3.52	1.29
Stress and burnout	2.83	1.40

Key Finding 21: Both in-service and pre-service teachers are satisfied with their choice of becoming a teacher.

Key Finding 22: Society dissuades people from taking teaching as a career.

Pre-service and in-service teachers were asked about their decision to become a teacher using a 7-point Likert scale. Most of the pre-service and in-service teachers were satisfied with the choice of becoming a teacher ($M=5.80$ and $M=5.65$), respectively. The finding also revealed the fact that social dissuasion is evident to some extent in the context of Maldives (pre-service teachers with $M=3.91$ and in-service teachers with $M=3.81$). Social dissuasion reflects people encouraging to pursue careers other than teaching, people telling teaching is not a good career choice, and significant others influencing young people to consider careers other than teaching.

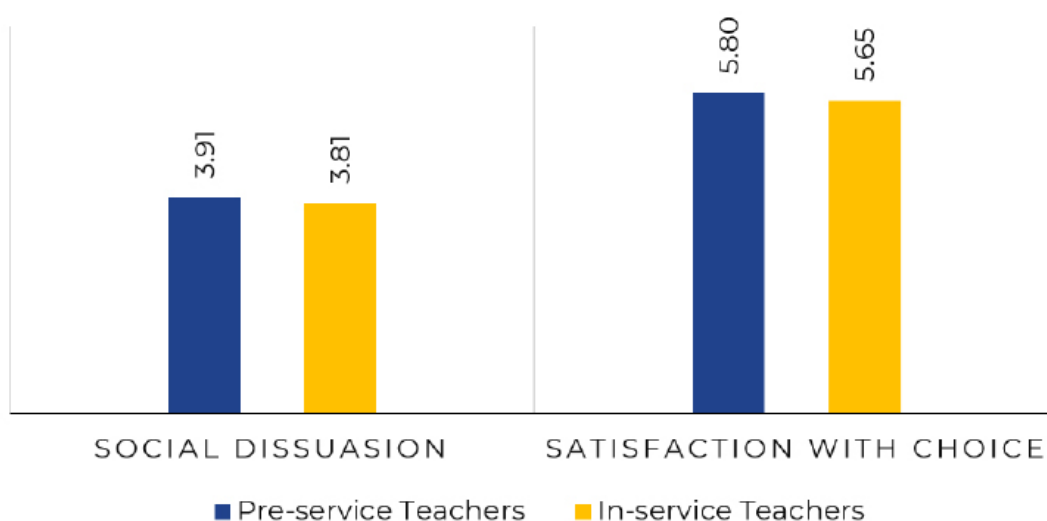


Figure 20: Pre-service and in-service teachers' decision to become a teacher

Key Finding 23: In-service teachers below 22 years and above 31 years of age have a significant difference in their belief about content and technical knowledge expertise required in the teaching profession.

Key Finding 24: No significant difference in in-service teachers' belief about difficulty, salary, and social status across the age groups.

The in-service teachers' belief about teaching was further analysed for the significant difference between age groups using One-way ANOVA. According to the results, there is a significant difference in teachers' belief about 'expert career' dimension only, among the four age groups: $F(3, 1577) = 6.923$, $p = .000$. Additionally, no significant difference was found in in-service teachers' belief about difficulty, salary, and social status across the age groups. Following the significant result, a post-hoc procedure using Tukey HSD test was conducted to find out where exactly the difference lies in expert career dimension. The investigation revealed that the difference lies between In-service teachers below 22 years and above 31 years.

Table 14: Difference in in-service teachers' belief about teaching by age groups

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Expert career	Between Groups	10.832	3	3.611	6.923	0.000
	Within Groups	822.466	1577	0.522		
High demand	Between Groups	2.248	3	0.749	0.696	0.555
	Within Groups	1698.823	1577	1.077		
Good Salary	Between Groups	18.023	3	6.008	2.411	0.065
	Within Groups	3928.661	1577	2.491		
Social Status	Between Groups	7.032	3	2.344	0.962	0.410
	Within Groups	3841.063	1577	2.436		

Key Finding 25: In-service teachers having master's degree and qualifications below first degree (Diploma, certificate and no teaching qualification) have a significant difference in their belief about content and technical knowledge expertise required in teaching.

Key Finding 26: No significant difference in in-service teachers' belief about difficulty, salary, and social status between their teaching qualifications.

One-way ANOVA was employed to examine if there was a significant difference in in-service teachers' belief about teaching based on their teaching qualification. Teaching qualification was classified into five categories based on the teaching certificates they have obtained: (i) Masters' degree, (ii) Postgraduate Diploma, and (iii) Bachelor's degree, (iv) Diploma, and (v) No teaching qualifications. According to the results, there is a significant difference in teachers' belief about 'expert career' dimension only, among the teaching qualification groups: $F(5, 1575) = 5.566$, $p = .000$. Additionally, no significant difference was found in in-service teachers' belief about difficulty, salary, and social status between their teaching qualifications. Following the significant result, a post-hoc procedure using Tukey HSD test was conducted to find out where exactly the difference lies in expert career dimension. The investigation revealed that the difference lies between in-service teachers having Masters' degree and qualifications below first degree (Diploma, certificate and no teaching qualification).

Table 15: Difference in in-service teachers' belief about teaching, by teaching qualifications

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Expert career	Between Groups	14.469	5	2.894	5.566	0.000
	Within Groups	818.828	1575	0.520		
High demand	Between Groups	8.162	5	1.632	1.519	0.181
	Within Groups	1692.909	1575	1.075		
Good Salary	Between Groups	12.224	5	2.445	0.979	0.429
	Within Groups	3934.460	1575	2.498		
Social Status	Between Groups	12.507	5	2.501	1.027	0.400
	Within Groups	3835.589	1575	2.435		

Key Finding 27: Least experienced and more experienced in-service teachers have a different belief about content and technical knowledge expertise required in teaching.

Key Finding 26: In-service teachers between 2-5 years and 6-10 years of experience have a significant difference in their belief about the social status of the teaching profession.

One-way ANOVA was employed to examine if there is a significant difference in in-service teachers' belief about teaching based on their teaching experiences. Teaching experience was classified into four categories: (i) less than 2 years, (ii) 2 – 5 years, and (iii) 6 – 10 years, and (iv) 11 or more years. According to the results, there is a significant difference in teachers' belief about 'expert career' and 'social status' dimensions, among the teaching experience groups: $F(3, 1577) = 8.991, p = .000$, and $F(3, 1577) = 3.514, p = .000$, respectively. Following the significant result, a post-hoc procedure using Tukey HSD test was conducted to find out where exactly the difference lies in expert career and social status dimensions. The investigation revealed that the least experienced and more experienced in-service teachers have a different belief about content and technical knowledge expertise required in teaching. In-service teachers between 3-5 years and 6-10 years have a significant difference in their belief about the social status of the teaching profession.

Table 16: Difference in in-service teachers' belief about teaching, by teaching experience

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Expert career	Between Groups	14.012	3	4.671	8.991	0.000
	Within Groups	819.285	1577	0.520		
High demand	Between Groups	4.951	3	1.650	1.534	0.204
	Within Groups	1696.120	1577	1.076		
Good Salary	Between Groups	6.105	3	2.035	0.814	0.486
	Within Groups	3940.579	1577	2.499		
Social Status	Between Groups	25.550	3	8.517	3.514	0.015
	Within Groups	3822.545	1577	2.424		

Key Finding 29: Pre-service teachers enrolled in certificate, Bachelor and Masters programmes have a significant difference in their belief about the social status of the teaching profession.

The pre-service teachers' belief about teaching was analysed for the significant difference between teaching courses they enrolled in using One-way ANOVA. Teaching programmes or courses were classified into five categories: (i) Master's degree, (ii) Postgraduate Diploma, and (iii) Bachelor's degree, (iv) Diploma, and (v) Certificate.

Table 17: Difference in pre-service teachers' belief about teaching, by study programme

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Expert career	Between Groups	2.888	4	0.722	0.974	0.422
	Within Groups	192.020	259	0.741		
High demand	Between Groups	4.011	4	1.003	0.935	0.444
	Within Groups	277.635	259	1.072		
Good Salary	Between Groups	25.998	4	6.500	2.289	0.060
	Within Groups	735.410	259	2.839		
Social Status	Between Groups	46.287	4	11.572	5.289	0.000
	Within Groups	566.644	259	2.188		

According to the results, there was a significant difference in teachers' belief about 'social status' dimension only, among the four age groups: $F(4, 259) = 5.289, p = .000$. Additionally, no significant difference was found in in-service teachers' belief about difficulty, salary, and expert career across the groups of teaching programmes. Following the significant result, a post-hoc procedure using Tukey HSD test was conducted to find out where exactly the difference lies in the social status dimension. The investigation revealed that the difference lies between certificate courses and both Master's and Bachelor's courses. Additionally, the difference lies between pre-service teachers enrolled in Bachelor's courses and Masters courses.

Key Finding 29: There is no significant difference in pre-service teachers' belief about teaching between those having a teacher in their family and those who do not have.

Table 18 shows the results of the independent sample t-test that was carried out to examine if a significance exists in pre-service teachers' belief about teaching with respect to having a teacher in the family. According to the results in Table 18, there is no significant difference in pre-service teachers' belief about teaching between those having a teacher in the family and those who do not have any of the dimensions.

Table 18: Difference in pre-service teachers' belief about teaching by teachers in the family

Belief about teaching	Family member worked as a teacher	N	Mean	SD	95% CI for mean		t	df	Sig
					SE	Lower Upper			
Expert Choice	Teacher in the family	146	6.497	0.751	0.062	-0.137 0.283	0.683	262	0.495
	Don't have a teacher	118	6.424	0.982	0.090	-0.143 0.289			
High Demand	Teacher in the family	146	6.381	0.926	0.077	-0.125 0.379	0.992	262	0.322
	Don't have a teacher	118	6.254	1.155	0.106	-0.131 0.385			
Good Salary	Teacher in the family	146	2.613	1.738	0.144	-0.080 0.747	1.587	262	0.114
	Don't have a teacher	118	2.280	1.644	0.151	-0.078 0.745			
Social Status	Teacher in the family	146	5.048	1.406	0.116	-0.122 0.621	1.323	262	0.187
	Don't have a teacher	118	4.798	1.659	0.153	-0.129 0.628			

THE CHANGE TO THE VALUE OF TEACHING PROFESSION OVERTIME

Key Finding 31: In-service teachers observed that greater change occurred to occupational prestige over time compared to community members.

Key Finding 32: In-service teachers had an unhappy feeling about how teachers are valued by the society despite their perception of teaching as a good job.

Participants from three groups; in-service teachers, pre-service teachers, and community members were asked to rate the item “Today teaching profession has lower occupational prestige in comparison with the past” on a 5-point Likert scale, from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Both in-service teachers and pre-service teachers were asked whether they are valued by the society, social respect, and social status using a 7-point Likert scale on their agreement.

In terms of occupational prestige of the teaching profession, those who work as teachers currently

observed the greatest difference happening over time compared with pre-service teachers and community members (Figure 21). In-service teachers and community members perceived the job worthiness quite differently. Community members did not agree that social respect or standing accorded to teachers decreased due to the status of the teaching profession. However, in-service and pre-service teachers perceived much lower occupational prestige than community members in the present days compared with the past (Figure 21).

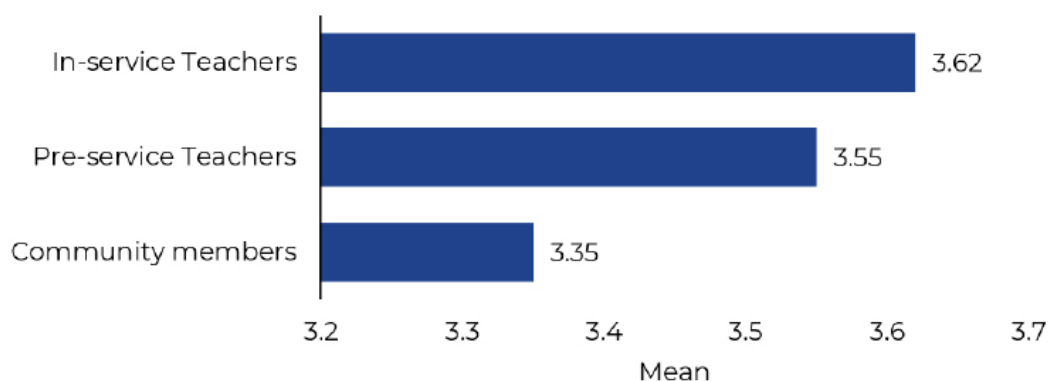


Figure 21: Occupational prestige of teaching profession in comparison with the past and the present

Even though lowered occupational prestige for teaching profession was observed by comparing the past and the present, both in-service and pre-service teachers believed that teachers are still perceived as professionals and teaching is

perceived as a high-status occupation in general (mean values above five) (Figure 22). For all the items of social status, in-service teachers awarded lower ratings than pre-service teachers. For example, pre-service teachers had a mean value

of 5.20 and in-service teachers had a mean value of 4.72 for the item “Do you believe teaching is a well-respected career?” (Figure 22). Though they have a positive perception towards the teaching profession as an occupation, in-service teachers

did not think that “teachers feel valued by society” (M=3.54) and awarded a low mean value for “thinking teachers feel their occupation has high social status” (M=3.80).

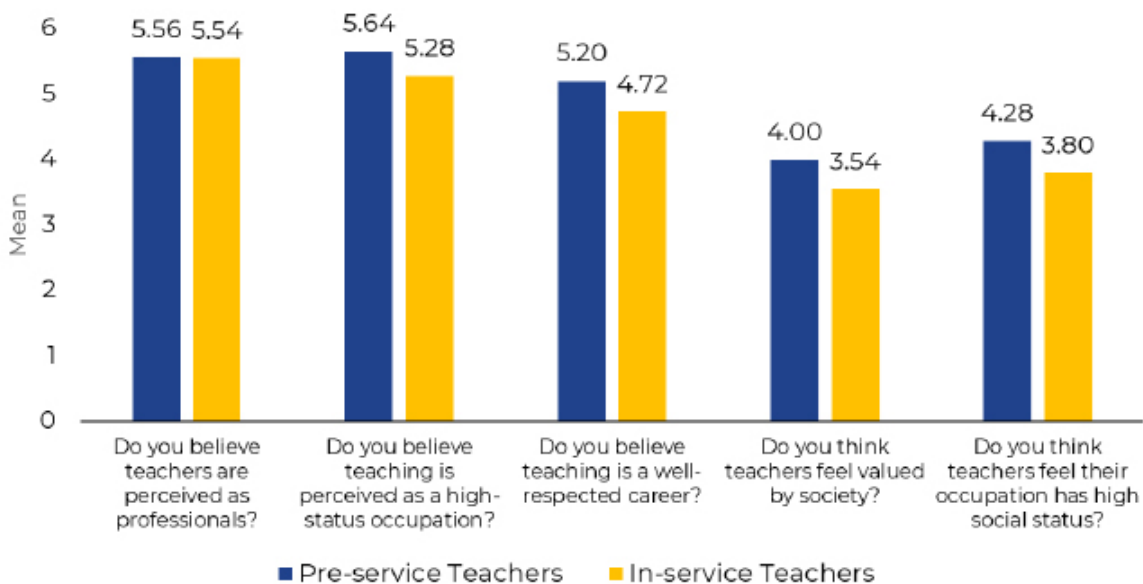


Figure 22: Social status and value of teaching profession

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CHOICE OF TEACHING AS A CAREER

1. FACILITATING AND HINDERING FACTORS

Key Finding 33: Making a social contribution is the most influential factor for both pre-service and in-service teachers in their choice of teaching as a career.

Key Finding 34: Intrinsic career value is the second most influential factor for both pre-service and in-service teachers in their choice of teaching as a career.

Key Finding 35: Ability to teach and wanting to work with children are facilitating factors for both pre-service and in-service teachers in their choice of teaching as a career.

Key Finding 36: Social influence to become a teacher is the least perceived factor among both pre-service and in-service teachers.

Both pre-service and in-service teachers were asked about factors that influenced their decision to become a teacher. Using a 7-point Likert scale, they were asked how important these factors were in their decision. Making a social contribution (M=6.18 and M=6.24) was the most influential factor for both pre-service and in-service teachers in their choice of teaching as a career, followed by intrinsic career value (M=5.90 and M=6.03) (Figure 23).

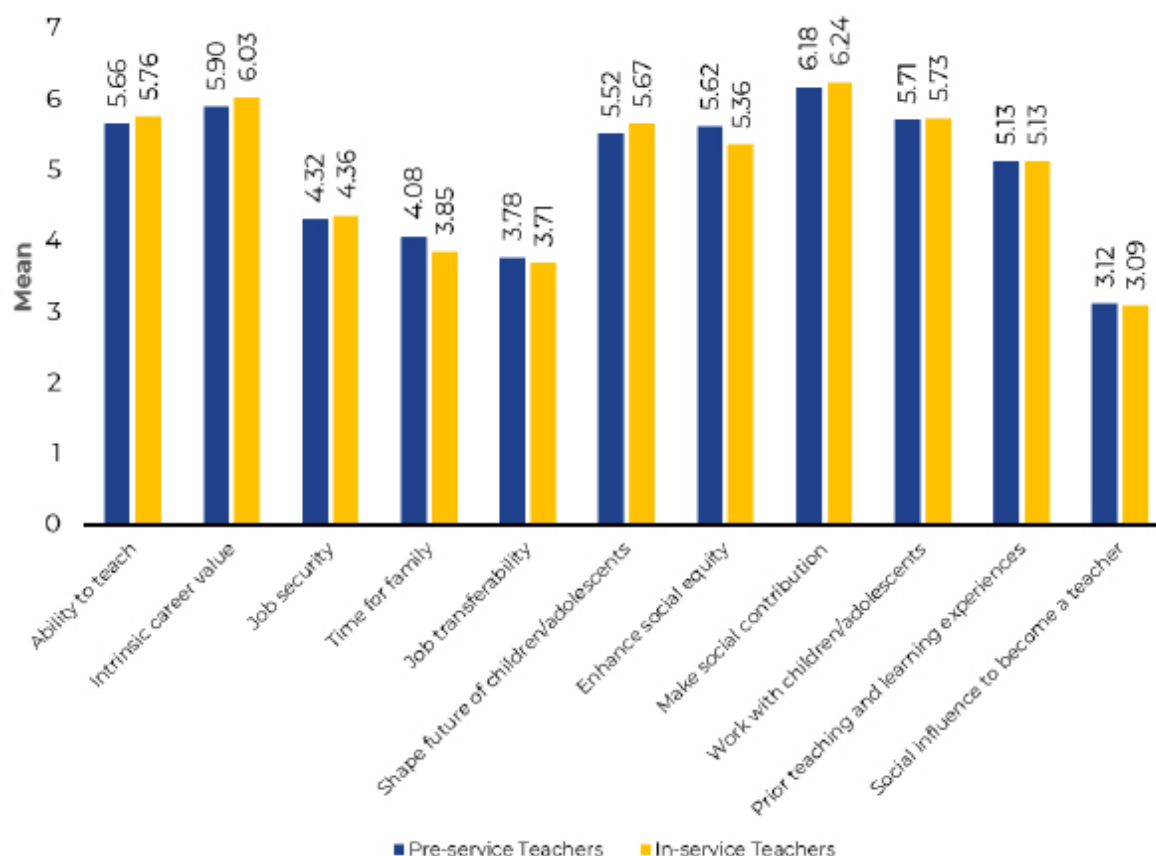


Figure 23: Facilitating and hindering factors

Other facilitating factors include; ability to teach (M=5.66 and M=5.76), work with children/adolescents (M=5.71 and M=5.73), shaping future of children/adolescents (M=5.52 and M=5.67), enhancing social equity by helping under-privileged and; socially disadvantaged students (M=5.62 and M=5.36), and prior teaching and learning experiences (M=5.13 and M=5.13) having had an inspirational teacher, having had good teachers as role models, and having had positive learning experiences at school.

With the lowest mean value from both the groups (pre-service teachers = 3.12 and in-service teachers = 3.09), this study found that 'social influence' to become a teacher was minimal in the Maldives. Social influence reflects what their friends or

family, or people whom they work with, thinks of him/her becoming a teacher. Thus, it was an insignificant factor for most of the teachers who participated in this study. Some factors that had less effect on their decision include difficulty to give 'time for family' (M=4.08 and M=3.85), job transferability (M=3.78 and M=3.71), and job security (M=4.32 and M=4.36).

2. TEACHING AS A FUTURE CAREER CHOICE

Key Finding 38: 85 percent of secondary students did not want to choose teaching as a career.

Secondary students studying at lower and higher secondary grades were asked whether they would consider teaching as a career choice after completing their school education. Most of the students (85 percent) did not want to choose teaching as a career while only 15 percent of students said “Yes” (Figure 24). This was an alarming result which would be further explored in qualitative part of this research in terms of the factors that might have a bearing on people choice to choose or not choose teaching as a career.

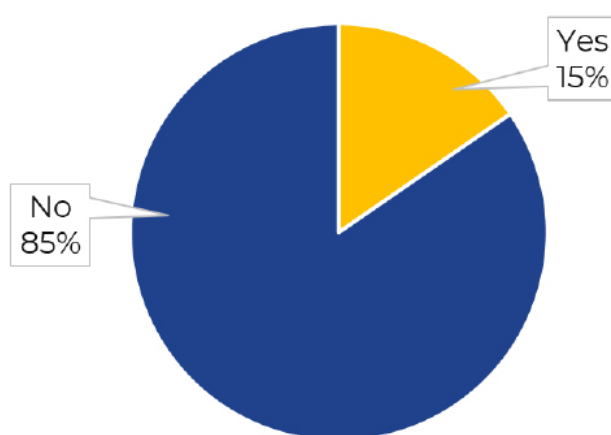


Figure 24: Teaching profession as a future career choice as perceived by secondary students

3. HAVING A TEACHER IN THE FAMILY IS AN INSIGNIFICANT FACTOR

Key Finding 39: No significant association was found between students' interest in the teaching profession and having teachers in the family.

Responses from secondary students who have considered becoming a teacher were compared to the question, “Does any of your family members work/worked as a teacher?” The results showed that 11.5 percent of the boys had considered becoming a teacher whereas the percentage for girls was only 3.9 percent. The ratio of students who had considered becoming a teacher was slightly higher in the case of students who did have a teacher in their family compared to those who did not have a teacher in their family, 8.97 percent versus 6.42 percent respectively (Figure 25).

Table 19: Association between having a teacher in the family and students' interest in teaching

	Having teachers in the family (Yes)	Having no teachers in the family (No)	Total
Have considered becoming a teacher? (Yes)	137	98	235
Have not considered becoming a teacher? (No)	699	593	1292
Total	836	691	1527

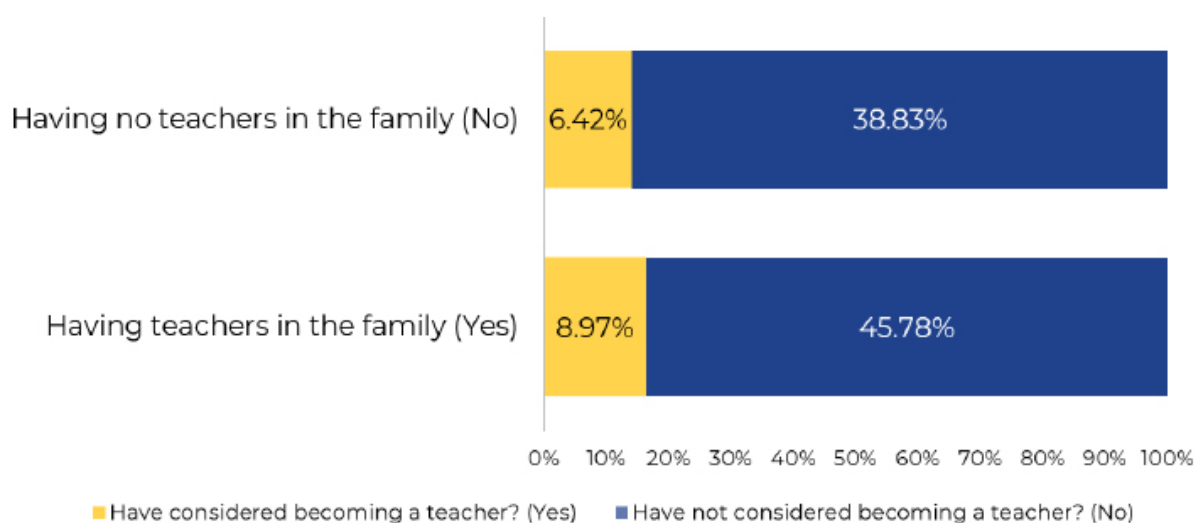


Figure 25: Influence of having a teacher in the family on students' future choice

In addition, students' interest in the teaching profession was correlated with having a teacher in the family. The chi-square test revealed that there is not enough evidence to suggest an association between students' interest in the teaching profession and having teachers in the family.

4. FACTORS CONSIDERED WHEN CHOOSING A TEACHING COURSE

Key Finding 40: Course quality followed by teaching modality are the highest influential factors that pre-service teachers considered when they chose a teaching course.

Pre-service teachers enrolled in teaching/education courses were asked about factors that they considered a teaching course, "course quality" followed by "teaching modality" were the highest influential factors that pre-service teachers considered when they chose a teaching course. Following these factors, 'course fee', 'course duration', 'class timing', and 'location of course delivery' were important factors that pre-service teachers considered (Figure 26). The results are limited to most of the responses received from public higher education institutions due to difficulty in reaching pre-service teachers from private higher education institutions.

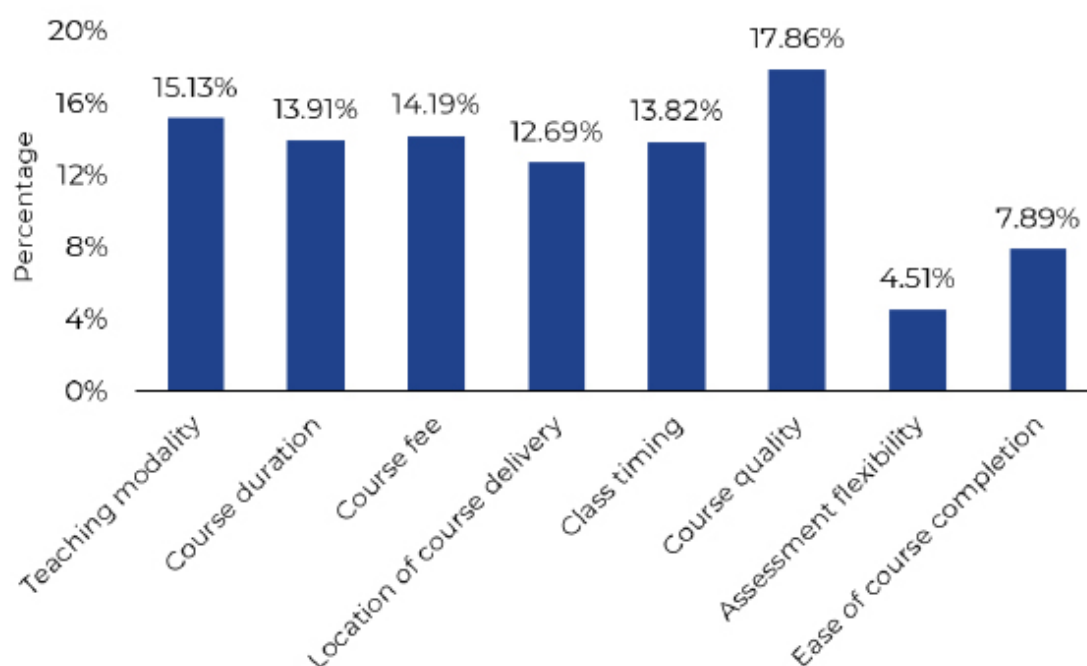


Figure 26: Factors that pre-service teachers considered when choosing a teaching course

Key Finding 41: Attending regular physical classes was the most preferred modality when pre-service teachers chose a teaching course.

Additionally, attending regular physical classes was the most preferred teaching modality by pre-service teachers when they chose a teaching course (Figure 27).

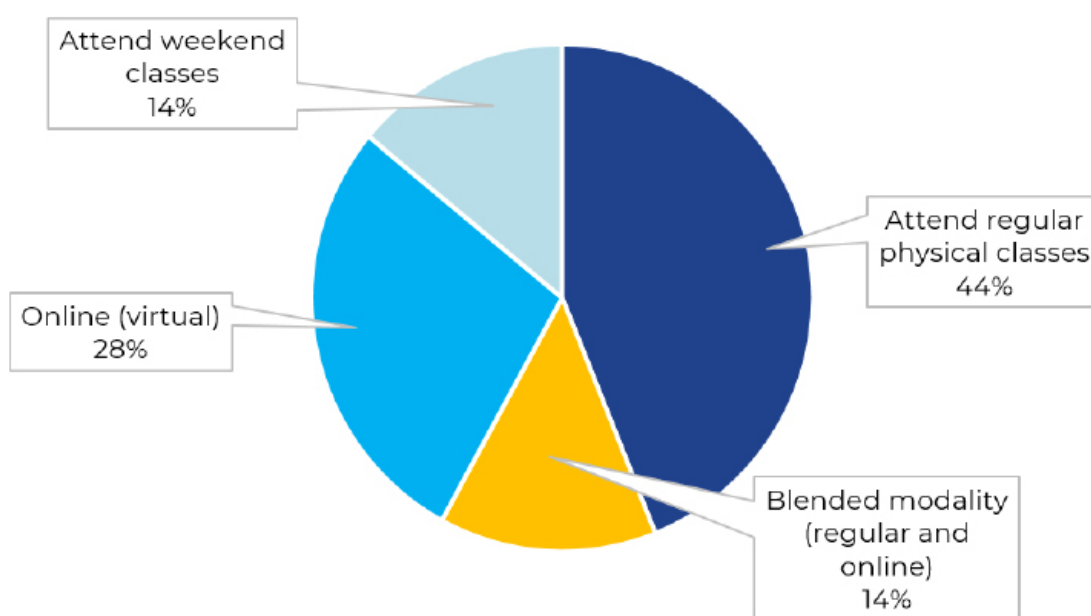


Figure 27: Preferred modality when pre-service teachers chose a teaching course

MAKING TEACHING PROFESSION ATTRACTIVE AS A FUTURE CAREER

1. CHANGES SUGGESTED BY COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Key Finding 42: Ensuring equal overtime allowance for teachers as in other professions, followed by improving management practices are the most preferred changes suggested by the community.

Key Finding 43: Increasing salary and allowances, and improving teachers' status in the society are the third and the fourth ranked changes suggested by the community, respectively.

To attract teaching profession to potential students, community members suggested to ensure equal overtime allowance for teachers as in other professions (83.07 percent), improve management practices in schools (77.80 percent), increase salary and allowances (69.65 percent), improve teachers' status in the society (62.78 percent), and ensure a reasonable workload (54.19 percent).

Although it was not included in the most rated 5 items, more than 50 percent of the respondents suggested to ensure safety and wellbeing and provide equal allowance for local and expatriate teachers. Additionally, close to 40 percent of the respondents suggested providing health insurance for teachers and their families.

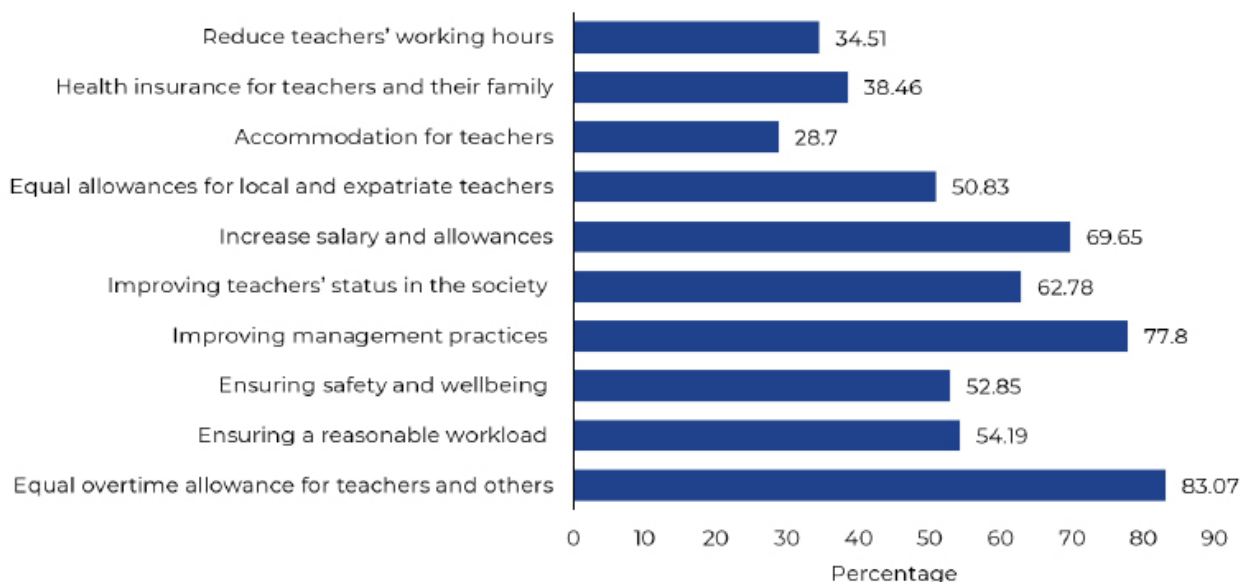


Figure 28: Required changes to make teaching profession more attractive (by community)

Key Finding 44: Increased salary and allowances are the most preferred changes suggested by the secondary students.

Key Finding 45: Improving teachers' status in the society is the second most preferred change suggested by the secondary students.

1. CHANGES SUGGESTED BY SECONDARY STUDENTS

Students were asked about the changes which could make them consider the teaching profession. More than half of the respondents (77.93 percent) mentioned an increased salary and allowances (Figure 29). The second highest; 63.72 percent was "improving teachers' status in the society". Almost half of the respondents mentioned "equal allowances for both local and expatriate teachers" and "Ensuring safety and wellbeing". Considering the changes among girls and boys, 49 percent of the girls and 29 percent of the boys mentioned "increased salary and allowances". "Accommodation for teachers" had a smaller proportion among the students.

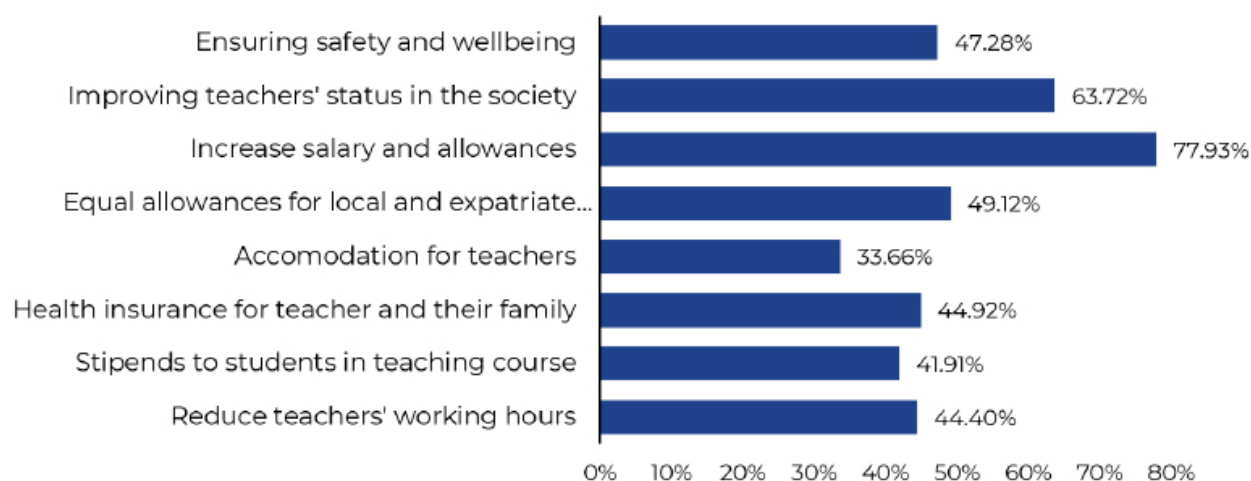


Figure 29: Required changes to make teaching profession more attractive (by students)

3. CHANGES SUGGESTED BY IN-SERVICE AND PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS

Both in-service and pre-service teachers were asked to suggest the most important changes which could make the teaching profession attractive. Both the groups suggested ensuring overtime allowance for teachers as in other professions as the most crucial change needed (87.65 percent in-service teachers and 81.44 percent pre-service teachers), followed by increasing salary and allowances (86.20 percent in-service teachers and 77.27 percent pre-service teachers). Although these two changes were rated as top two changes, in-service teachers ranked 'ensuring a reasonable workload' (55.64 percent) as the third essential change, while pre-service teachers ranked 'improving management practices' (62.88 percent) as the third crucial area that requires changes.

Key Finding 46: Ensuring equal overtime allowance for teachers as in other professions is the most preferred change suggested by both pre-service and in-service teachers.

Key Finding 47: Increasing salary and allowances is the second most preferred change suggested by both pre-service and in-service teachers.

Key Finding 48: Ensuring a reasonable workload is the third most preferred change suggested by in-service teachers.

Key Finding 49: Improving management practices is the third most preferred change suggested by pre-service teachers.

More than 50 percent of pre-service teachers suggested to ensure a reasonable workload of teachers. Equal or close to 50 percent in-service teachers proposed to improve management practices (50.22 percent), improve students' discipline (48.65 percent), improve teachers' status in the society (47.83 percent), provide equal allowances for both local and expatriate teachers (47.07 percent), and provide health insurance for teachers and their family (45.56 percent). Interestingly, providing stipends to students enrolled in teaching courses (22.75 percent) was ranked least important by the in-service teachers. However, 38.64 percent of pre-service teachers suggested provision of stipends to them.

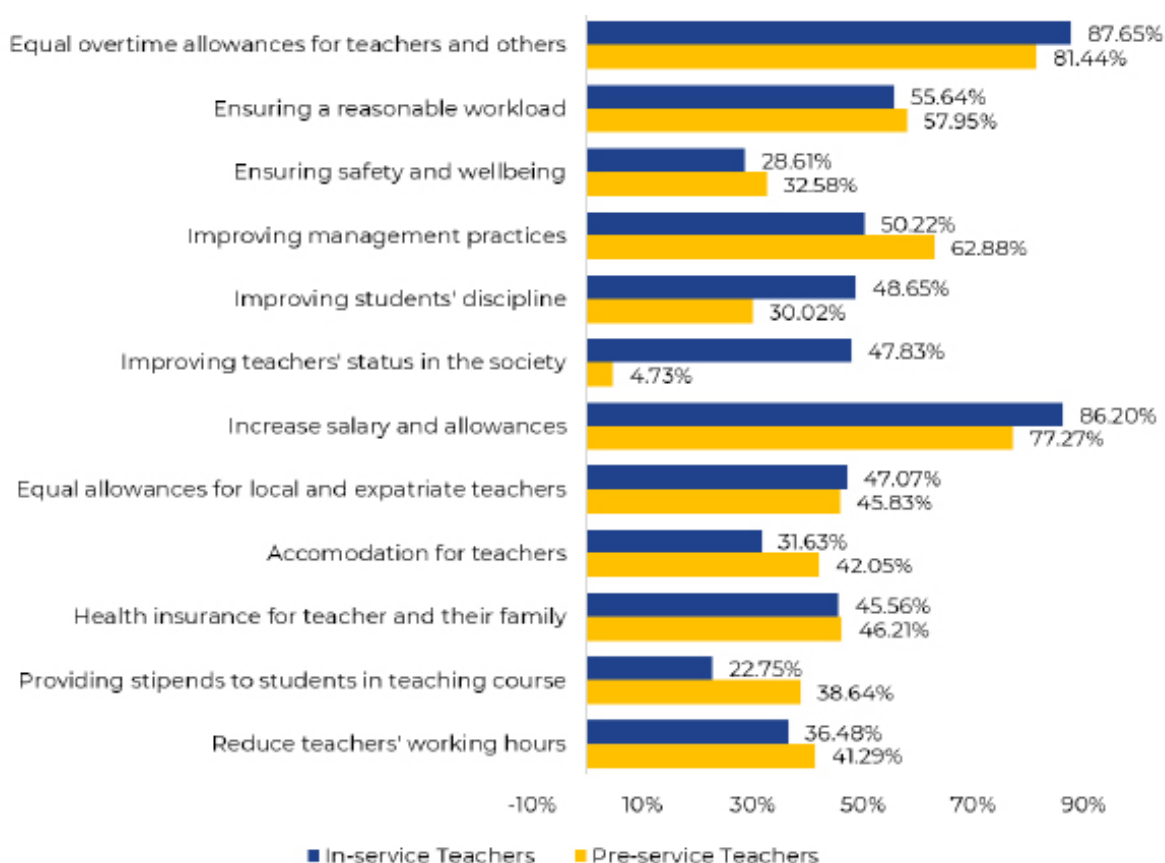


Figure 30: Required changes to make teaching profession more attractive (by in-service and pre-service teachers)

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

The aim of this research is to investigate perception, value and choice of the teaching profession as a career. The focus is to explore the views of different groups of people about the teaching profession and how it is valued in the Maldives. This section presents important themes generated from the qualitative data gathered through focus group discussions with four groups of participants (secondary students, in-service teachers, pre-service teachers, and community members) selected from 12 regions of the Maldives. Each group composed of 8-10 participants. The participant groups were composed as given in Table 20.

Table 20: Participant groups

Group	Composition
Community members	Parents, council members, teachers (retired or resigned) spouses of teachers. Any of these participants are referred to as community members unless otherwise mentioned a parent or retired teacher in some cases.
Teachers	Teachers who worked in schools at the time of this research (Atolls and Greater Male')
Secondary Students	Students of Grade 10-12 across different regions (Atolls and Greater Male') Secondary students are always referred to as students in the findings.
Pre-service Teachers	Students who were enrolled in teacher education programmes.

The findings are reported with minimal interpretive writing supported with verbatims shared by the participants. The findings are presented in four sections illustrated with distinct themes associated with the focus of the research questions outlined. The first section reveals participants' perceptions about the teaching profession and values given to the teaching profession as a career. The second illustrates the change that has been to the value of teaching profession overtime. The third reveals factors influencing the value and choice of teaching as a career. Finally, the fourth, reports participants' views making the teaching profession attractive as a future career. The findings in this section are reported with main categories and associated themes generated via all participant groups. However, some unique themes that may be relevant only to specific groups are presented separately. This is to add clarity to draw the implications for specific stakeholders while also guiding the recommendations at the end.

PERCEPTION AND VALUE OF THE TEACHING PROFESSION AS A CAREER

Participants discussed their perceptions about the teaching profession in relation to three main ideas. These ideas are categorised into: (1) The perception of teaching as a noble service, (2) Teaching profession is perceived as a very busy and tough job, and (3) Teaching profession is undervalued as a career choice. The main categories and relevant themes for each are presented with supported conversations and interpretations in the following subsections.

PERCEPTION OF THE TEACHING PROFESSION

Participants have described their views indicating that teaching can be seen as an exemplary profession if the income associated with it is not emphasised. Participants discussed that the teaching profession is accepted as a service.

1. TEACHING PROFESSION IS ACCEPTED AS A SERVICE

The theme identifies that teaching is viewed as a good profession if teachers' salary is not given much emphasis and considers it as a service. Participants talked about it indicating that there could be many other intrinsic benefits for the person and the community if salary was kept aside. Some participants from the community members talked about this idea:

"Teaching is a very good job to do as a service. Also, I observe that people normally do teaching with their passion and interest. Even if teaching is a tough job for many, it seems very interesting for them." (Community Member)

A parent from the community members added:

"As a parent, I would say teaching is a tough job, yet teachers do it because they like doing it as a service to our children and the community. Some of them even do not complain about the huge working hours, it is a good job to do. What I also feel is that some people must do it because they are important for raising our children. They are very important. They spend days and nights doing this job." (Community Member)

Another group of participants further elaborated the same idea:

One Participant said: Teaching is a very good service as I see it. Because it is about teaching something to someone which offers great satisfaction. (Community member)

Participant two supported the idea and said: It is a very good work and a very responsible job though it is tough. (Community member)

A third one participated in the conversation and said: We need people to teach as it is very important for our community. (Community member)

All the examples illustrated here clearly describe the community members' views of the teaching job as a service even with the busy and tough workload that is associated with it. Some participants further discussed the teaching profession as a valued service they provide. Supporting this idea, a parent from the community members mentioned:

"In our islands, people do observe a lot of respect for teachers. They are very appreciated ... all those who are working in the school. We parents and children accept them as highly regarded. A very few parents would probably even raise a concern regarding any issue..." (Community Member)

Another parent supported with the same thought and said:

"As a parent, I would say that most parents highly regard teachers and respect them. But it is very natural to have a few with different personalities and may also have some concerns...But overall, I would say that parents do accept teachers with high regard." (Community Member)

Another community member emphasised more on the respect given to teachers saying that:

"Teachers are very important for the community. They are respected people, and are an important component of the community. Without teachers, we cannot develop people... I feel they are important representatives of the community." (Community Member)

One more participant added more explanation about the value given, saying that:

"Any community is built by capable people who can do the work...future of the Maldives, building the future... developing a generation... It is the most important role of teachers. So, teachers are important okay... without teachers, a generation cannot be built, a future cannot be built. Teachers are important".

A different point was noted by another community member, he added:

"We see that they are our children's second parents. They are skilled in raising children and parenting them. They play an important role in raising them." (Community Member)

More elaboration was added to the idea by another community member:

"A child from a very young age spends the most time with teachers ...until 15th or 16th years ... The values... principles, honesty, loyalty, knowledge, and attitudes they gain from them. ...parents hardly get time for them... so teachers are very important people." (Community Member)

The above examples illustrate the value given to teachers as they are accepted and highly regarded because of the important role teachers have in developing a generation for the future of the country. Some participants talked about the teachers' noble responsibility in the community.

Further, many teachers discussed the idea of teaching as a service given to the community rather than focusing on it as an income source. In the conversation, a job is meant more as a source of income.

A teacher said:

"I don't believe I can do this job as a job expecting an income source... without being motivated and... teaching cannot be done without passion, ... it requires so much time, unlike other professions...if a job the working hours are fixed isn't it? But...for teaching, it is often 24 hours... I don't believe I can do this as merely a job."(Teacher)

In agreement with the previous idea, another teacher added:

"I also believe that teaching cannot be done as a job, cannot continue in the teaching field... with no interest... if only as a job... completing the hours of work... is not like teaching..." (Teacher)

In the same focus group, another teacher supported this idea saying that:

"I completely agree with it, teaching is a huge responsibility, if teaching is done as just a job, it cannot fully be done..."(Teacher)

Linking to this idea, another teacher more openly clarified that:

"If teaching is to be done only for salary, the outcome will not be as good if someone works with personal interest and motivation." (Teacher)

More explanation on the meaning of job with an economic point of view was cleared by another teacher in the same group, a teacher said:

"Let's see, if you think teaching is a job, you need to have skills and then you check the salary. If you think from an economic point of view, teaching does not provide enough income source... you will never see teachers getting rich in this area, mostly they will have just the amount for managing life." (Teacher)

The economic point of view was described in another conversation, a teacher said:

"I would say that teaching is to be done only as a job, it would be hard for anyone to build their life [the money value]... if husband and wife both work as teachers, at the end of the month they will have nothing... and if you start giving tuition to earn more... Teaching is a full-time job... it would be good if we get a good salary... but cannot be just done as a source of income." (Teacher)

While considering all nine sub-themes generated through the focus group, conversations with four groups of people clearly identify that teaching is valued as exemplary work if the salary is kept aside. Further, the profession is perceived as a very busy and tough job as discussed by most of the participants in the

2. TEACHING PROFESSION IS PERCEIVED AS A VERY BUSY AND TOUGH JOB

Nearly all members of the focus groups talked about this issue raising concerns regarding the impact it could have on the value given to the teaching profession. A community member who currently works in another field talked desperately about the dissension between teachers' busy life and tough workload.

"I have my own experience as a teacher... Some days I get very tired after taking so many classes... I would feel the pain in my feet...would need rest after finishing the classes because of the long hours of standing. Now I don't feel that anymore ... I would really like to highlight this point...teachers get both mentally and physically tired due to the long hours of working." (Community Member)

A community member gave another example saying:

"Teachers are leaving this profession because of the workload they are required to do day and night away from their family... and the low salary. I asked this question to a very senior teacher who applied for an admin job in the health centre. She said that she feels bad about leaving the job, but the amount of work and not having enough time for that is the reason that she wants to leave the job." (Community Member)

Another member from the community group shared her experience of working as a teacher prior to her current job. She said:

"I was a teacher before my current job... there is a big difference in the job... the workload, the way our work is... the working hours, time to spend, and the salary that is given... that all have a mismatch..." (Community Member)

A normal day's experience for a teacher was shared by a community member to indicate the hard work that teachers do every day. She complained:

Working in a school for six hours... going back home and doing the housework, and getting ready for the next day's teaching... the thinking is always in mind... What I will do tomorrow... this is what the child did today... how to deal with him...what can be done to change anything... so it will just keep going on in mind... the mind never gets to relax... so what I am saying is I really love teaching but the mismatch between all the work to do... time and salary do not really match. (Community Member)

Speaking about the workload, another member from the community talked:

"Teachers really do very hard work... I work with many students and spend so much time with them. So, I do feel it. They normally go to school around 6:45 until 4 or 5. Their kids stay home without their mothers. Teaching is very hard work. I feel the government gives a very low salary compared to the heaving workload they have..." (Community Member)

A community member who has a teaching qualification shared her reasons for not working in the field because of the busy schedule and high workload. She said:

I have teaching qualifications. Every time temporary teachers are selected for teaching, I think about applying for teaching... even parents encourage me to do that. But then I think about it... this is not worth doing. I get more money if I stay home and offer tuition for students. So why would I go I feel the responsibility, I really want to join the school. But I have more concerns about not having enough time to invest in school hours and not having enough salary for the work I would be doing when I am in school, even if I don't go to school I still get to earn more. (Community Member)

Talking about teachers' busy working hours against their everyday life, a teacher addressed to an obvious concern she observed: She said:

"Due to the high workload at schools, teachers hardly get time for any other source of income unlike in other fields. For example, in other fields, when official working hours are done, they get more time to increase their income through part-time work." (Teacher)

More importantly, a community member noted an important point about how teachers' work is seen during school off hours. Even if teachers do so much work at home it is considered as their responsibility, rather than counting it as overtime work.

"Teachers always work on a very busy schedule. People always talk about their busy work as a normal thing. Even after going back home, they still do school-related work. And sometimes it is believed that it is what teaching is and it is their responsibility." (Community Member)

The extracts above portray the teachers' busy and heavy workload and how that could impact their motivation to the value given or the choice of remaining in the job. With such a busy workload, teachers face other challenges in their everyday work such as facing injustice regarding their overtime money. As teachers were busy with the overload of work, their family time was compromised as discussed in the focus groups.

3. TEACHERS ARE COMPROMISING THEIR FAMILY TIME

As reported in the previous findings many participants talked about the busy work schedule that teachers have in their daily work life. In this part, more conversations took place in relation to the family issues that resulted due to the less time that teachers have for their families. This also means that teachers compromise their family time for their work life. With this idea, many teachers raised concerns regarding how they had to compromise their family time. Further, other participants in different groups also discussed this matter in the same vein.

A teacher talked about this concern:

"Actually, I don't get enough time for my family. There are things that families also want... I don't get to do that... I don't get to spend time with them. During the holidays, I also want to be with them. So, some family relatives also say, you are working too busily... you have to give time to your family too... so it does influence our relationship with family relatives too." (Teacher)

A teacher in a big school mentioned:

"I hardly get time for my family... I spend most of my daytime in school, sometimes my mother even says, once you get to school you forget everything... you hardly get time for your own children... and you are looking after others' children at school." (Teacher)

Apart from the above examples, two teachers talked in a different focus group:

One teacher said: This is very busy... too much time is spent on it... require a lot of dedication

Another continued: Don't give time to the family... too many extra activities... very busy... creates a lot of problems as unable to give enough time to the family. (Teachers)

More teachers talked about the family issues:

"I don't get enough time for my family... the commitment, time and I don't have that satisfaction... and I feel sad."

"Don't get time for my personal life...can't have a balanced life... and the other reason is family pressure is so much... because the salary does not match the working hours, I do...hardly get to manage both my professional and personal life." (Teachers)

Apart from teachers, students also noted such concerns regarding family issues. A student said:

"Teachers also have families, due to their busy schedule of work, they hardly get to spend time with their family. Most of their time is spent in schools. Very little time is given to their own children." (Student)

Similarly, some community members addressed the issue of teachers not having time for their families. A member said:

"One of the reasons that teachers leave this profession is their busy work schedule during the day and night away from their family and for a very little salary." (Community Members)

Four community members in different focus groups mentioned:

"The time for teachers working hours needs to be fixed so that they get time for their family." (Community Member)

"Even during the weekend, teachers are very busy, they don't have any family time... it is not worth it at all to leave the family for the low salary they get." (Community Member)

"I am a husband of a teacher; I have two children...I would tell them... never become a teacher... It is a very busy job...not looking after children... leaving them to be taken care of by others... this is not life... isn't it." (Community Member)

"I have a 6-year-old... He says Mummy does more work...and Mummy cannot give any time for me... So, the child also feels that his mother doesn't get time for him. And sometimes he says... Mummy Don't go... stay home... This is sad isn't it." (Community Member)

All the examples above clearly indicate that teachers have very little time with the family when thinking about everyday work life. With more practical scenarios, two community members further narrated how a teacher's daily routine goes:

"Early morning at 5:30 or 6:00 she goes to school, will be back around 3:30... most days later than that... Not only that. Then she will say... have a practice in the afternoon... and at night a meeting... she will be back late at night... then will start preparing for tomorrow's lesson until 1 or 2 am. She would hardly get to sleep... so teachers don't get time at all, and they won't even be mentally fit... because of this huge workload." (Community Member)

"I work in the airport, everyone in the house works in different jobs... My wife is a teacher... As he said, at 5:30 am she will go to school... she will come for a break... to feed the child and she will go back around 12:30 pm or 1:00 pm. When she comes back it will feel like 'kurolieh theley hen' [used to describe the pressure] ... the child is fed or not... she would hardly realize what she will be doing...go back to school and will return around 3:00 pm. Again she will say I have another practice... so imagine how frustrated I will get... a 9-month-old kid we have... she does not get time at all to look after him... for this reason... I also get a lot under pressure... I even tell her .. there has to be a limit to the work."(Community Member)

Another community member more reasonably talked:

"I would personally not recommend any woman to become a teacher. Because they don't get time for their family. It won't be too wrong if I say, they almost neglect their family. My sister is sitting next here... she would probably know how much sacrifice she had to do when she was a teacher. How many teachers have neglected their own children to give time for students?" (Community Member)

The same idea was addressed by another community member:

"The busy work schedule is mostly the concern. I left the teaching job because I had children very close to each other... and did not get time for them... I could not manage school time. Every time it was hard to ask someone to look after my children... and in islands, it is difficult to bring a maid also to stay with children." (Community Member)

A community member also mentioned the family issues that some teachers may have due to the busy work schedule. He talked:

"In most families, teachers get family problems due to their busy work. So, how would I recommend for my daughter to become a teacher? She would also start a married life soon, we cannot control her life... when she had to spend so much time in school, her children are going to be neglected... that won't work so that does not seem working for now [the current situation of busy teaching schedule] ... the work hours need to be changed... and teachers need to balance both families and work-life...a mechanism needs to be established to manage workload and time." (Community Member)

Another community member more convincingly talked about the family issues and teaching workload:

"The main problem is the workload issue... for example, in an office administration job, once the office hours are done, there won't be any other work when they return home. They get to spend a happy time with their family. Where is that time for teachers... they don't even get their weekends to spend with their family. Rarely get it. Especially, near the end of the year... they will always be at school... competitions, other extra activities... They need time for their family and children too... with my husband... parents and relatives... they need time for that too... no time for their own social life... they relatively get less time for their own life." (Community Member)

Although the participants do not reveal the exact family issues or concerns that may have been caused or could cause due to teachers' busy workload, it seems that teachers have very little time for their families due to their busy work. This in fact conveys the idea that teachers compromise their family time for their work life. This means that many teachers may have had so many challenges in managing their professional and personal lives. With more discussions among the participants, they have seen that teachers were unjustly treated regarding their overtime pay.

4. TEACHERS' OVERTIME PAY IS UNJUSTLY TREATED

Many participants complained about the salary as well as the overtime allowances that they deserve for the tremendous amount of work they do in schools. As indicated in the conversations, apart from teaching there are several duties that teachers perform in schools such as extracurricular activities and co-curricular. Despite them being inadequately paid for their work, teachers are even more unfairly treated when overtime allowances are given. This issue has become one of the most intolerable concerns for teachers. This issue was aptly discussed both among community members and teachers in a frustrating manner.

A participant from the community members clearly addressed the following point saying:

"What I observe is that teachers are not only concerned about their basic salary. The main concern they are having is also related to their overtime problem. The way overtime is given to teachers is completely different from other civil service institutions. This makes the teachers receive a very low percentage of the overtime allowance for their extra work. This is totally unfair." (Community Member)

Another participant from the community members disappointedly mentioned an example:

"About overtime... even if teachers work for the whole day, they get 10 percent.. I don't believe it is good compared to their work. And then 10 percent is approximately 600 MVR, or 700 MVR... this is something that always happens..." (Community Member)

Several teachers more frustratedly talked about the injustice that they have when they spoke about the overtime money.

"The problem is, actually, we are not even given the overtime money for the work we do ...We don't even have family responsibility rights... if taken the salary will be deducted... and over time will also not be given... This may be the reason why teaching is not valued or not interesting. This is totally unfair." (Teacher)

"Nearly all teachers work in extracurricular activities that are mostly organised after school hours. Often we tend to have more hours of work compared to Male'... with every single activity we are working at school... yet don't receive overtime money for that work... we only receive 10 percent of overtime allowance... [in a sarcastic way] Basically, the message is raising children is not important as far as I see it." (Teacher)

Teaching for 7 hours here [school].... again, going for extracurricular activities... we don't get full-overtime money..." (Teacher)

Speaking about the disappointment regarding the injustice in the way overtime money is given, a teacher shared how unfairly she was treated:

"We write our overtime hours according to Civil Service policy, which normally ranges around 3000 MVR, but we only get approximately 500MVR... or less" (Teacher)

Providing a more practical example, a teacher explained:

"Our work does not only involve teaching inside the class officially, but we also have to attend core curricular activities...extracurricular activities, so many activities. Even now we are having netball, football... we will have to be with them... so after spending the official hours of teaching... getting ready for teaching the next day...so for all this work we don't get overtime." (Teacher)

Giving more details about the disappointment and the feeling of injustice and which also can lead to demotivation towards the job, a teacher said:

"I was working very passionately even during my practicum and afterwards. The day I wrote my OT [overtime] hours, I had to cut much of my work time, it was very disappointing... led to lack of motivation... 5000 Rufiyaa was written in the OT sheet, which had to decrease to 340 Rufiyaa... even if someone is so motivated it could lead to frustration... actually, our OT is decreased because our work is not accepted." (Teacher)

The unfair treatment was more comparatively expressed by another teacher:

"When thinking about other fields, what people get for their work and what we get in our work need to be fair. For example, in the health sector, for everyday they sign for work, they get 100 rufiyaa [in an exaggerated tone], Are we also not signing [in the overtime sheet] ... OT hour money is given differently across different civil service institutions. This is not fair at all. We do our official hours' work.... Many of the working hours also include extracurricular hours that we had to spend with children during off-school hours. And it is often more in our case [atolls] compared to Male' [indicating the limited number of teachers] as we had to do everything... but we don't get our overtime money... Most people in Civil service institutions get one third over time. We only receive 10 percent... indirectly, saying raising children is not important, we don't care [more sarcastically, indicating what the policymakers would say]."(Teacher)

Another example was shared by a teacher more disturbingly:

"A nurse gets 7000 rufiyaa for her overtime, and for a teacher, the maximum is 500 rufiyaa. The Ministry of Education limits the percentage of overtime for teachers. The civil service policy declares that it is a right of employees. ... this incongruous also exists. All other institutions except schools do not need to limit the overtime money, and they get what they deserve. We are only not getting it. So, no one would want to remain in teaching because of such unfair treatments". (Teacher)

Adding to that idea, another community member complained about the injustice, saying:

"The huge difference relates to the way overtime money is given. At school normally ... We have a fixed amount for overtime, and it's divided among everyone. But in other fields, it does not happen that way. They get overtime money based on their working hours recorded. So, this is an area that we can easily compare with how things are done differently. It would have been fine even if there were fixed hours decided and paid adequately on that basis. This does not mean we come home and get paid on just bookmarking... What we are saying is even if the number of hours is decided, it must be fairly treated. This is unfair. We see the difference of 6000 or 7000, we could have earned for our work." (Community Member)

In a different example, another community member talked about the difference that can be observed about the overtime money given in schools. She said:

"In many schools, overtime money is distributed among all. But then the work that is done without overtime may be just volunteer work...for example, lesson planning is for overtime work, marking books, not overtime... there was a time that overtime was only considered for extracurricular activities." (Community Member)

Apart from what teachers and community members spoke about the way overtime was given, some students also highlighted from the knowledge they knew about it. A student mentioned:

"Teachers do talk about the fact that overtime is a fixed amount even if they write about the overtime working hours, they do not get paid." (Student)

The extracts from the conversations above are 'loud enough to highlight the point that the teachers were unfairly treated with their overtime pay. This is an aspect that needs to be carefully considered as it seems completely unfair towards teachers' work in schools.

Considering all the reasons highlighted above, clearly identifying why the teaching profession could be undervalued subsequently impacts the choice of the teaching profession as a career. Apart from family issues that could relate to teaching, participants openly discussed the value given to the teaching profession influenced by the perceptions identified above.

THE VALUE OF THE TEACHING PROFESSION

This theme was generated from participants' conversations across all groups, the focus was regarding the income value given to the teaching profession. The theme included teachers are valued with their noble responsibility, yet the profession is undervalued with its low income.

1. TEACHERS ARE VALUED BASED ON THEIR NOBLE RESPONSIBILITY

This idea was discussed in the focus groups by all participants explaining the value given to teachers and to the teaching profession due to the noble responsibility they have in the community.

A teacher mentioned:

"I see that many people say that teachers play the most important role in our society... I hear many parents say that... they do not get what they deserve... they must be the highest salaried people. Many people talk about the important role teachers have... In fact, in the islands the most active role is done by teachers to prepare our children for their life... many people accept that... our children study and work in good jobs just because of the teachers" (Teacher)

Another teacher further added explaining the high regard given to teachers:

"Teachers are valued... even now... a teacher from...[school name is removed]... or a teacher in a family... or among our friends... the value is seen very obviously... mostly that member will be asked to do the advisory

role when a concern is raised for any kids in the family... so the value is given because of their profession.” (Teacher)

Another teacher elaborated with more practical experience of her own:

“I live with my husband's family ... often they ask me to talk to one of their kids when they have any issue or concern.” (Teacher)

Another teacher talked with more examples amplifying the important role of the teacher.

“For example, some parents may also say... the student will listen to you more than anyone... many parents request talking to kids when having to talk about anything concerning their kids.” (Teacher)

Another teacher talked about the value given due to their importance for the community, a teacher said:

“I would recommend students to become teachers. This is a very good profession. This is good for raising children... I want to highlight that all teachers are important people for building a community.” (Teacher)

The extracts generated from the focus group conversations highlight the important value given to teachers by the community because of their specific skills. Apart from the conversation regarding the acceptance of their professional skills, some also talked about the value of teaching as a profession. Further, when talking about the value of teaching profession, teachers conversed about different benefits that teachers could gain through their work as teachers.

A few members of the group talked as given below:

A teacher said: it gives job satisfaction...

Another added: Very happy that I can teach many things to kids... it is actually...invaluable...

Another teacher shared a different benefit: It's gaining points for hereafter ... this is a very good job for that too... This is not just a profession... This is very noble.

A fourth teacher added to the idea: This is also an opportunity to grow... get to learn a lot...

The first teacher in this extract again added: It offers so many benefits for personal life too so many skills can be used too...

Another teacher also talked about what she feels: I think the tolerance level is also high among teachers... During COVID time we were able to manage everything so well... because we are teachers.

One of the members again added: That's really... true... so many skills can be applied in our real life too... we can tolerate things well... teachers are mostly conditioned very well for everything.... (Teachers)

The ideas shared by teachers clearly indicate the value of the teaching profession. More examples were shared supporting the same idea.

"A teacher said: I feel this is a very good profession. A very respected job...get to learn so many ... I feel so happy that I get to help many... (Teacher)

Another stressed on the same point: I feel teaching is a very noble profession... very good profession." (Teacher)

These examples show the important value given to the teaching profession by teachers. Apart from the teachers' own views about how they were seen in the community, some students of Grade 10-12 also talked about how teaching was regarded as a noble responsibility.

This idea was also discussed by students when they talked about the important role teachers have in the community. One student described teaching, saying that:

"Teaching something in a way that someone can learn about something that he does not know. And it plays a very important role in the community." (Student)

Another student talked about teachers and about their importance:

"I see Teachers as very important people, they supposedly are very good with kids, and I like teachers." (Student)

Several students also discussed the idea of responsibility as follows:

One student said: ... it is a lot of responsibility...

Another added: teaching so many kids... giving attention to all individuals ... their needs and everything. Dealing with everyone is difficult...

Another added more: teaching, preparing lessons,

One more talked: creating interest and motivation for all to learn (Students)

Another group of students talked about the responsibility as a value given to the teaching job. They talked:

A student said: I feel teachers are very important...guiding in different ways ... talking to all [students] very closely, building their future...

Another more openly talked: ... teaching is seen as a different profession... requires so many skills ... for example, teachers need to be very good at preparing students for exams... if they are unable to do that, they receive a lot of criticism. (Students)

The examples illustrated above reveal the importance of the teacher's role. Students' extracts further noted the value they give to teachers as highly regarded people because of their role in their life. Furthermore the students and pre-service teachers addressed the same idea of responsibility as a value given to the teaching profession.

A pre-service teacher said:

"The responsibility of looking after so many children is a big responsibility... especially, I feel like, in primary schools, the teachers have higher demand. I feel it is a huge responsibility... to provide education to these children is a national need... a very important service given to the country... I feel like it is huge." (Pre-service teacher)

Another pre-service teacher stressed the same idea saying that:

"I believe that this is the most important of all without considering the income resource, as a profession, this is very good... if you wish you can earn in other ways too if you are a teacher." (Pre-service teacher)

Examples revealed above clearly highlight the value given to the huge responsibility that teachers carry on their shoulders, and the value is linked with the nature of that noble responsibility to provide education as a service, rather than as an income source. Several other themes were generated from the focus group conversations related to how the teaching profession is undervalued by its low income.

2. TEACHING PROFESSION IS UNDERVALUED FOR ITS LOW INCOME COMPARED TO THE WORKLOAD

When participants talked about the value of the teaching profession, many of them related it to the income value it has as a job. The word 'salary' was the most coded word in the themes generated via the group members' conversations in the focus groups across ten regions. The number of times that participants mentioned words related to salary ranged more than 400 times in their conversations. The main words included salary (50 times), income (3 times) or wages (11 times) [in English form], and other words that give the meaning of these two words in Dhivehi such as Musaara (265 times), Anmudani (6 times), Ujoora (52 times), Laari (41 times), and Faisaa (6 times). In all instances of their conversations, the words were used to complain about the salary or to talk about the inadequacy of the salary compared to the amount of workload.

Many participants talked about the reasons behind the undervaluing of the teaching profession. Some of these reasons are associated with the low salary, busy workload, and the huge amount of time that teachers required for their work life.

Many teachers talked about the low value of the teaching profession compared to other fields, as given below:

A teacher said: Early days teaching was valued very much as a profession. Probably that's why many parents encourage their children to become teachers. Then the salary was good too compared to other fields.

Another teacher continued: Now there are so many professions, money can be easily earned. The teaching salary does not match the workload. So, students do not want to enter the teaching profession.

Another teacher added giving more reasons: actually, what students see about the teaching profession, in general, may also change their perception about teaching. We just nod our heads whatever parents say... students sometimes say ... why do you not respond to them... or why don't you leave the job with all these difficulties... So students do think about all these... hard work... pressure... So how would they join teaching with all these?

Another teacher made a different point: The main thing now is the monetary value. How are we supposed to not think about it? All students will think about the value of the work and ... money is an important part of it...

A fourth teacher talked about the prestige of teaching: Compared to early days, teaching is not considered as prestige work. Evidence of it probably is... when advising a student who doesn't study, would say to a person that and others who have not studied they get so much money... so students will have less interest in teaching. These are things we see... students do have these perceptions. They would say, we want to join the defence force, we want to have a life with a family, MNDF provides so many incentives... teaching has no such incentives. (Teachers)

A teacher shared what she thought of parents' attitudes towards the teaching profession. She said:

"I think the most important role is played by the parents when promoting the teaching profession to their children. I don't think parents accept the teaching profession as an important career. They don't see that it is a good career for their children." (Teachers)

Another teacher more convincingly supported the previous thought:

"Students do not get interested in teaching because of their parents. Every parent wants one of their children to become a policeman so that he can support the medical health care of the parents. Teaching has nothing like that. If a doctor when parents get sick, he will be next to them to serve and provide care... so if a teacher that's so much busywork." (Teacher)

Another teacher explained a possible reason why parents do not promote teaching.

"I think every parent would want a profession that brings a good income for their children. Sometimes I also ask my students if they want to become a teacher. They would say Sir you are also working so busy... So most parents also guide their children to work in other professions." (Teacher)

This idea of parents' discouraging their children was clearly identified by a parent in the community group.

"My daughter is in Grade 10. She does discuss her career with me... her mother is a leading teacher, I had experience working in the profession... we know what life is like... how would I recommend my daughter to become a teacher." (Community Member)

Apart from the above extracts, many students admitted that their parents discouraged them from becoming teachers. Below is a conversation on this topic:

A student said: What now happens is they degrade the profession of teaching. Even if one family member wants to become a teacher, they would probably say, oh No that's a very low ranking job. It would be better to become a lawyer or a doctor.

Another student in a different tone said: The salary should be higher... The low salary makes it less. The profession is valued less because of it. And that's actually very sad.

Another student stressed: Now, most parents want their kids to be doctors or lawyers. (Students)

Some other students also talked about parents' views on the value given to teaching in different focus groups. Some of the following extracts were drawn from their conversations.

A student: There is a stigma that the teaching profession is not worthy.

Speaking more openly, a student said: In reality, at a very young age, we are encouraged to study well and become a doctor. No one would say to a high achieving student to become a teacher.

Another supported the idea and said: I also think there is stereotyping for specific careers. There are some prestigious jobs, and we are targeted to become someone like that, and even I would say if you become such... mother will be very pleased. So, our thinking is also set on that.

Another student clarified: Prestige probably relates to the high salaried jobs. (Students)

Students have clearly highlighted that their parents did not encourage them to choose the teaching profession and that it is not considered a valued profession in society.

Community members also talked about it. One said:

"We hear a lot about teachers as busy people, their salary is very low... There is a mismatch between what teachers do and what they get. Sometimes, they also tell their children not to choose a teaching profession, that they will not get time for their homes... and will be very busy." (Community Member)

Some students also further talked about parents' negative perception about teaching:

"Often, even if children want to become teachers, parents will discourage them. Children become less interested in the teaching field... Salary is considered as the most important one." (Students)

"Parents' perception towards teaching is very low... Many parents also influence their kids not to select a teaching profession... they would say it is not a good field...would give many reasons for not to select it." (Students)

Another student stressed the same point indicating that the community value to teaching is also less. The participant student said:

"In reality, why our interest is low for teaching is because of society's views on it. Society views teachers as low...and they are not prestigious. But they are the people who actually build this society. And the future

of children.... But because society sees it that way... our interest is also low for teaching." (Student)

Some community members added:

"Parents want their children to be doctors or lawyers. Teaching is not viewed as a valued profession. Many parents want their children to join nursing because the salary is good."

A clearer note was given by a parent in the community group. She said:

"I would not recommend my child to become a teacher. Even if she joined, I would ask her to quit in this situation [having so many concerns regarding the low salary and workload]. We experience what is happening... we face so many frustrations and burnouts..." (Community Member)

Another parent in a different focus group mentioned:

"I would not recommend my children to become teachers. In this situation, teachers' work is not accepted... They work so hard... I am married to a teacher... she does not have time for us.. she gets a very low salary compared to the work she does. She loves the school more than her husband. Even if she does not get appreciated... so this is not a field that someone should choose as a career." (Community Member)

Many of the extracts illustrated above have highlighted the parents' view of the teaching profession as an undervalued career due to its low income. All participants across different groups are in an agreement that parents do not value the teaching profession as a career nowadays.

Further, many participants compared the salary given to other professions when talking about the salary of the teaching profession. A teacher took an example of a magistrate's salary.

"I clearly remember that in the early days, the magistrate of the courts in the Islands got a similar salary range. Now their salary is now doubled saying that they are not allowed to do any other work. Even if a magistrate leaves the job, there is a 20,000 rufiyaa as an allowance. Sometimes it is more than 20,000. But for a teacher it is only 10,000, there is this much difference. But in reality, I feel I do not get the salary I deserve for my work." (Teacher)

Another example was taken by two teachers about the parliament members' salary:

"For example, the parliament members who have no level of education get about 80,000 rufiyaa as a salary. We, teachers, work for 24 hours, receive only 10,000 rufiyaa. So that means we are valued neither by people nor by the government. A student said to me one day, I don't like studying. Even if I don't study, I can get a job. I told him that it is not something someone buys and gets. Another day, a Bangladeshi asked me how much I get for my salary. I told him 10,000. He replied back we also get that much. 'So, what can we say?'" (Teacher)

"For example, if parliament members say that they can live with 84,000, that means we also would need 84,000 rufiyaa. They are people who represent us." (Teacher)

Both examples compared the amount of salary the parliament members to what teachers receive for their work. Taking an example of salary for political appointees, it was discussed as hugely different compared to the salary teachers receive for their work. A teacher said:

"I like to take an example of political positions. Especially the political position in the Maldives is assigned with not much work. People get good salaries. A student who may have just completed grade 7, could have a political position as a president in an island council. And this person gets 12,000 or 13,000 rufiyaa. A teacher who works for 24 hours gets only 9,000 or 10,000 rufiyaa. So, there is this concern." (Teacher)

In this example, the teacher was referring to how much the teaching profession is undervalued because of its low salary compared to other professions. Even the examples are somewhat exaggerated, the feelings of being not valued was one of the major concerns noted in the focus group conversations. More examples were shared by participants comparing how the teaching profession is undervalued due to its low salary. Another participant talked:

"For an example of an attendant, we can see the difference. We study up to master's level, there are so many who have this level of qualification. they don't get a high salary for taking home. There is no balance [among different fields]. A sister, who is working as a nurse, with a diploma, her salary has a difference of 5000 rufiyaa." (Teacher)

Another example of police jobs, a teacher complained comparing it with teaching salary:

"When police officers complete a master's level degree, they get two ranks. They get twice or triple the salary of what teachers get. Students sometimes say, what are you doing. We finish O' level and if we go to a resort, we will get a higher salary than yours." (Teacher)

Giving some more examples comparing teaching salary with those in the health sector, some teachers shared their thoughts as follows:

"Overtime money does matter. Most people who leave the teaching profession go to the health sector, because their salary is higher, and they hardly get to do any extra work. Only to complete 8 hours, and that's it." (Teacher)

"In the health sector, a student who completes grade 10 and works as a translator gets a higher salary than someone who has a Master's qualification in a teaching job, there is an increase of 2000 or 3000 in the salary." (Teacher)

"For example, security guards at hospitals get 11,000 rufiyaa for a take-home salary, we with Masters get less than 15,000. So what we are saying is education is not valued at all. Security guards do not do much work, we work very hard, and we get less than 15,000." (Teacher)

All of the three examples above note the value given to the teaching profession compared to other fields in terms of the take home amount. Apart from teachers' conversations regarding the value of teaching in the community in terms of its salary, some students also expressed their views on the same idea of income value.

"Low salary, the same workload in other fields get a higher salary, and teachers work 24 hours a day... and it was like when at home also they [teachers] will be thinking about tomorrow's lesson." (Student)

Another student mentioned the following in a different focus group:

"Other fields are much easier and a better salary is given." (Student)

In another region, a student noted:

"I think it [teaching] is a very difficult job... for example, a resort job can get a better salary, and political positions also get more money." (Student)

More conversations were carried out among the community members regarding the value given to the teaching profession due to its salary value. A community member mentioned that teaching can be a second option:

"Not many opportunities to work in the islands, so that's why I became a teacher. When I got another opportunity to work in another field I resigned. What I believe is that it is too hard compared to the salary it offers." (Community Member)

More community members added raising concerns regarding the lack of acknowledgement given to the teaching profession. One community member said:

"The government does not acknowledge it [teaching]. This is what I feel...a political person, even without having any study, they get 10-18 thousand rufiyaa for their salary..." (Community Member)

Another community member explained more reasons comparing teaching with other professions:

"What I think is that the government does not appreciate teaching much... We see fewer students are interested in this field because of the value given to the profession by the government compared to other professions as in the early days. For example, we have seen earlier, teachers get better salaries than magistrates and they have moved to the teaching field due to that. But now we see teachers leave the teaching profession to work in other fields." (Community Member)

All the extracts derived from the focus group conversations showed that the teaching profession is undervalued due to its low salary compared to other professions. This also indicated that often the salary given in a profession is strongly associated with the value given by the community. In other words, high-salaried jobs are believed to be more valuable and respectable. Since the salary offered to teachers was seen to be inadequate, this also means that the teaching profession is undervalued by the community based on its salary scale. If it is to be more highly valued by the community, the salary needs to be increased.

An instance of this was found in a conversation among four community members in a group where they talked about the low income of the teaching profession and how it could impact the value attached to the teaching profession.

"A member said: Useless work to do...all governments promise that teachers 'salary will rise... yet no improvements happen."

Another added: "They[teachers] do the hard work for building this country... and no government provides the salary they deserve."

A third member with the same tone and more annoyingly said: "It would be better to go fishing than teaching... becoming a teacher is just useless"

A fourth member added with a rationale behind the ideas above: "It is very challenging to do teaching with the salary they get now." (Community Members)

These comments by community members clearly show the outrage that participants have about the salary and its mismatch with teachers' workload. Speaking about the school context, a member noted that:

"Teachers do not get a salary comparable to the amount of work they do... they don't even get the overtime allowance. This is probably the reason why people do not want to become teachers." (Community Member)

Another member added:

"I would say in the situation now [indicating about the huge workload situation], teachers do not receive the salary worth the amount of their work." (Community Member)

In a different focus group, a member said:

"The fact that we need to believe is that the teaching profession is very low... they have so much work to do" (Community Member)

Regarding the same idea, a teacher participant said:

"I have thought a lot about moving to another profession... I would say the salary is very low.... It is really not worth it." (Teacher)

A teacher who has had the experience of working in both government and a private school job said:

"I am working in the foundation stage, preschool... earlier, we don't get good salaries from the private schools... Now I find it very different... the government schools do not even provide overtime allowance... I get a better salary in private schools." (Teacher)

Another teacher added saying:

"All will work for a good salary, won't they? The salary must be worth the work they do... teachers get a very low salary compared to the work they do." (Teacher)

In the same vein, some students also talked about the low salary that teachers receive linking it to the value given to the profession.

The conversations carried out among several students in the group as below:

A student started saying: "Teaching is a very low salaried job, and it is too busy"

Another with a very low tone said: "Low paid and a busy job"

A student talked with more explanation: "I notice that teaching salary is very low...I feel it is not worth it, compared to the work teachers do... the salary does not match... plus overtime allowance I don't think they get what they deserve."

Another student: "Teachers don't get a deserving salary."

A student also noted: "Even if it is a good job, the salary I feel is too low."

Another added: "Compared to the work they do; they get a very low salary."

Another student very hopelessly said: "Teachers are underpaid... Many teachers say that."

Another added his view with more explanation: "I have talked with some teachers; they say that they don't even get overtime money unless with a specific number of hours... and the salary does not increase...so even teachers take many extra classes their income does not increase."

With a more convincing tone, a student said: "Actually, the salary is very low, isn't it?"

Supporting the same view, another student stressed: "The salary is too low. (Students)"

All these students identified that the teaching profession does not offer an adequate salary compared to the amount of work that teachers do. Apart from students' perception about the salary and the workload that teachers have, participants across all groups immensely discussed the huge workload and the mismatch between the job and salary. The conversation appeared to be underlined with complaints and concerns they wanted to pass on to the government policymakers.

Two teachers expressed their disappointment in the following manner:

I would like to mention that the main barrier that many people don't apply to teaching jobs... is we do not get an adequate salary for the job.

I believe many teachers are leaving or their lack of motivation to this profession... The main reason is the salary... (Teachers)

Another teacher more worryingly said:

Some of my students say going fishing is better... working in a resort is better...what are you getting for the work you do. Basically, they are saying a fishing boat (kanneyli dhonye) would be better with less difficulty...so students want their life to be fulfilling... flexibility... the balance between the time, amount of work...(Teachers)

Another teacher gave a more practical example:

For someone who starts a life, teaching is not a good job... the income is not good either... I also mentioned that when the younger generation starts life this is not a good profession for them... but before their marriage, it is a good job. Because they don't get time for their family." (Teacher)

Some community members also discussed this issue ominously, raising concerns regarding the mismatch they observed between teachers' income and the amount of work. A community member said:

Everyone will need money for living. Without it, we cannot live.... Teachers are leaving this profession because of the mismatch of the time, salary, and working hours. The most complained issue by teachers is regarding their high workload." (Community Member)

Some community members also highlighted that even motivated teachers do complain about the mismatch between their salary and workload saying that:

"In reality, many teachers who love the profession do complain about the low salary and the mismatch between the work, salary and the responsibility they do." (Community Member)

"At present teachers' salary is not adequate to the amount of the work they do." (Community Member)

Both community members and teachers have raised several concerns regarding the mismatch between teachers' workload and the salary. Apart from the mismatch, many participants across all groups talked about the busy teaching schedule of teachers and their workload.

Previous findings identified that teaching was regarded as an exemplary work if its salary was not given an emphasis. It was also noted that teaching cannot be considered the best source of income. Based on these findings, it can be said that the community does not attach a high value to the teaching profession. In other words, teaching is relatively less valued compared to other professions. However, participant conversations also revealed that the value the community attached to teaching have undergone changes over time.

THE VALUE OF THE TEACHING PROFESSION

This idea was discussed by many participants across different focus groups both in atolls and islands. The conversations mostly centred around the views and reasons behind the decrease of the level of respect given to teachers and the value given to the profession itself. Three important categories generated were drawn from many participants' conversations. This includes participants' own observations about the change that has been seen in society, people's mindset, and in the teaching profession over time. The findings are presented with supporting conversations.

1. TEACHERS ARE VALUED BASED ON THEIR NOBLE RESPONSIBILITY

This idea was discussed in the focus groups as changes to the society that happened with time while also influencing people's thinking and mindset towards the teaching profession. Participants in both teachers' and community members' groups talked about the idea immensely, raising concerns about the influence of time on devaluing of the teaching profession.

In a sustained conversation among four teachers, they talked about the way the value has lessened over time. They mentioned:

A teacher: "Compared to early days, I believe the value is very low... in each profession, there are good and bad people... especially in social media... a lot happens... feel sad to see all that... what people talk about..."

Another teacher sadly continued and said: "If anyone writes anything the blame is on everyone."

A third teacher said with more claims: "For example, there might be an incident... happened from a teacher..."

A teacher who talked earlier again said: "Even if a little thing happened by one teacher, the blame is on everyone. I see very disturbing comments..."

Another teacher added more annoyed: "It feels like anything that goes wrong is from the teachers' side or teachers are bad...sometimes they even say... Teachers know nothing now..."

Another teacher more frustratingly shared: "Teachers are not appreciated...don't see the respect from the society... students are too open...freedom of everything... students' rights... Anything that goes wrong is on teachers' shoulders."

Researcher: "So, does that impact how you value it..."

A fourth teacher in a low voice agreed: "That's true... so anyone who wants to join teaching we don't have much to promote."

A teacher who talked earlier added again: "Isn't it? We say that school is a mirror of society... then students' rights are too much now, and they know everything... students' attitudes also changed a lot now... very aggressive...and unhealthy as I see it." (Teachers)

It is apparent that time has brought so much change to the children's mindset and how people think about all around them. A community member disappointedly mentioned:

"Everyone's rights are important to ensure...parents don't get to do anything against their children even for parenting and raising them properly. Teachers are not allowed to do or say anything to a child without the consent of the child... Even if a child does something very wrong it goes back to child rights..." (Community Member)

This idea was more broadly discussed by community members, saying:

"Freedom has been more openly practised by everyone. So, when something happens, it is openly talked about regardless of anyone who is involved in it... it matters. If we are to consider how the sense of respect is lessened...this is not only towards teachers...showing respect is something lacking... everywhere in our society." (Community Member)

Freedom for everyone may have influenced the way people think about different things and the actions they take and how they do so. Freedom and the rights of people have been another important theme

raised by community members.

The community members were disappointed when they indicated that sometimes such rights restrict the parenting or teaching and managing children's behaviours. Taking such examples, another community member claimed:

The atoll school here on this island has many students who use substances (drugs) and students who are involved in filthy behaviours, but teachers do not have any room for saying [naseyhathuge they bunumah] anything to guide them. So, by law they are given the freedom to do whatever they want to do any wrongdoings [in a sarcastic way] ... no mother can touch the child... [to punish for misbehaviour] ... the mother will be jailed if punishment is given to a child ... the law is enforcing children's rights... locking others' hands is cuffed... so the whole society is suffering from it.

More examples of such scenarios were mentioned by community members out of concerns about the respect and value given to teachers. A community member said:

"How are teachers going to be respected if mothers are not given that respect? When kids were raised at a young age, time is very different from now. Expenses and styles of raising children are very different... Teachers are doing so hard work to teach and educate these children with good principles... but most children coming out of school are going out of control...so awareness programmes are to be organised... [in a sarcastic way, as if nothing such works] ..." (Community Member)

Another reason as noted by a community member was that it might have been influenced by the way that teachers are valued over time. He said:

"Today's generation kids always want things to happen in easy ways... isn't it? So, because it is a difficult job... maybe they don't like it... even on our island, there are many areas where they [students] can work easily... This could be one reason that they [students] don't choose this profession... actually what students also see is...if a teacher it's all about so much time that they have to spend in schools... no time for another work... and the society also sees that a teacher cannot even get sick... this is what I notice... so that actually demotivates..." (Community Member)

The examples narrated by these community members address the concerns of having less control over the misbehaviour of children due to the overemphasis on child rights legislations practised. The participants indicated that this might be one factor that has changed the society's perception on how teachers are seen and valued. Teachers have very little control over students' behaviour. This in turn can affect classroom practices as anything a teacher does out of concern for students' misbehaviour might be interpreted as a violation of children's rights.

A more practical example was shared by a community member as follows:

"Children are more powerful than teachers in schools. If a child complains about anything, teachers are often confronted by many from the society." (Community Member)

"Children are left too freely with no control over their actions, which leads to many behavioural and discipline issues, thus teachers are less respected too." (Community Member)

The extracts above highlighted the society's mindset that teachers have very little control over students' life and their role.

Further, some community members talked about how people's views may change regarding what they know about teachers. A community member commented on the spread of infamous news or events:

"Sometimes when an unacceptable behaviour happens by teachers or any other... doctors too... Imam of the Mosque [who leads the prayer] also included... When something goes wrong by anyone in the society, it spreads all over the place... and earlier a very few know about any incident that happens due to the closed society. But now society is very open." (Community Member)

A community member more openly talked:

"Now in a classroom, if a student threatens a teacher... there is no boundary set for them... but earlier... teachers are protected..." (Community Member)

Speaking about this idea of open criticism about what happens in society was addressed by a teacher too. She expressed frankly:

Parents and generally everyone views teaching differently now. When something happens from a teacher, normally the child's say is considered overlooking teachers' side of the story. Parents listen to their child, again the society will start having the rumours without facts, such incidents and rumours influence how the profession is valued among young generations.

The participants' conversations indicated that society has become more open to criticism about each other and that may impact how people (such as teachers) are valued. The extracts also highlight the changes to society in terms of the rights of children that may negatively affect teachers' practices of teaching. The ideas also signal that children's behaviours and values are not given much emphasis at present time. The conversations note that teachers have less control and power over students, which may indirectly influence the value of the teaching profession itself. Most conversations mentioned above illustrate how society's views can impact the value given to teaching. More conversations regarding social media influence were brought to notice by many participants.

2. CHANGES TO THE TEACHING PROFESSION AND THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

When teachers and community members talked about the change to everyday teaching, they discussed the changing nature of work. A teacher described such changes as follows:

"In the earlier days information was only written in books. And students only know what teachers teach. But now, there are a bunch of resources. Some parents even have purchased packages [for their children's learning]. So if teachers explain anything wrong, students can identify. So that's a change. Another thing is that all teachers are familiar with Google Classrooms. All teachers have 2 hours of Google certification training. That's a huge change to our work. The other change, earlier when we teach, we get a lot of help from others, unlike now everyone is sort of like it's only my responsibility now... teachers have more work to do to ensure student learning..." (Teacher)

Speaking about changes that have complicated teachers' work, a teacher described:

"Even though our New Curriculum is much better than the curriculum we had before. Yet, added lots of complications to our work. The curriculum is designed with a pedagogy that students are to teach with inquiry method, but there are no resources available for designing learning as expected in the curriculum. We don't have resources.... It is difficult to implement according to the design of learning expected. So there is this gap... another thing is the Key stage 3 and Key stage 4 are not aligned well... teachers do whatever they think would work... the other thing is when teaching Qur'an... it is taught from primary... to grade 10. But Qur'an is not considered as important. The students' view about Qur'an has also changed...they see it as irrelevant...Why is that No assessment is done... Another, we teach social studies from primary to Grade 9, but we hardly know what is happening with that subject...student find it a useless subject... these are so many of issues involved in teaching at schools...." (Teacher)

Another aspect was noted by a teacher, saying:

I believe if we look at teaching now, it is the least respected profession. This is the main difference I would like to note. In reality, if we say, resources, technology with all these, the profession is improving day by day...a variety of strategies and ways of teaching are being introduced, if we think that the teaching profession has seen so much improvement. However, people's thinking about this profession, society's view has decreased. This is the main difference I notice. Students' view is not to be too bothered about what teachers say... maybe they find information from many other sources such as social media, parent, community... they disregard what teachers say...sometimes, they [parents] change the whole story [about a teacher when something happens] and make their children believe in something they think of. So teachers are not important anymore. The teaching profession is not important either... students also believe that they do not need to listen to everything teachers say...neither during teaching hours students do not need to listen what teachers teach... and they can find the information from the internet or we [students would say] can find that from other ways...so they [students would say teachers] are not important.

In a classroom such as above, teaching is made more complicated than in a normal classroom as students do not consider giving attention to teachers' teaching, which will make teachers work more complex with all challenges such as classroom size, new curriculum implementation, and students' behaviour issues that they already have.

Another teacher added with more explanation of conveniences that probably made things a little easier compared to the past:

"The change that has been seen in teaching...when I first came... there are no printing facilities... We gave an exam... writing the questions on the board. Now things have changed hugely... we also used a utensil [a tool used for writing] for writing exam papers.... Things have changed compared to the early days... Now information is so available anyone can find it from the internet/online...teachers have the knowledge and expertise to teach." (Teacher)

Another teacher narrated that there were new complications to contend with, in the present. She shared:

"Thinking about it now, there are so many things that make teaching easier. When I first started teaching...

We stay at school to prepare everything [teaching aids for the class] by our hands...photocopying...drawing... printing.... Now we don't need to spend time at school for that...we could just stay home and prepare everything for the class such as looking for relevant videos/YouTube or things from other internet websites... that can be done easily... However, with all the ease that comes with technology.... we find students become easily distracted with so many things available on the internet... Even though there are so many available resources, students hardly find them on their own... they always expect everything to be provided... and they do not explore and learn on their own.... Everything is to be done by the teacher. Students do not take responsibility for their own learning. ... Earlier, when we told students there will be an extra class... nearly 20 students will join... now we will see only 2 students... so many excuses... they expect everything to be individually informed or written on Viber group... Have to inform their mothers... The same thing happens when it comes to classwork too... many students do not complete their work in the class... hardly take their responsibility of learning... students now are too lazy... and learning is taken too loosely." (Teacher)

Several teachers talked about the changes they have seen as follows:

A teacher: I think a difference I see is very much related to the new curriculum. Earlier we didn't know where we were going... it was like sailing a boat without a target... now we know what is expected... I also notice the change in students' attitudes towards learning... I recall once an instance... a student who was one of my classmates then... he was a dropout from the school, labelled as dropout as his nickname.... [the example was given as learning was given so much attention].

Another teacher said: the year that's true... but that's a very different case...studying was given a lot of attention then.

A third teacher talked: earlier when a student gets absent, they will be hesitant to face the teacher.

A third teacher stressed: Yes, people's attitudes toward studying also have changed.

Another teacher continued: Earlier, we didn't have so many resources for learning... basically all students will depend on teachers. But now there are so many resources available... for some students it is not important what is taught in the class. Especially for smart students. Some would feel okay even if we don't go to school. So there are things too. (Teacher)

Some more teachers added saying that teaching has become a lot easier when compared to the past:

A teacher: There are many easier ways due to the availability of the internet now, especially, with the COVID time, we received a lot of help to carry out teaching... It is also easier because now we have computers at schools, things can be easily saved. Preparing lesson plan is easier of course.

Another teacher talked: In fact, it is easier to share things among different people

Another teacher continued: Looking for relevant resources is easier too

Another teacher said: A range of different helpful websites are there...

Another added: Yeah, even to design differentiated learning is easier now.

The examples above note that the way students' thinking towards studying and learning might have also influenced overtime, thus likely to leave some impact on teachers' work at the present time. Such change in students' attitudes towards learning may also influence the way we see the importance of teachers. (Teachers)

Similar ideas were presented by another group of teachers. One teacher said:

"We are seeing so many changes happening to the way teaching is done now... online teaching... sharing resources online so easily... finding so many different things and ways to increase student motivation... creating presentations so easily..." (Teacher)

These comments by teachers clearly portray a change and that those changes have made teachers' work easier with the available technologies at present time. This could also mean it can add more value to the work and how it is seen by present teachers and how that may have an influence on prospective teachers.

Some teachers added more explanation regarding the change they have seen and changes that are expected to happen in the future. A teacher mentioned:

"When thinking about teaching... our work is very different from other fields. We will always need to be updated with ongoing changes... including technology... At present, the least qualification expected in teaching is first degree... then we are expected to complete master's degree now... other fields they can remain in their jobs as they are... We are supposed to adapt to any changes to the system... Now we are expected to be good at online teaching... as done in COVID time..." (Teacher)

A teacher explained a more critical point of which teachers are required to be more aware. She added:

"With time, so much change has been seen in teaching... teaching methods... skills... students' behaviours... a lot of changes... Earlier. Students have general knowledge about things they study... but now they can find so much... which is good... but the teachers would need to be more prepared... as many students may understand more about what they study prior to teachers' explanation on some areas. Another thing is the policy we follow, 'NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND' so the student who is under-achieved is required to give a lot of attention... we will have to work with him. We will need to work with the level of students individually... attending all students' needs... and we don't see attention being given to study that much by many... neither by parents... studying is not important anymore for some... when kids grow up, they get jobs... there is this thinking too... Another thing is... the curriculum has changed a lot... the assessment strategies with the new curriculum have brought so many changes to our work. We can't give a one-off test to assess student learning... due to that we don't see students' efforts put on achieving in the assessments... even parents, do not bother too much because no grades are given on the stage in some key stages... so the achievement of the child is seen differently... students they don't feel they are achieving unlike earlier... with A report... B report... no competition is there as earlier." (Teacher)

Another teacher elaborated on the students' behaviour at present time. She claimed:

"Now we have so many issues with students' discipline problems. We face so many discipline issues. Sometimes because of such issues, teachers have left the job on some islands. It is very challenging to work now." (Teacher)

The extract above highlighted many changes that teachers must be mindful of when teaching at present time. Perhaps that also added complication to the way teaching is done at present. This could also have influenced the value of the profession with the ongoing changes. Apart from what teachers have observed in the teaching environment, community members also talked about some changes that have been observed and how those changes could impact teachers' everyday practices. They also talked about the important role that teachers have to deal with the existing changes. This point was most discussed in relation to inculcating and instilling good values and disciplines in children.

A community member said:

"Compared to earlier, so much change has been seen in the teaching profession. There are so many resources available now... TV... Tablets... Phones... So many of these resources added many things that need to be taken care of when raising children... both parents and teachers need to be more careful with all these available resources. Students would need to be more carefully guided so that they learn goods and avoid the bad stuff. Teachers and parents need to teach values to children respecting ... and many are diminishing as attention is given less on these..."

Some community members claimed that teaching at present time is more complicated as teachers have very little control over students; thus, many behavioural issues are part of their everyday teaching. Explaining this point, a community member said:

"Students have so many rights now... there is very little control for teachers to do anything inside the class to punish a student when wrongdoing is observed. Teachers are not allowed to say anything to a student."
(Community Member)

Another community member's comment in a different focus group was completely in line with the teachers' role in instilling values and discipline. He said:

"If everything is allowed, there won't be any guilty people. This is what happens now. All students are given so much freedom. We will need to carefully inculcate Islamic values in children. What I see is the most important responsibility for teachers is instilling values in children... that cannot be taught without them. Knowledge can be gained through the available resources... students can learn many different things through it, but values and attitudes cannot be learnt through the internet resources." (Community Member).

Another community member complained about the teacher role at present time, saying:

"The Maldivian curriculum now is expected to teach the knowledge outlined in the curriculum...teachers have very little emphasis on inculcating discipline and values in children... The curriculum does not take children in a direction in which students can have good values and principles. As students are given total freedom, teachers have very little room or control over them... Teachers are the people who supposedly have the control to rear the children with the expected values."

Another community member talked about the same idea of the importance to be given to teachers' role of inculcating values in children at present time. He said:

"An environment where teachers do not have any say for disciplining children is not good. I remember

when I was young... I was punished because I did not learn my Islam lesson... I had to stand on a chair for 30 minutes... but I knew that I was punished because of my own behaviour and that I did not learn my lesson. It is okay to punish students without harming them ... teachers should be given control over students... The Ministry needs to take some charge to bring changes to the policies... to address such... where is the teachers' right? It is not only children's rights... What can be said... what can be done... to control... need to be redefined..." (Community Member).

The conversations narrated by the community members were not necessarily related to the value of the teaching profession. However, the points they raised regarding the complexities of teaching could be indirectly related to the value of the teaching profession. This is because when people perceive teaching as a complex task, they may value it more. As the participants admitted, the teacher's role of inculcating disciplines is much more challenging at present time. Since managing students' behaviour is more complicated now, this also means that the teaching profession is much more demanding at present compared to the past.

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CHOICE OF TEACHING AS A CAREER

Participants across different groups have discussed a range of the factors influencing their choice of teaching as a career. The themes generated from the conversations are divided into two main categories, one is the positive factors that may influence the choice while the other, negative factors that may hinder the choice of teaching as a career. The two key findings are stated as below, and more details and supported conversations are provided along with each theme.

POSITIVE FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CHOICE OF TEACHING

Many participants across different groups talked about the factors that may positively influence the choice of teaching career. More specifically, teachers and pre-service teachers talked about the factors that influenced their choice of teaching as a career, while students, in general, talked about what would or may influence if they were to choose teaching as a career. Parents and community members on the other hand talked more about the factors that they thought would influence their spouses' or children's choice of teaching as a career. The findings are thus reported with different groups according to the specific ideas they have discussed in the focus groups.

1. OPPORTUNITY FOR WORKING ON ONE'S OWN ISLAND

The opportunity to work on one's own island can be both a social contribution and a personal value. Nearly all teachers who participated in the focus groups organised in islands have stressed the idea of working on their own islands as one of the considerations that determined their choice. Even some teachers who talked in the focus groups of the Greater Male' region highlighted the same point as one factor that had influenced their choice of becoming a teacher. Speaking about this idea, a teacher noted that teaching was the best-suited profession to work in the islands. She mentioned:

"Working with my own family on my own island was my first choice when deciding the teaching profession. As there are not many opportunities for work in other fields in the islands. Teaching is always available in island schools. I also want to serve my own community instead of bringing a foreign teacher to my school." (Teacher)

Adding to another teacher's voice, she stressed that she chose teaching as a career because she wanted to work on the island with her own people.

"I applied to this field because I wanted a job on my island. When I completed my school in the 80s, I was thinking about what to do for a living...there were no courses available in the islands then...the only available option for the study was some special classes as the school did not have any other upper grades. So, after that, I started going fishing, but unfortunately, it did not work for me as I was having so much trouble with motion sickness [hodulevumai boa enburun], so I thought that this is not going to work for me...so I completed Grade 7 it was like completing grade 10 then... so I had to do an entrance exam to enter the teaching course for two years. The main reason was getting a job here on my island but now I am very interested in my job."

Another teacher more openly shared that even if she disliked the teaching field, she chose to teach because she can stay in the island with her family. She shared:

"Actually, I did not want to become a teacher. It was not my interest at all. I wanted to become an independent business woman. It is still one of my dreams. I was working in a resort earlier... I don't like office jobs either. So, what happened was... my parents did not like keeping me in the resort job...as they were saying they don't want their daughter to work in the resort. It may be because they don't have trust in us... for any reason...there was pressure working girls in the resort field. I was not mature enough either... so I had to change my career when I checked the options... The most available jobs on the island were teaching. The only option I could select was English teaching, so I became a teacher then." (Teacher)

The above three extracts note three different cases of choosing teaching as a career just because teaching allowed the option of working in the islands. Apart from these three cases, a group of teachers mentioned to stay in the island as the main drive to choose the teaching profession. They talked:

A teacher said: First thing I thought about was working on my island... the second thing was that the salary was reasonable too compared to that time... I could get 3500-5000 approximately ... It was early 2000.

Another teacher added: When I finished school, the first thing I thought about was staying on my island and getting a job. But I was interested in nursing then... I applied for two courses together. But getting the opportunity in the teaching course.

The third teacher supporting the same idea said: What I thought about was having a reputed job and staying on the island. I would say such... teaching is the best...

A fourth teacher continued with the same conversation with others and said: When I completed my GCE in 2004, the thing that I could stay on my island was working in the school. So, I started working as a teaching assistant first... so that's how I first started working as a teacher because I wanted to stay in my island, teaching job was the most available one... as I was working as a teaching assistant, then completed the teaching degree...

Another teacher with the more interesting talk: I always kept saying... I don't want to become a teacher. But to stay on my island and work ... was the main reason why I had become a teacher. But now I like teaching.

Another teacher more convincingly said: Teaching was chosen as it was the only option I had if I am to work on my island. But later I got interested in teaching...

The rich conversations that these teachers had about their choice of becoming teachers indicated the common thought about teaching careers as an opportunity to work in their islands.

Apart from teachers, pre-service teachers also talked about their main interest in becoming teachers derived from the thought of working on their islands. About seven pre-service teachers in the group were asked the main reason for selecting a teaching course. They explained their reasons as follows:

About three or four together: We all wanted to work on our islands. We got opportunities to work as teaching assistants in school. [different pre-service teachers belong to different islands]

Another pre-service teacher said: I actually applied just because I want to work on my island.

Another added: Actually, I wanted to work in my islands... that is why I applied.

The above conversations and extracts clearly outline that working in the islands was one of the main factors that may influence the choice of teaching as a career. Apart from what teachers gain the benefit of working in their own islands with their own family, more teachers talked about the value it has as a dual rewarding (Now and Hereafter) work.

2.TEACHING IS DUAL-REWARDING FOR NOW AND THE HEREAFTER

Considering teaching as a dual-rewarding profession, it can be associated with its social contribution value. When teachers talked about this idea, they referred to the reward they gain for Now and the Hereafter. They discussed that teaching is a good deed whose rewards come in both ways: the reward of the righteous deed in this life and in the Hereafter. Addressing this idea, a teacher said:

"Especially, building a society with good people is like benefiting not only in this world but for Hereafter too with unlimited gains and rewards". (Teacher)

Another teacher in a different focus group added:

"This is a religious work... this is in fact the best profession as I see it... that's why I am doing it" (Teacher)

In the same vein, another teacher from a very different region said:

"Instead of thinking about what I will get in return [salary], I am thinking about the gains for both sides, now and Hereafter... I am doing it because this is a very good work..." (Teacher)

Another teacher more persuasively mentioned that:

"I hear many people even saying that this is the best work that anyone can do for a living... teaching to children. More specifically, teaching the Qur'an is probably the best... what will be better than that... as for now and Hereafter." (Teacher)

Apart from the examples above, some teachers in a focus group talked more pleasantly about the gains they receive for the two worlds (Now and the Hereafter). They talked:

A teacher said: this is a work where you get happiness for two worlds...

In talking about it, another teacher continued: I would recommend teaching for others too as this is rewarding for two worlds [Now and Hereafter].

Another agreeably said: if you want to collect points for Akhirah [Hereafter], this is the best job you can do... This is not just a profession; this is also a very noble work. (Teacher)

The illustrated examples of the conversations do note the thinking of teachers behind the reasons for their choice of teaching as a profession. In fact, they clearly articulate that teaching is not necessarily done merely focusing on the returns of its income, rather there is a more rewarding reason behind their choice. Besides the idea of dual reward, some teachers talked about the intrinsic value of teaching as a satisfaction-driven profession.

3. INTRINSIC SATISFACTION FROM TEACHING

Gaining satisfaction through teaching can have some personal value to it. Teachers had very rich conversations regarding their feeling of satisfaction from the teaching job. The word satisfaction was the most commonly used word by teachers when talking about the benefits they gain through teaching. Teachers, nearly everyone in the focus group indicated an agreement about the teaching satisfaction that they feel, regardless of so much workload, time spent, busy hours that they have in the teaching profession. Almost every single teacher expressed the main reason why they are continuing with the teaching job was the satisfaction they get through teaching.

Many teachers in the focus group continued their conversation between them about the satisfaction they gain through teaching. They stated:

A teacher said: a huge satisfaction is gained

Another stressed: Yeah, it is a tough job but very satisfying...

Another teacher in a sad tone added: There is a worry of low salary, but I continue because of the satisfaction I gain from teaching.

Another teacher in the same group later added: I only continue with this job because of the satisfaction I gain through spending my time with children.

Another more convincingly said: Actually, I am doing this for a service... and the satisfaction I truly gain for myself

Another more supported with an agreement said: I like spending time with children and gain lots of satisfaction. That's why I am still here [school]. (Teachers)

Another teacher spoke about the low salary but stressed her satisfaction as the main factor for continuing her work as a teacher. She stressed:

"Actually, I am here because of the satisfaction I gain through it ... even if it is tough... it does provide great satisfaction... teaching children, I believe the main thing is about the satisfaction I gain through it." (Teacher)

An experienced teacher in focus group conversation added:

Since I am 18 (years old). I have been teaching... .. I am here because I gain a lot of satisfaction through teaching... when I see my students working in different positions.... That's so much satisfaction.

Speaking about the same idea, three teachers have talked agreeably as follow:

A teacher said: This is a good job... I gain a lot of satisfaction from it...

Another teacher added: When I see my previous students grow up and work in our community... that's like so much happiness...so much satisfaction...This is a big thing for me.

Another teacher with a positive tone said: Yeah, it is a great satisfaction...Teaching children is so good...

A teacher on an island school explained how she gains satisfaction by describing her genuine feelings about it. She narrated:

"I would say that I have my kids at home..., actually I am a primary school teacher... so when I enter the class I have 25 kids, I say that all are my kids. It makes them very happy... some students truly feel happy with me... This term, I got sick, wasn't feeling well and I had to go to Male' for a medical emergency...so when I returned... All my class students prepared to get good cards for me... and I was so touched... they were so happy to see me back... this is the happiness... this is the satisfaction... that feeling is important... that's what it matters." (Teacher)

Another group of teachers talked about the satisfaction as follow:

A teacher: I don't do this just as a job...I like it... I am very happy with my work...teaching something I know to others...when I see my students achieving... and growing... that's like so much...

Another teacher in a very proud tone said: Actually, teaching is not just a job for me... I am very happy with the work I do... when I see my students growing up and working in different positions... The satisfaction I gain is something different.... Feels like very good work I have done for them. Sometimes they would even call me...Miss Miss.... And there are so many of my students... and it's like so much happiness.

Another teacher added agreeably: Yeah, actually, this is the best work for me... so much satisfaction when we see kids growing... and achieving... and working... that's what we want to see, that's happiness... I want to continue like this in the future... I am very satisfied.

It was noteworthy to mention that some students of Grade 10, also described the satisfaction that someone could gain through teaching when they talked about teaching in a focus group. They shared their experiences

as described below:

A student: I give tuition to some students... It gives so much happiness when I feel like they learned something.

Another student: I am a basketball coach... for younger children... it gives lot of happiness when I see them learning and following my instructions

Another student: I also give tuition to young children... It gives a lot of satisfaction though it is not very easy for me to teach... I also feel that it is a difficult job... and I think about my teachers...

Teachers also talked about feelings of satisfaction when disregarding the income value. Several teachers addressed this idea:

Even if it does not provide a good income... This is good work to do... a very beneficial for the community. Good for everyone... it is good... (Teacher)

Another experienced teacher shared how much she valued the teaching profession when disregarding its salary.

"This is my 38th year of teaching. I became a teacher when I was only 18 since then I have been working as a teacher, now I am 56 years. I am saying that this profession gives great satisfaction. Makes me feel good when I see my students grow to be good citizens working in different positions. I see the outcome of my work. I will not leave this profession." (Teacher)

Another group of teachers mentioned similar benefits.

"A teacher said: A great satisfaction is gained

Another added: Satisfaction of teaching children... not necessarily thinking about the income return.

Another stress: dealing with children... lots of satisfaction.

Another teacher added: Actually, great satisfaction is gained through teaching kids...

Another highlighted: We are giving an important service...

Another more joyfully said: `` I like spending time with kids... it's very satisfying for me... but not thinking about the income it offers..." (Teacher)

In the same group, another teacher was more vocal about the satisfaction. She said:

"We actually do this because it gives great satisfaction even if it is a very busy job... it does offer satisfaction... we are happy that we can raise a good generation of kids...so we are happy with that..." (Teacher)

In one of the focus groups, some also talked about the same way of the satisfaction they gained through their teaching job. They talked:

"A teacher said: This is a very respectful job...."

Another added: It is busy yet very satisfying...

Another stressed on the same idea: I teach because when I get into the class... It is so pleasing...

Another said: Teaching is something I really like doing...

Another clarified more convincingly: it does take time to prepare and teach... a lot of time... but very satisfying..." (Teachers)

The examples above recognise the meaning of great satisfaction that teachers gain through teaching. The extracts above highlight the feeling of satisfaction that anyone could gain through teaching regardless of working as a job or other. More specifically, teachers have shared the joy they gain through teaching and the main reason for their motivation to continue in the teaching profession. Even though the salary was part of some discussions, it was merely considered as something on the side. The main influential factor was their own satisfaction gained through teaching. Although these are already teachers who have chosen teaching profession, to remain and keep going with the demanding work of teaching and with the 'insufficient' salary explain the importance of satisfaction as an influencing factor to the choice of teaching as a career.

NEGATIVE FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CHOICE OF TEACHING

Nearly all participant groups discussed negative factors influencing the choice of teaching as a career. Some talked about teaching being labelled as a feminine job, while others considered the insufficient income as the most hindering factor. They also mentioned the limited professional growth and negativity social media brings towards teaching. These ideas are reported in themes with relevant conversations by participants.

1. TEACHING IS SEEN AS A FEMININE JOB

By several community members and teachers, the teaching job was discussed as a female dominant profession. The conversation sounded as the profession does not seem suitable for males due to the limited income associated with it.

Many teachers in different focus groups mentioned this issue in following terms:

This field is full of females...there is nearly none a male teacher... it seems like not many males would even want to join this profession.

I consider this profession good for females... I don't think boys get interested in teaching.

I teach secondary students... I also mention that this is a good profession for females

I also think it is a good job for females as you also get holidays with children.

For girls this is a reputed job...it is good for them.

The other thing is that it helps them to become independent... It is a good job for females... (Teachers)

More explanations were added by teachers, saying:

I don't see any male teachers in this group [i.e. the focus group]... looking after children... housework... I am thinking how they would even manage work like we do if they become teachers... Men are not interested in teaching on our island. Especially, in primary teaching, there is no male teacher.

A teacher noted some benefits for females to work in this field:

In many institutions, offices, sexual abuse is very common... This is a place where females can have that safely... we hear very little about such... this is a very good environment for working females.

Some teachers mentioned that females are taking up more roles than male teachers. A teacher mentioned:

"Here in our school, there is discrimination between males and females when roles are allocated. All class teachers are females in this school. Even all extracurricular activities are mostly managed by female teachers. Male teachers when they get too busy to leave the job... choose other professions as the income is very low..., they are required to work more for living, so I think for this reason ...this profession may be not suitable for them." (Teacher)

A community member also mentioned that teaching is a female dominant job, saying:

99.9 percent of teachers on this island are females. It is seen as a female dominant work... when we were studying it was not like that. But it is obvious now.

Another teacher explained the reason behind their thinking about teaching as a female dominant practice. She said:

"Actually, the main responsibility [financially] of taking care of family is given to males. And what is got from teaching is not enough...nearly it can be managed with the salary. Things are very expensive... when life gets started... they will need to find a place to live... and many expenses. Thinking about all these... this is not suitable for males." (Teacher)

Two teachers in different focus groups mentioned the reason why males would not choose the teaching profession because of its low income:

"No male student wants to join the teaching profession. A very few may get interested but never continue in teaching because of the limited salary." (Teacher)

"Boys want jobs with high salaries, they even say that Sir when working in a resort you get a better salary." (Teacher)

The simple conversations extracted from the focus groups identified that the teaching profession is seen as a female dominant job, which affects the way it is seen by males. Some have even highlighted that it is not suitable for males because of low income and is expected from them to take the main financial responsibility of the family. However, some teachers also noted that comparing the amount of work done by females, it is too difficult for males to manage all the different roles and work even at schools. The perception about teaching being a female job may negatively influence the male student's choice of teaching as a career. Apart from participants' conversations about teaching as a female dominant profession that may influence the choice negatively, there were some conversations about the insufficient income of teaching.

2. TEACHING DOES NOT PROVIDE SUFFICIENT INCOME

The most dominant themes throughout the whole focus groups were conversations about the inadequate income from the teaching job. Some of these conversations have been already identified in the previous section. The conversations were about the negative influence it may have on the choice of teaching as a career.

Two teachers in different focus groups mentioned:

"The main reason I think would be the salary... in reality, the work that is done in this field is not given an adequate salary. It does not match the amount of work required by teachers. No holiday for the brain... no holiday..." (Teacher)

"I believe salary is the main reason that people don't want to choose this career. The very beginner teacher would know how much work is to be done by teachers... that's like no ending...doing scheme of work... teaching planning... and with the new curriculum... shared values... and many new stuff... having all these for more than a decade... we are still not familiar with it properly. so much work... so much knowledge to be learnt... so much complication... The salary certainly does not match it. So, it is not worth it." (Teacher)

Another teacher stressed:

"The main reason why students would not want to come to this profession is because of the amount of work... and inadequate salary with no allowances... 24 hours is not enough for doing the job. No payment is given for any extra work...6:45-3:45 and closing school, then even after school... There is a lot to do... evening hours... night hours... even early morning hours... so much work... with no allowance on any work to do." (Teacher)

Another teacher added more explanation:

"There are many reasons why students would not apply to teach. I remember asking Grade 10 students in the career guidance workshop, which field they want to choose for their career? No one chooses the teaching field. I also ask them why... the reasons... one of the main reasons is salary... the second one is the value ... The third is busy work... no student wants to join this profession with all these...some even say that my mother is a teacher I don't get to see my mother...spending 7 hours in the school during school time... then will again come for extracurricular activities... so when thinking about the salary... we also hear from mothers... that they don't even get overtime in full payment. So, knowing all these, how would they choose this profession?" (Teacher)

Important extracts drawn from different focus groups were related to the inadequate salary and workload as important considerations to focus on if the teaching career is to be chosen by students. The teachers noted that these are negative factors that may influence the students' choice of teaching as a career. Teachers mentioned:

Reducing teaching workload could motivate students to choose this profession" (Teacher)

Salary... working hours. Would need to change..." (Teacher)

Workload to be reduced... It is not only teaching hours... there are many events... lighting... sound system managing... all are managed by teachers. Reducing workload is very important." (Teacher)

The salary increase is very important... the workload does not match with the salary." (Teacher)

Two teachers highlighted exactly why would a student not choose teaching as a career:

Thinking about this time, there is no adequate salary to the amount of work...it is not a career, the student would choose as it does not provide a good salary.

My view is the main reason for not choosing the teaching profession is the salary.

Another teacher stated:

"I would say, financially thinking...teaching requires 24 hours work... with a professional view, the salary is not equivalent to the job requirement." (Community Member)

More conversations on inadequacy of salary with workload were noted as negatively influencing the choice of teaching as a career. The community member said:

"The workload required for the job is too much compared to the salary given. The take-home pay is very little compared to the work they do for so much time. A low salary can be a negative factor that students do now want to choose this as their carer. 18 years olds will think more practically about the money... so the salary matters." (Community Member)

The extracts drawn from the focus group conversations were mainly from teachers and community members who have highlighted that the inadequate income and the workload can negatively impact the choice of teaching as a career. This is something that needs to be carefully considered when promoting the teaching profession for prospective students. Apart from the insufficient salary, some participants also noted the limited professional growth associated with teaching as a career profession.

3. TEACHING HAS LIMITED PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

The conversations related to teachers' professional growth were carried out by many teachers in the focus group. The concerns were mostly raised regarding the limited opportunities that teachers have in that regard. This could be another reason that may have led to undervaluing the teaching profession. A teachers talked about this concern:

"I feel like teachers are stuck somewhere...they are not moving forward... especially for those who are working in islands, they have very limited opportunities to grow professionally. It is very limited...at some point it seems like we have reached the highest point, which is the Master's degree... and very limited opportunities for training... limited for new experiences... but in other professions, people get more opportunities to grow and travel to other parts of the world too." (Teacher)

Another teacher mentioned that the only reason that she would probably leave the profession is the limited opportunities for her professional growth in the field. She said:

"As a teacher, I would leave this field only if I don't get opportunities for professional grow. Now Masters I have completed in 2012, then I joined and got the promotion after two years and now I am like on the last ranking. I don't think there is any other option to improve my professional capacity. We hardly see teachers doing PhD." (Teacher)

Another explanation given about the professional opportunities. A teacher explained:

"Teachers want to study... Previously, when teachers obtained certificates, they got promotions. Now what we see is even for those who are studying... there is no promotion given. If it was given; many would have been interested in teaching." (Teacher)

When teachers spoke about professional growth, some also addressed the promotion and ranking opportunities. A teacher said:

"Many would also consider the rank or level increase in the job. When there is no professional growth, many may not get interested in continuing with the teaching profession. For example, the highest rank for teachers to get is leading teacher, deputy or principal's position, and this opportunity would not be possible for all." (Teacher)

Many of the extracts mentioned above underline the limited opportunities teachers have for their capacity building and professional growth. This may lead to undervaluing of the teaching profession in the community. Some participants also discussed the media influence as a negative factor that impacts teachers' work and the value of the teaching profession as a career.

4. THE NEGATIVE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON TEACHING

Many conversations related to the social media influence were about negative comments and rumours posted about teachers and teaching. The idea is that it may have some impact on how teaching is seen by the new generation and how it could impact its value in the community. Several comments by teachers and community members around the social media were reported with their views on how it impacts the value of teaching as a profession. A teacher mentioned:

"Social Media is very influential... It plays an important role. Often what happens in a school is spread in society... We notice this on our island too... many things are shared on social media platforms... a lot without any fact, merely rumours... people's thinking changes towards each other because of rumours talked about... this often indirectly influences students' choice of teaching as a career and the value given to teachers too. Kids are very open to social media influence too." (Teacher)

Another teacher claimed that sometimes some rumours are targeted at specific people on social media, thus influencing how people view them. She said:

"Sometimes, rumours are targeted to specific teachers... and then people talk about them. When something happens to a teacher it becomes a big deal." (Teacher)

Another teacher expressed her disappointment as follows:

What normally comes on social media is very frustrating... Many disturbing comments are posted about teachers... really painful emotions... When I first started my teaching career, there was a lot of respect for teachers. But now, everyone's rights... human rights... our rights are mostly compromised. Where is our right?

The influence of social media was clearly described how it can have an impact on teachers and how the teaching profession can be viewed by other people who read the information on social media. Another teacher commented more disturbingly saying:

"When something goes wrong, the community puts all the blame on teachers... the teachers' side of the story is overheard... teachers are not important anymore... their profession is also not important... Kids don't see any importance in listening to teachers. All this is because of the social media influence... because of the negative comments spread to the community." (Teacher)

A teacher expressed concern about social media influence on teachers as follows:

"Some parents write really negative comments on social media... and that's probably a sign of community view on teachers." (Teacher)

The above extracts revealed that social media can have a direct and indirect influence on teachers' life. It can have a direct impact on teachers' everyday work, while indirectly it can impact their social life.

The extracts revealed in this section identified both positive and negative factors that may impact the choice of teaching as a future career. The positive factors include social contribution value such as the opportunity to work on islands, dual rewarding for Now and the Hereafter, and an intrinsic value such as providing great satisfaction through teaching. Some negative factors such as considering teaching as a feminine job, insufficient income, limited professional growth, social media influence may negatively impact the choice of the teaching profession as a career.

MAKING TEACHING PROFESSION ATTRACTIVE AS A FUTURE CAREER

It is highly crucial to seek ways to retain incumbent teachers and attract other young people to the teaching profession in the Maldives. Participants across all focus groups talked about several ways that can make the teaching profession more appealing as a future career for the young generation. Three important categories were identified in the focus group conversations. They are (1) Building an attractive profession, (2) Marketing the teaching profession for young people, and (3) Providing equivalent incentives as in other fields. Based on these three categories, specific themes were generated with relevant conversations shared by the participants. Each of these categories is presented as follows.

BUILDING AN ATTRACTIVE PROFESSION

Participants across all focus groups talked about the importance of making the teaching profession more attractive for current teachers, prospective teachers, and young people. Three areas were noted by the participants focusing on building an attractive teaching profession. These included increasing the wages equivalent to the workload, reducing the workload along with fixed working hours, and providing an attractive work environment. Each of them is reported with supported conversations held in the focus groups.

1. INCREASING THE WAGES EQUIVALENT TO THE WORKLOAD

All participants discussed the idea of wages (salary and overtime) with a number of phrases such as salary, overtime money, musaara, aanmudahni. ujoora, faisa, lari and wages. The wages include an equivalent salary and justified overtime allowance considering the amount of workload and time invested. Participants across all groups have suggested increasing wages equivalent to the amount of work required for teaching. The conversations were mostly focused on making young people more attracted to the profession. A group of teachers suggested ways to motivate young people to the profession in the following conversations among them.

A teacher said: The most important thing is the salary

Another teacher complained: Many young people even say... How much do you get for your salary... they say...we get about 12,000 or 15,000 even working in a private place.

Another teacher claimed: The most challenging thing is the difference of salary across different disciplines... as there are different jobs available here on this island.

Another teacher suggested: Young people say that we get 5000 rufiyaa working only for 5 hours, why would you work for so many hours. (Teachers)

The conversations among these teachers highlighted the importance of increasing the wages of the teaching profession as it was the most important part of how the profession is valued among young people. A community member talked about how a teacher's busy life can impact young people's thinking about this profession. He said:

"Students will see how busy teachers are... that probably will restrict them to choose this profession... even if we don't discourage. If I am a teacher, my son will know how I spend my time... isn't it? And he will also see how other family members who are teachers are working with the heavy workload... that will discourage the new generation to enter the profession." (Community Member)

Another parent in the same focus group said:

"I do encourage my son to become a teacher, but the question he will raise is how much salary will he get... when he knew the salary, he would not want to enter this profession...the salary is too low compared to the workload." (Community Member)

This conversation was supported by students' talk on what they would recommend changing in order to attract them to the teaching profession. Increasing the salary and overtime was the main ideas suggested by many students in different focus groups as follows:

A good salary

Increase the salary

Providing equivalent overtime allowance to the work

I believe the value is low because of the salary

Teachers say they get very little salary

When I asked my sister whether it would be okay to become a teacher, she said if you want to work with a very small salary then you go...

I think the main factor is salary to be increased

Increase the salary

If teachers get a worth salary, students would

A change to the salary

I believe it is important to increase teachers' salary

What teachers get for their salary does not match the amount of work they do

Most students would choose a profession with a high salary... if teachers' salary changes... students may choose to teach...

The above examples are just a few of the many recommendations forwarded by students to increase the wages for teachers if the profession is to be promoted to them. These examples clearly convey the message that the value of the teaching profession is decreased because of the low salary it has. This means that with the salary increase, the profession can be more attractive for young people.

2. REDUCING TEACHERS' WORKLOAD ALONG WITH FIXED WORKING HOURS

Participants across all groups have talked about the long hours of work that teachers have. More specifically, teachers disappointedly complained about their everyday busy work. Reducing the workload was suggested by many, not only teachers but also by community members. Apart from long hours of work, teachers also talked about the heavy workload that they have. Teachers have discussed how attractive the profession would be if the workload and fixed working hours are set. Teachers' conversations were more about the good feeling that comes with teaching, and they hope to just reduce the workload and working hours to make the profession more attractive.

A teacher: I was thinking how best it would be if we have less workload

Another Teacher: This is a very good job for the community...

Another again repeated the same idea given by the previous teacher saying: if we could only reduce the working hours... It would be so good. There won't be anything better than teaching.

Another teacher agrees with a more convincing tone: Yeah...It won't be totally wrong if we say that teaching is the only profession that helps self-improvement....

Adding to the teachers' ideas, a pre-service teacher also mentioned:

I think we need to have fixed work hours for teachers... Now it seems that they are taking too many hours of work ... reducing the workload is very important to attract young people. Like a primary teacher, takes all subjects of the class, that is like so much time for preparation, teaching... marking... assessment managing student learning... communicating with parents... All these take more time than we even think about it now... just imagine their extracurricular activities... how is that going to be managed... within the given work time."

Some community members also raised their concerns regarding the workload and working hours of teachers indicating that this could be one factor that the system needs to bring a change to promote the profession to young people. Having seen a teacher's busy life may not attract students to enter the profession as highlighted by some community members. A community member noted:

"I have suggested some to enter the teaching profession. But they say, a teacher has too much work to do... and the salary is so low... the other thing is office staff normally finish their work at 2:00, but teachers they don't ... rather spend about 13 or 14 hours at school." (Community Member)

Another community member talked about student who he has encouraged her to become a teacher, He narrated:

"I have suggested a student to do primary teaching... Now she is like saying, after completing the teaching course she would do a management course...because teaching work hours are too much... and office staff they don't have to... Now she is actually doing the teaching course as she is working in an office... and has seen the difference and ease that she could have if she works as an admin staff rather than a teacher." (Community Member)

More community members talked about the busy workload in different focus groups. One is the husband of a teacher who annoyingly mentioned that he would not recommend any of his children to become teachers because of the workload and unreasonable working hours. He said:

"I would not recommend teaching to anyone...Never become a teacher... It is a very busy job."

"I think teachers' workload needs to be reduced if we are to attract young people to the profession"

"It is important to bring changes to the salary and workload, with more promotional packages for attracting young people."

Two teachers very frustratingly talked about why they would not promote the teaching profession to others due to the busy workload and working hours. They suggested to bring changes to the workload and work hours if teaching profession is to be promoted:

"To be honest, I will never promote teaching to my students to choose teaching as a career. I will openly say... this is not a profession that can give you anything. I am not recommending it to my students.... in this situation [having too high workload with little salary] ... if things change. I would... otherwise if they [students] are personally interested in teaching... I would not recommend it. But I would even then be alert that this is not a profession for improving life... not a good income... not only that... so busy with so many hours of work... so much time... how would I promote this to anyone?" (Teacher)

"I told my daughter to become a teacher when she was young. But she always says... I don't want to become a teacher because I can see how busy you are... she says I don't like it.... So, she did not join teaching... Now I am thankful that she did not join... the way she works and the income she makes have so much difference compared to my work as a teacher. So, what I mean is I am thankful that she joined another profession.... This is something we need to think about..." (Teacher)

Several students talked about how teachers or parents would not recommend teaching for young people because of its busy workload and inadequate salary.

A pre-service teacher said: Now even teachers do not promote teaching because of the teaching workload and inadequate salary.

Another pre-service student added: Sometimes teachers also tell not to become teachers... They say that this is not worth it. The salary given is not worth the workload... Teachers do discourage students... they say... see how we are working... We are also trying to leave the job...as it is too busy.... And I would say... the salary is also very low... They also commented a lot... when I was at practicum...I once was very unhappy about it...But actually, I really want to be a teacher (Pre-service Teachers).

Supporting the same ideas above, students in the focus group talked about the changes that need to be brought to the teaching profession so as to attract people into the field. Several students in different focus groups mentioned reducing teachers' workload. The following are just a few of many suggestions regarding reducing workload.

It is not worth compared to other professions

They are really doing hard work

It is a very busy job

They do so much hard work

My sister is always at school... hardly get time even night-time around 10 and 11.

They literally have no time to do anything

For example, in other jobs, it is like they work and then go home and do whatever they want... but teachers when they return home... marking books and many other works...

Compared to other professions, teachers do more work.

Too much time to be spent at school and the workload is too high (Students)

Apart from reducing workload, some have also noted the importance of having fixed working hours for teachers. A teacher noted:

"The working hours need to be fixed... for example, all teachers are busy with extra hours, over 24 hours. Sometimes the teaching is also influenced because of it. It can be done through liaising with outsourced people without involving teachers.... It can save teachers' time... reduce unnecessary work for teachers... we are also required to do so much admin work checking through unnecessary documents... main work also needs to improve. It takes so much of our time. What helps them to fill today, they [admin staff] won't be able to do it tomorrow. Such work can be reduced and add flexibility to the work environment." (Teacher)

Many of the conversations in the above extracts strongly emphasize the importance of reducing teachers' work hours as a key part of making the teaching profession attractive. Apart from reducing work hours, creating a conducive working environment was given a great emphasis to make the teaching profession more attractive to young people.

3. PROVIDING A CONDUCIVE WORKING ENVIRONMENT

Several participants talked about the existing working environment suggesting making the work environment of schools more attractive for the current and future teachers. The idea is that when the work environment is appealing it can add value to the profession and make young people become more attractive to the profession of teaching.

A group of teachers talked about the important things that they would expect from their work environment:

A teacher said: I think a lot about a space where we can have a relaxing time, maybe a sofa and rest space.

Another teacher added: Yeah, Actually, that would be very good. We come from Male' and work here, don't have a space to even put our stuff, I would also like to have a bigger locker, the one we have now is very small and hardly puts anything inside it.

A third teacher said: We would love to have our own workspace where we can leave our stuff, now we will have to carry our bags and everything when we go to class also. (Teachers)

Apart from making the workspace attractive, some teachers also talked about the resources they required for teaching. Some teachers talked about in the same focus group:

A teacher said: We have only one AV room, it is very difficult as it is mostly occupied...

Another teacher added: the infrastructure needs to be strengthened, with the availability of the internet... and high-speed WIFI connectivity, computers for all teachers, or laptops, these are important for a workplace.

Another teacher complained: At present we have very limited space for the classroom as there are more than 30 students in most classes, the student ratio needs to be changed to the space of the classroom. Or allocate more space for classrooms, another thing I would like to see is having air-conditioned classrooms, comfortable classrooms for both teachers and students.

Another teacher mentioned: I like to have different types of classroom spaces, such as art rooms, language labs, workshops etc. (Teachers)

Speaking about facilities and resources, teachers mentioned a variety of facilities to make the work environment more attractive. Teachers expressed:

A teacher said: The first thing I want is a computer for all teachers

Another teacher added: A good TV system, which we can use for showing videos in the classrooms

Another teacher added more simple stuff: There is no space for laptop charging space or spots... It is very hard to manage such things. (Teachers)

Many teachers have noted the necessities for making the work environment comfortable for their everyday teaching. A teacher noted:

"We need our work environment to be modernised. The staff room we have is the same as it was in 2004 or 2005, nothing has been renovated or brought any changes to the space. I remember, when I was working in STO, the place had a specific room for tea. You can make your own coffee and tea. There is a rest space, specific to females. During break time or when wanting to relax, staff can use that room. We need to have a better working space .. things need to be improved." (Teacher)

A community member who was a teacher before talked about important facilities. She described:

"Speaking about the work environment, the staff room where teachers work has only 4 computer systems. How many teachers would there be working in that school? So many.... How many stations are there for teachers to sit comfortably to do the work... The place is like just putting a table and finding a little space to do the work. This is how the staff room is like. There is no space where teachers can work comfortably. The other thing... The school network system... There is no other way that teachers can get access to the internet through laptops. One more thing... Teachers always have to bring their own laptops to complete so much work... Why are we not getting these facilities, why do we need to use our own systems for doing the job. This is just so frustrating.... And more... sometimes... we were told that we are not allowed to take the books home to mark... but the question is how we are supposed to complete the marking if we don't take them home... if lesson plans are not signed by this date... there are not enough computer systems to do such work. So many issues..." (Community Member)

These two extracts highlight that to make the teaching environment attractive, the facilities required for the teaching profession need to be provided and improved in schools.

Another teacher talked about human relationships as part of making the work environment more attractive for current teachers and prospective students. She claimed:

The school management needs to acknowledge teachers' work and appreciate them... normally they are always notified about what is not done... For example, when we have 30 students, even if only one student fails, the teacher's work is not accepted and will be blamed on... so, if teachers' work is accepted and appreciated, they will feel more satisfied with their job. Even saying a few words of appreciation can encourage their work. So many teachers are moving from one school to the other seeking that satisfaction in their jobs.

A community member also addressed the same idea saying that:

"Often the work environment can become so discouraging... when sharing feelings with other colleagues and with the school management... they don't do anything about it... the parents also will know after everything happens or after the teacher leaves the job because of so many issues that happened in the school. The school management does not do anything to defend or help the teacher when anything goes wrong... but if the school management works with teachers, teachers could have a better work environment." (Community Member)

MARKETING THE TEACHING PROFESSION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Participants across different groups and regions discussed ways to promote teaching as a career. The conversations drawn from the discussions are divided into three categories as follows.

1. PROMOTING SPECIFIC CAREER GUIDANCE TO TEACHING PROFESSION

Many teachers talked about how the teaching profession could be promoted among secondary and higher secondary students. That includes teachers promoting their profession in different ways while also organising career guidance sessions with a focus on teaching only. Some teachers even raised concerns that career guidance is more focused on other disciplines like the health sector and science fields instead of teaching. A teacher mentioned:

"Sometimes career guidance is focused on other areas instead of teaching. ... Nursing area is very much focused in some schools...career guidance needs to be focused on teaching too. Teaching also has so many good things to promote...the job opportunities are very high in the teaching field. Some students even do not know much about the teaching field." (Teacher)

One teacher particularly mentioned that it is important to promote the teaching profession by those who are passionate about teaching. The teacher mentioned:

"The teaching profession needs to be promoted to students by teachers who love the profession. too, so that students really get motivated to do teaching. I have recommended teaching earlier to one of my students. Now she is working here in this school as a teacher." (Teacher)

In addition to teachers, pre-service teachers also talked about this idea as highlighting the importance of promoting teaching profession by people who love teaching. Several pre-service teachers talked about it:

The first student said: I feel that if we talk to them more students will be attracted to teaching as we love teaching and we know the importance of it for our country.

Another added: We want to talk to more students about the teaching profession... let them know about it

A third one added: I think if students think teaching is a busy job... we could always talk to them... that actually all jobs are busy in different ways...when they know that there are so many other good things related to teaching, they would be interested in teaching. Things like... the enjoyment... satisfaction... fun time with children... There are so many good things about teaching... We really need to talk about the good stuff with students.

A fourth student mentioned: Actually, students know very little about teaching. They only hear what the social media is posting... we can talk to them about how important it is for our country... if there are no teachers... The school system is going to have so many problems. We need local teachers.

A fifth student continued: we need to open opportunities for students to get early experiences of teaching ... may through relief time teaching... teacher helper or assistant teachers... many of us have done that in our islands. It can be formally introduced to school leavers... (Pre-service Teachers)

Several teachers mentioned that career guidance specific to teaching may attract students join teaching along with opening opportunities for students to join teaching as assistant teachers or relief teachers:

"We see students who finish 'O' Level working in resorts because they promote the profession. We could run teaching specific marketing for Grade 10 students." (Teacher)

"We need to organise career guidance programmes specific to teaching... In fact, very few students know about different areas and disciplines that they could start their career at the time of their school graduation. This is important for students."

"We nearly had nothing related to teaching specific career guidance... for now it seems, as an important thing to do. For Grade 10 students, it is also important to know that there are opportunities to work as a teaching assistant in the school prior to their degrees." (Teacher)

Some teachers also suggested running community awareness programmes about teaching professions focusing on parents so that they know the importance of this profession for the future of this country. A teacher said:

"I think it is good to run awareness programmes too to promote the teaching profession and also to let parents know about the importance of this field. Actually, the most important field for the country is teaching. It is the profession that lead to all other professions. Build the community... and the future of the country." (Teacher)

Some teachers talked about important aspects that need to be promoted about the teaching profession, they expressed:

A teacher said: I would recommend students to go for teaching if they are interested...I will tell you this is a good profession if you like it.

Another teacher added: This is a profession for life... you become a good parent if you are a teacher... It is

a good profession for everyone...

Another more positively said: The work environment is very happy here... I like it very much... this is a good place to be...

A fourth teacher said: I guess if you think about self-improvement this is it...you will get to learn always... always renewing the information...

Another teacher more convincingly said: Actually, if you are teaching, you become a better person...

Some have highlighted new approaches to promote teaching professions on social media as social media is one of the most common platforms that young people are always connected with. A teacher explained:

"Media platforms are very important to promote the teaching profession. We could post good stories about teachers... the shining moments of teachers... success stories... I believe that can have a huge impact on how students view the profession. We always see negative comments posted on social media that make students think so negatively about the profession." (Teacher)

Another teacher added a different point indicating that even in the class teachers can promote teaching in different ways. She mentioned:

"In my class I promote teaching a lot, I ask my students to be good presenters... and tell them what to improve... ask them to act like teachers when they present." (Teacher)

A group of teachers talked about how teaching profession can be promoted with role models:

First teacher said: I became interested in teaching when I was in Grade 5. I recall, one day my maths teacher asked me, which profession I want to go for. I mentioned that I want to be like you Sir. So that means you need role models who are good with students and who are good in teaching.

Another teacher added: Yeah, role models are important to promote teaching

Another narrated her story: I have many family members who are teachers... My brother [Thithibey] always says that he is a Dhivehi Subject Teacher, and actually, he works in a school in Male'... I used to talk a lot about him... feel so proud about my brother ... So, I got interested because he was a very good teacher, and everyone talks about him.

The extracts above highlights role models of good teachers as an important promotional technique to attract young people to the profession. Further, using social media as a platform to promote good examples of teachers' stories, and promoting teaching even during class time, talking about the good side of teaching with students may also have a good impact on students' choice of teaching as a career.

2. PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR EARLY CAREER TEACHING EXPERIENCE

This is an important opportunity to provide for those who are potentially ready for entering any field of work. This means that if school leavers are given opportunities for entering the teaching field at the time of their school graduation, they may become interested in the teaching profession, as indicated in many

conversations. Many teachers narrated how they became interested in teaching with opportunities of early teaching experience when they were young. One teacher narrated her story on how she became interested in teaching:

"When I was a student, a neighbour of my house wanted me to teach her young child. So, I go to teach him every day... I did not know much about teaching then... So, I started teaching him letters first... reading and writing...I receive about 20 Rufiyaa per month then. It was a good amount then for pocket money... I was happy... The teaching of this little child made me become very interested in teaching just because of that experience..."

Another teacher briefly said:

"I first became interested because I went teaching preschool children when I got the opportunity when I saw how joyfully these kids' study...listen to their lovely talks... from there I got interested in teaching."

A teacher noted sharing her experience as a fresher then:

"I was encouraged by my math teacher... I was just a student in Grade 9 then. I was sent to a Grade 6 class to teach. Students were very happy with me... I even knew some of them... though they were a bit younger, there wasn't much age difference with me...they were very friendly... I liked it very much... I enjoyed my time in the class... that is how I became interested in teaching initially. So when I completed Grade 10 I applied to the teaching field." (Teacher)

Many examples from the participants' conversations identified the fresh students' teaching experiences as an important part of how they became interested in teaching. This idea was narrated both by teachers and students as something that makes them enjoy the teaching profession. As these examples highlight, the importance of gaining early experience of teaching may attract more young people to the profession as discussed by the teachers. A teacher mentioned that introducing early career opportunities for freshers can enable more young people to become interested in the teaching profession. She said:

"It would be good for letting school leavers know that they have the opportunity to join teaching with pocket money ... maybe like 3000 rufiyaa... as relief teachers or temporary teachers. Either would be an opportunity for them to get started with an early career." (Teacher)

Another teacher stated that if students are given opportunities to do some teaching-related work, it could also create interest in the teaching profession. A teacher mentioned:

"Arrange house activities, to involve in guiding students... tutoring... let students develop skills related to teaching such as communication... leadership and those..." (Teacher)

The many extracts shown here clearly indicate the importance of providing opportunities for school leavers to enter the teaching profession as early as they graduate from school. As highlighted by many teachers in the focus group, they have become interested in the teaching field through that early experience of working as teaching assistants in schools.

3. PROVIDING EQUIVALENT INCENTIVES AS IN OTHER FIELDS

Several participants talked about a range of different support and incentives that they also deserve as given in other fields. Many teachers talked about the unfair division of allowances and incentives by the government in other fields leaving teaching with no value. A group of teachers talked about allowances given in other fields due to specific professions. They expressed:

First Teacher: For example, police and MNDF staff receive health insurance policies for all their immediate family members and parents.

Another added: We are also doing a national service; we must also receive an incentive to the nature of work we do

A third one added: We are talking about different types of allowances. we don't get any...

A fourth one said: We also deserve a risk allowance. As many of us work in conditions often we are threatened... and sometimes with special children who are so aggressive.

The example above notes that teachers feel that they also deserve to be fairly treated when it comes to providing allowances. Some examples of allowances included health incentives and risk allowance. Another group of teachers also talked about the same idea indicating that teachers also need to be supported with different incentives to remain in the job as many teachers leave the profession due to its unattractiveness to continue in the job. They conversed with each other:

The first teacher said: I think risk allowance is important... as we are teaching in many risky situations. Since the school system introduced the inclusive practice, we are prone to many situations to deal with aggressive students. ... the time has changed now... many students these days are involved in drugs and other gang activities... Often times teachers are in situations where she is open to so many of these.

Another added: We also want to have job security and protection for teachers... When something happens, rumours (talk with no facts) when anyone hears anything about such... the whole community starts talking about it... all the blame goes to teachers... teachers' reputation are at stake... when any such thing happens... There are so many issues involved in it... the time has changed and now we teach in a very risky environment.

A third teacher added: If we are talking about allowances... it is important to ensure that we will receive the overtime money for the completed working hours... not at the end decide that these hours are not included... or this thing needs to be deducted. Things need to be clearer than this...

Another teacher in the same group added: health insurance is important... Actually, this is a very high-stress level job... we don't receive any help for managing our mental wellbeing... in many organisations and companies, there is health insurance for such...

Another teacher said: I think the allowances provided for foreign teachers should also be equally given to local teachers... because we do the same work... accommodation allowance must also be given for those who are teaching on another island or a city. (Teachers)

These extracts noted different allowances that teachers would hope to have as they were given in other fields unequally such as risk allowance, health insurance packages, accommodation.

Another teacher talked about attendance bonuses as an incentive to promote teachers' punctuality and commitment to work.

"Earlier we received bonuses for teachers... for every two years...now there is nothing much... there is no appreciation or acknowledgement for attendance... and with this more issues related to teachers' absenteeism also arose." (Teacher)

Another teacher talked about different types of expenses that teachers had to invest in as part of their teaching work. The idea is that teachers spend a considerable amount of their personal income on preparing for their teaching, sometimes for teaching aids, other times for using the Internet at home or using their own laptops and stationery and so on. These concerns were raised by a group of teachers as they talked:

First teacher: We are teaching... with our own expenses... using our laptops... the internet...materials... sometimes even printings... buying so many things for teaching aids... all these are part of the expenses that we invest our own money for... there is no such allowance for buying and spending for teaching planning.

Another teacher supported the same idea: That's very true... At least we should get some allowance for that... we buy so many things for our classes. We need an allowance for such expenses.

The extracts described above highlight the expenses that teaching may involve, and how often it is overlooked. Teachers use their own laptops for their work, use their own internet at home to prepare for teaching and communicating with parents. These are concerns that need to be carefully considered as part of the expenses required for teaching.

DISCUSSION

This section discusses the findings of the quantitative and qualitative data in the light of the existing literature to answer the research questions of the present study.

PERCEPTION AND VALUE OF THE TEACHING PROFESSION

The first research question of this study investigated how people perceived teaching as a career and the second research question explored the value of teaching and how the value of teaching changed overtime. From the analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative data, the findings related to both of these questions showed some similar patterns and therefore the discussion is presented accordingly.

PERCEPTION

The responses of the participants of this study during the interviews indicated that teaching is an exemplary work. Teaching is viewed as a good profession and a valued service to the nation. However, the participants emphasized that if teaching is viewed alongside the salary, the importance and value of the profession tends to fade. Hence, it was commonly found that although teaching is a job which included responsibilities and was heavy in workload, it is an exemplary profession. The quantitative findings showed that the majority of the non-teaching experienced participants agreed that teaching is a well-respected career while participants who left the field agreed less with this aspect. Similar rating was observed with occupational prestige, participants who left the field think that teaching has a lower occupational prestige than other fields. Both in-service and pre-service teachers believed that teaching is an underpaid profession in the Maldives with the lowest mean score of 2.28 and 2.46 for in-service and pre-service teachers, respectively. At the same time, they believed that teaching is a difficult job (M=6.31 and M=6.32), with a heavy workload and

it is an emotionally demanding job.

Another interesting finding of this study was that when participants valued teaching in terms of the salary, there is no inherent worth of teaching as the most appealing source of income. When compared to other professions, teachers' salaries are low. There is a mismatch between the teaching workload and the allocated salary. This was expressed by both teachers, students and community groups. Apart from the mismatch, many participants across all groups expressed their dissatisfaction about the busy teaching schedule of teachers and their workload. The quantitative findings of this study revealed that irrespective of their status in the teaching field participants disagree that teaching is an easy job and they equally agreed that teaching needs specialized training and it has a heavy workload.

In addition to the low salary, it was found that teachers do not receive their deserved overtime allowances according to their workload. Teachers' workload extended beyond normal school hours, and apart from teaching, their engagements included extra- curricular activities, co-curricular activities and trainings. This issue of overtime was one of the most intolerable concerns for teachers. Further, participants expressed how teachers' demanding workload limited time with their families. Teachers stated that their family time was compromised in attending to school work and duties and there was no work-life balance. Additionally, teachers were faced with the challenge of limited opportunities for professional growth.

Hence, teaching is perceived as a very tough and demanding job which is not well paid.

The biggest deterrent found from this study is the low salary of the teacher profession. This finding is similar to what Gorard et al. (2021) found. They also found that the social influences that affected the value of teaching profession were the views of the participants in regard to workload-salary balance. When there is a low salary compared to the amount of work, this could negatively impact young people's perceptions and attitudes towards teaching profession (Gorard et al., 2021; Yuh & Choi, 2017; Hammet, 2008; Scott et al., 2001; Sokolova, 2011). Also, teacher's perception of teaching workload is found to be a strong predictor for teachers to leave the profession (Gorard, et al., 2021; Higton et al., 2017) and leads to high attrition rate (Dee & Goldhaber, 2017). In addition, teacher workload was found to be an area of serious concern for teachers and is also recognised as an issue by members of the public. Workload concerns were influencing teachers' intention to leave the profession, and form part of the reason people would not recommend teaching as a career (Haffernan et al., 2019). Furthermore, teachers' lack of ability to manage the stress associated with the high workload and low pay was found to be a cause for high turnover (Cooper-Gibson Research, 2018). Hence, the workload of teachers is a concern and needs further attention to mitigate adverse impacts on the teaching profession in the Maldives.

VALUE

This study found that participants saw teaching as a valued profession. Most discussions highlighted the specific and professional skills that makes this profession valuable, and teachers felt that there are several benefits they gain by becoming a teacher. Students believed that teachers have a huge impact on their lives and described teachers taking a lot of responsibility to provide them with knowledge and this increased the value of teaching. However, as teaching is not seen as a source that can generate a good income, this

factor affected how people thought about this profession including parental views about their children's career: they do not promote choosing teaching as a career for their children. As many participants compared teaching with other jobs, teaching is more time- consuming, generated less income and had little to offer as professional growth. Although occupational status of teaching was not perceived very highly by both the groups, they believed that teaching profession is a respected career to some extent and society perceived teachers as professionals. Additionally, both the groups believed that teaching requires a high level of expert/content knowledge and technical knowledge (M=6.62 for in-service teachers and M=6.64 for pre-service teachers). These findings indicated that the community perceived there is little value in teaching as a profession. Further, the quantitative data of this study showed that teachers who left the profession and who are working in the profession do not believe that they are valued by the society.

These findings are similar to the findings of the study by Audu and Egharevba (2016) which found that parents' thinking about teaching as a low status, and society's negative perception of the teaching profession are partly responsible for discouraging young people from considering a teaching career. It is revealed expectations and demands placed on schools are on the rise, with parents behaving increasingly like "education consumers", and putting more pressure resulting in making the teaching profession more difficult and creating unease among teachers who are more often criticised for their teaching (Lantheaume, 2008). As found in this study, parents who saw teaching as a low-profile profession do not encourage their children to go into teaching. Further, parent's attitude towards the teaching profession is found to influence student's perception about teaching which impacts students' willingness to choose teaching as a career (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018; Audu & Egharevba, 2016). Hence, this attitude of parents can be one of the influencing factors that young people do not choose teaching as a

profession in the Maldives. Although participants of this study expressed that teaching is a valued profession, similar to other studies, its value by society is neither economically nor socially recognized (Jiménez, & Hinestroza, 2020). Similar findings showed that although the public feels that teachers are respected and trusted, this is not consistently transferring to teachers feeling appreciated for the work that they do (Haffernan et al., 2019).

Several years ago, teaching was highly regarded as a valued profession in the Maldives. So how did this change over time? This study found the two main reasons for the change of value of teaching is 1) changing political scenarios such as freedom of speech or other aspects of life may have influenced the way teachers are treated or respected, and 2) people's thinking, mindset, and attitudes toward the teaching profession. Freedom for everyone may have influenced the way people think and take actions towards different things in life. Echoing with freedom people's rights have been another important point raised by community members when talking about changes that were seen overtime to the value of the teaching profession. The participants' conversations indicated that society has become more open to criticism about each other and that may have an impact on how people (such as teachers) are valued.

The quantitative data of this study revealed that in terms of occupational prestige of the teaching profession, teachers currently working as teachers observed the greatest difference happened overtime compared with pre-service teachers and community members. In-service teachers and community members perceived the job worthiness quite differently. Community members did not agree that social respect or standing accorded to teachers decreased due to the status of the teaching profession. However, in-service and pre-service teachers perceived much lower occupational prestige than community members comparing past and present days.

Overtime, the value of teaching is compared with

other high paid professions, and unfortunately, the value is less now when compared to many years before. Studies have found that even though the financial aspect may not be the most important factor for choosing to become a teacher, it is an important factor of attractiveness that seems to be increasing in most countries (European Union, 2013). This is evident in the study by Hargreaves et al. (2017) which stated that pay has become the second most common reason for seeing teaching as an attractive career by 2006 compared with 2003 when it stood in fourth place. Hence, it can be assumed that while more well-paid jobs increased with the booming economy of the Maldives, teachers' salaries and other incentives have not increased.

Another interesting factor that influenced the peoples' mindset about the value of teaching in this study was found to be social media. Students' dependence on teachers were affected as students had access to a plethora of digital sources of information about the topics which were easily accessible, such as YouTube. Such technologies were mentioned to be helpful teaching resources. However, teachers felt that their rights and freedom are threatened that anytime, their actions and fabricated stories about them can be made viral over social media and they are less confident in expressing their views on social media in fear that actions may be taken against them. There is evidence from studies that suggest that this is very real. For example, in a survey by Ecclesiastical Insurance (2019), it was found that more than a third (37 percent) of teachers contacted by parents on social media have received criticism or abuse. This leads us to give our thoughts on the immense pressure the teachers are experiencing that their mental health and well-being needs to be considered. It is stated that the mental health of teachers is a big concern for the sector, while workloads, long hours and feeling isolated or unsupported are well-known contributing factors to teacher's stress levels (Ecclesiastical Insurance, 2019). Hence, the teaching profession in the Maldives has become

more complex overtime.

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CHOICE OF TEACHING AS A CAREER

As referred earlier in this study, teacher education institutions in the Maldives have shown an alarming drop in the enrolment for teaching courses. This research has attempted to identify what factors might be influencing the rapid decline of student enrolment in teaching programmes so as to seek ways to attract them towards the teaching profession. Both quantitative and qualitative findings have revealed several factors that may influence the choice of teaching as a career. Some of them were positive while others were negative. In the quantitative findings, the most contributing factors were identified: “making a social contribution” (M=6.18 and M=6.24) was the most influential factor for both pre-service and in-service teachers in their choice of teaching as a career, followed by intrinsic career value (M=5.90 and M=6.03). These findings are parallel to qualitative findings in terms of social contribution and intrinsic values given to the teaching profession. Early and recent authors such as Wang (2004) and Heinz (2015) have discussed the person’s willingness and enthusiasm as important factors that may influence the choice of a career.

In this study, the opportunity to work in islands was found to be a contributing factor to the choice of career for both in-service and pre-service teachers. However, students have little knowledge about personal motives, yet some community members also discussed that some of them who were previously teachers have chosen the teaching profession due to their intention of working in their islands. This research thus recommends this point: promoting teaching courses on islands to open opportunities for freshers to start teaching careers on their own islands. Working on an island can also be seen as a contributing factor to social contribution as some participants have

and “had positive learning experiences at school”. These findings were in line with both researchers: Heinz (2015) and Gore (2016) who also found that teachers among family members and inspirational teachers exert a great influence on young people’s choice to pursue the teaching career.

The literature identified that interest in teaching, enjoyment, and feeling of accomplishment as intrinsic factors that facilitate the teaching profession. The findings of this study also revealed that joy, passion, working with children, satisfaction are some important intrinsic values that teachers shared about their choice of teaching. More specifically, student participants have highlighted that they see their teachers enjoying and having satisfying times when they teach. This in turn can add value to promoting the teaching profession for students. It is noteworthy to mention that one distinct finding revealed by qualitative data related to participants’ thinking about dual rewarding of the teaching profession.

Participants expressed that teaching provides benefits (good rewarding feelings) for this world (while they are alive) and the Hereafter (after they leave this world). This also meant for the Muslim communities that teaching is considered as both religiously beneficial (gaining Thawab) and as a rewarding community work. The rewarding community work is mostly about contributing to building a good generation including raising and educating children. This dual rewarding idea can be supported with altruistic factors such as service to others, help and support others, and make a difference to the community. Participants expressed the value of teaching in terms of the value given to the teaching profession as their contribution to build the community that can be beneficial for a person’s present time in life and the Hereafter. The literature identifies ability to balance work and family (Struyven et al., 2013; Weiss & Kiel, 2013) and flexible working hours (Aksu, Demir, Daloglu, Yildirim, & Kiraz, 2010; Jungert et al., 2014) as extrinsic factors that influence the choice of teaching. In this study, both these factors were noted as

negatively influencing the choice of teachers, which were also discussed by all participants. The findings of this study and the literature reviewed suggest ensuring these extrinsic factors to ensure retention of teachers in the context of the Maldives as many participants have expressed their motive to leave the profession if the salary and the amount of work required for teaching job to be balanced. As shared by majority of the participants, the low salary and high workload can negatively influence their motivation to remain in the teaching profession. Some participants have also noted that although they are interested in teaching, due to the low income associated with the teaching profession, they are hesitant to join the teaching. The low financial incentives may also lead to teachers leaving the teaching field, as some literature highlighted the importance of balance between intrinsic, altruistic, and extrinsic factors (Struyven, Jacobs, & Dochy, 2013; Brookhart & Freeman, 2012).

The Maldives is a very small country, which also means that it has small communities of the islands, having concerns, issues, and rumours about or related to teachers, leaving a negative impact on how the teaching profession is valued by the community as well as by freshers. The findings of this study revealed that there is a huge social media influence on how the community perceive and value the teaching profession. Small communities mean that when anything goes wrong by teachers, it spreads widely as everybody knows each other in such communities. It was noted that there is little attention given in the literature on how small communities can have different scenarios when it comes to influencing the choice of teaching via social media platforms. Participants in this study widely expressed their insecurities, concerns, and challenges when working as teachers due to the social media influence. The findings also indicated that social media influence can also impact how people perceive the teaching field, which in turn can impact prospective students' choice of teaching as a career.

Some researchers such as Low et al. (2017) described the culture and context influence on the choice of the teaching profession that also have some links with the findings of this study, yet it does not clearly identify the relationship with the social media and cultural context of a country. This may be an area that needs further attention in future research. Some quantitative findings revealed that students' choice of teaching may be influenced by community perception. In the context of the Maldives, this is highly crucial as the country is facing great challenges in attracting highly accomplished students to apply for the teaching courses. This means that the influence of social media can have a huge impact on teaching course enrolments.

MAKING THE TEACHING PROFESSION ATTRACTIVE AS A FUTURE CAREER

The third research question of this study investigated how to make the teaching profession attractive as a career. Several conclusions can be drawn from the results which pertain to this objective. From the numerous data gathered the results provide meaningful findings and insights that could be generalized to the teaching field.

The results strongly support that the overwhelming reason why students are not interested in teaching is the imbalance of financial rewards including salary and overtime compared to salaries and incentives of other sectors, implying that there is an injustice between the education sector and other sectors in providing salary and overtime payment. In Maldives, teacher take home salaries are rather low compared to other professions, and the teaching profession is not among the occupations with the highest social prestige.

To attract teaching profession to potential students, community participants suggested to ensure equal overtime allowance for teachers as in other professions (83.07 percent), improve management practices in school (77.80 percent), increase salary

and allowances (69.65 percent), improve teachers' status in the society (62.78 percent), and ensure a reasonable workload (54.19 percent). In-depth interviews of this study revealed the urgency of ensuring equal overtime allowance for teachers in relation to other professions. In this study, students were asked about the changes which could make them consider the teaching profession. More than half of the respondents (77.93 percent) mentioned "increased salary and allowances". The second highest (63.72 percent) was "improving teachers' status in the society". Almost half of the respondents mentioned "equal allowances for both local and expatriate teachers" and "Ensuring safety and wellbeing". Considering the changes among girls and boys, 49 percent of the girls and 29 percent of the boys mentioned "increased salary and allowances". "Accommodation for teachers" had a smaller proportion among the students. These findings validate the need for a salary and overtime increment in order to make the teaching profession more attractive for undergraduates. This is supported by previous studies indicating that low salaries are a deterrent that keeps young individuals from pursuing the teaching profession (Gorard et al., 2021). This means that with the salary increase, the profession can be more attractive for younger individuals. However, the pitfalls of extrinsic motivations being a primary choice for an individual's decision in choosing teaching as a profession must be considered.

Researchers have also criticized the economic value which most societies have placed on the teaching profession, thereby arguing that the meagre salary does not compare to the extent of work that is required of an individual working in academia. This, it is argued, may in turn influence the attitudes and perceptions that younger minds have towards the teaching profession (Gorard et al., 2021; Yuh & Choi, 2017; Hammet, 2008; Scott et al., 2001; Sokolova, 2011). This is also supported by Dee and Goldhaber (2017) who argued that low pay was a major factor to which the high attrition rate of teachers could be attributed.

Although salary and overtime were rated as the two major factors which required immediate attention, both in-service and preservice teachers who participated in the interviews highlight that 'ensuring a reasonable workload' is essential. The quantitative data of this study found that both in-service and pre-service teachers suggested ensuring overtime allowance for teachers as in other professions as the most crucial change needed (87.65 percent in-service teachers and 81.44 percent pre-service teachers), followed by increasing salary allowance (86.20 percent in-service teachers and 77.27 percent pre-service teachers) to make teaching profession more attractive. Although these two changes were rated as top two changes, in-service teachers ranked 'ensuring a reasonable workload' (55.64 percent) as the third essential change, while pre-service teachers ranked 'improving management practices' (62.88 percent) as the third crucial area that requires changes. As evident from the findings of this study, teacher's high workload is a recurring factor and concern expressed by all participants. While also considering low salary and overtime allowance, recent research suggests that the proximal cause for high turnover has a direct correlation with teachers' lack of ability to manage stress levels while managing their workload (Cooper-Gibson Research, 2018.) This is also backed up by Perryman and Calvert (2020) explaining that one of the reasons behind teachers' decision of leaving the teaching profession was their heavy workload. Workload being a repeated finding in different research, the current study adds to it with a new finding, that is, the necessity for a fixed working hour for teachers. This is mentioned by teachers as well as student teachers interviewed.

Thus, the indications which can be extrapolated from these findings include a hypothesis that the preservice teachers in the sample already have knowledge of the economic and social struggles which come with choosing a highly demanding profession, teaching. This indicates that these individuals may already be aware of the 'pitfalls' before they even start their education. With similar

findings from Watt et.al. (2012), this hypothesis can be generalized across contexts. Moreover, it helps us reconceptualize our understanding of teacher dropout and retention (Savickas et al. 2009; Savickas, 2012).

According to Yuh et al. (2017) and Demirel (2014) individuals spend approximately 70 percent of their daily time in the workplace. As childcare teachers spend so much of their time at work, their professional lives may have a direct impact on their personal lives. Given that teaching is known to be a demanding career with long work hours, meagre salary, and stressful interactions with many people, identifying specific sources of social support will considerably enhance teachers' well-being and job performance.

Several participants emphasized the current organizational climate, suggesting that schools make their work environments more amenable to work in. The findings support the claim that one of the primary reasons for teachers leaving their vocations is due to impoverished working conditions. (Foulds, 2017; Murphy & Louis, 2018; Darling-Hammond & Rothman, 2011; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). Employees are the most valuable asset in any organization. As a result, experts argue that 'team happiness' is required to be motivated and productive while being stress-free. This, they claim, boosts productivity and makes the work environment a "happy place," making teaching more appealing to younger individuals.

The findings also revealed challenges such as lack of workspace and lack of resources required for teaching. Such hindrances of the working environment in turn influence teacher retention, which is supported by Holmes, Parker, and Gibson (2019). Participants from different groups reported that to make the teaching environment attractive, the facilities required for the teaching profession need to be provided in schools. This result supports the claim that the physical characteristics of learning environments have a substantial influence on individuals' attraction towards teaching. The

impact is thought to account for approximately 16 percent of the variation in students' learning (Barrett et al. 2015a.) Furthermore, participants talked about additional training and professional development for teachers to deliver effective lessons and facilitate good classroom practices.

Another important finding from research for both in-service teachers as well as pre-service teachers is, they choose teaching as a career as they believe that teaching is a consecrated profession and not for extrinsic motives. The finding is similar to that of other studies: pre-service teachers in Britain and Norway (Kyriacou, Hultgren, and Stephens 1999), and first-year Caribbean teacher candidates (Brown 1992), in which most of teacher candidates' teaching motivations were altruistic.

Despite the Maldives being an upper-middle income country, altruistic motivations appear to be more prevalent. This could be attributed to the possibility that pre-service teachers entered the teaching profession not only for extrinsic reasons, but also because they want to nurture children and promote a sustainable school environment, thus contributing to society.

A prominent finding of the research is the need for strengthening school leadership and improving management practices as raised by the community, in-service and preservice teachers. This is supported by Bush and Glover (2014) and Schein (2004) who emphasized the significance of creating and managing culture by the leaders. Participants of the current research have a similar view indicating that an ideal school leader encourages the formation of the school culture which reflects the image of the school and the society.

Another noteworthy conclusion of the study mentioned by the community as well as pre-service and in-service teachers is improving teachers' status. This idea is in consistence with the findings of Gulmez (2010) who argues that teachers' status should be relevant to educational needs, taking into account the aims and objectives to be achieved

in the field of education; in order to achieve these aims and objectives, teachers should be entitled to a fair status, and the profession of teaching should be respected by society (Gulmez, 2010).

IMPLICATIONS

This study found that teachers were passionate about teaching, but the imbalance of salary, allowances and workload is the main concern raised by teachers. The current take-home salary of the school teachers is incompatible with the workload. If this issue is not accorded a high priority in policy and action, the current trend in teacher attrition may worsen.

Further, prospective teachers will not be inclined towards choosing teaching as a career. In a few years' time, the education and higher education sector may be faced with a problem that is unfathomable as the decreasing value of teaching in the long run will affect the number of local teachers choosing the teaching courses. This will have an impact on the number of locally trained teachers leading to the teacher shortage.

As a result, expatriate teachers will need to be hired. Foreign teachers may lack the cultural context, values and key competencies required to deliver the national curriculum effectively. In addition, there is no guarantee that foreign teachers can remain in the same school or stay in the Maldives for long.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This section builds on findings from this study to provide recommendations to enhance teaching as a career choice in the Maldives. The findings and recommendations were discussed with multiple stakeholder groups in various validation workshops. Stakeholders include officials from the Ministry of Education (MOE), National Institute of Education (NIE), Quality Assurance Department (QAD), Teachers' Association of Maldives (TAM), Education Leaders' Association of Maldives (ELAM), Faculty of Education Advisory committee (MNU), steering committee of this research and UNICEF. The research team sought views of the various stakeholders regarding the feasibility of the recommendations put forward based upon the implications of the research. The stakeholder groups and the research team discussed at length, and when there was not full agreement, the recommendations have been revised to reflect the suggestions. The recommendations were prioritized based upon the suggestions from the stakeholder groups in addition to the strength of the findings. The current research is the first of this immensity conducted on the current topic, and the findings of this research accentuates decades-old protests regarding the status of the teaching profession throughout the Maldivian society, and globally.

The recommendations are premeditated to be used as a foundation for actions by the policymakers and relevant stakeholders in addressing the matters highlighted in the report. The following recommendations were prioritised by the key stakeholders during the validation workshops and are presented in order of priority:

RECOMMENDATION 1: ENSURE EQUAL OVERTIME PAY FOR TEACHERS AS IN OTHER PROFESSIONS

The findings of the research highlight that there are perceived inconsistencies in providing overtime allowance between the education and other sectors such as the health sector. Findings from FGDs are loud enough to highlight the point that the teachers were unfairly and unjustly treated with their overtime pay (10% overtime pay limit) despite the extra hours they must work, which is completely different for professionals in other sectors. Overtime pay for teachers has been controlled so as to ensure that it does not exceed the 10% of the monthly expenditure of the basic salary of all the staff as per Ministry of Education's circular (22-C/22/2015/14). As shared by the participants of this study, teachers' work is not restricted to classroom teaching only, and requires time after hours for calendared extra-curricular activities, core curricular activities, and preparation for teaching. Hence, the limit of 10% of overtime is frequently exceeded yet not compensated for. In the quantitative findings, ensuring equal overtime pay for teachers as in other professions was suggested as the most preferred change to make the teaching profession attractive by more than 80% community members and pre-service teachers, and nearly 90% in-service teachers.

The following recommendations are made to ensure equal overtime pay for teachers:

1. Revise the 10% overtime pay limit set by the Ministry of Education to ensure teachers are fairly paid for all additional work required to implement holistic education at schools.
2. Align the overtime policy of teachers with other civil service institutions to eliminate the difference and maintain consistency.

3. Revise overtime policy of teacher workload to include all teaching-related activities such as lesson planning, preparation, and providing feedback within fixed hours based on student ratio.
4. Develop a system to ensure overtime work is carefully recorded and fairly paid to avoid any concerns or issues related to teacher integrity and accountability.

RECOMMENDATION 2: TRANSFORM TEACHING INTO A HIGHLY PAID PROFESSION IN THE COUNTRY

The literature cited that salary is one of the extrinsic motives that drive teaching as a career choice. Low income is also cited as one of the factors leading to devaluing of the teaching profession. The quantitative findings showed that community group participants did not agree that teachers earned a good salary. For secondary students, increasing teachers' salary was the highest preferred change to be brought to make teaching attractive while for pre-service and in-service teachers, it was the second most preferred change. Qualitative findings also showed that teaching does not provide sufficient income and teaching profession is undervalued with its low income compared to the workload. Several community members and teachers expressed that teaching as a career can be highly regarded only if increasing the wages equivalent to the workload. These findings indicate that a revision to the teachers' salary is long due.

The following recommendations are made to transform teaching into a highly paid profession in the country:

1. Revise and align the teachers' salary structure to that of employees with similar qualifications in other sectors to close the gaps in salary and allowances.
2. Review and revise the differences in various allowances provided to employees at all the government paid jobs to maintain consistency.
3. Provide allowances for both local and expatriate teachers equally.
4. Introduce class teacher allowance commensurate with workload and responsibilities of class teachers.
5. Introduce attendance allowance to attract teachers and reduce teacher absenteeism and enhance teacher professionalism.

RECOMMENDATION 3: ENSURE TO ESTABLISH A REASONABLE WORKLOAD FOR TEACHERS

A heavy workload is cited in literature as a strong predictor of teacher turnover after salary. In the current research both quantitative and qualitative findings highlight that all participant groups concurred that teaching is "not an easy job", and one that requires a considerable amount of "after hours work". Majority of the participants from the community, students, in-service as well as pre-service teachers have given similar rankings to teacher workload. Thus, ensuring a reasonable workload is the third most preferred change by in-service teachers from the quantitative findings. Qualitative findings supported this finding by expressing to reduce teachers' workload along with fixed working hours for healthy work-life balance.

The following recommendations are made to establish a reasonable workload for teachers:

1. Analyse and revise teacher workload to ensure a reasonable amount of work is allocated for teachers to have a work-life balance.
2. Schedule all school activities and programmes within fixed working hours.

3. Adjust teaching hours in line with the learning arrangement of the new curriculum.
4. Establish a mechanism to manage extracurricular activities without overloading teachers.
5. Reduce ad-hoc administrative work for teachers.
6. Establish a communication mechanism to assist teachers to manage parent-teacher communication effectively.

RECOMMENDATION 4: PROVIDE A CONDUCTIVE WORK ENVIRONMENT FOR TEACHERS

Several researchers have been cited in the literature, showing the importance of a conducive work environment for teacher retention and job satisfaction. A supportive environment and working conditions have been further cited as motivating factors to stay on the job. One of the most concerning findings of the current research is the need to provide/establish a conducive working environment for teachers. In the qualitative findings several teacher participants have noted challenges such as lack of classroom and other learning spaces, lack of teachers' own work spaces, especially secure spaces to keep materials and personal effects in staff rooms, having to carry teachers' personal laptops to school as there are only limited computers in schools, and more frustratingly, weak internet connections which is a major hindrance to their work. Other teachers have raised concern that the teaching and learning has become unsafe for them. Community group participated have voiced the importance of a supportive environment where teachers' voices are heard.

The following recommendations are made to provide a conducive work environment for teachers:

1. Provide necessary infrastructure in terms of learning spaces, and individual workspaces for teachers.
2. Ensure a 'minimum resource allocation' is provided for each school.
3. Build healthy school culture and collegial relationships within the school community.
4. Enforce 'behaviour management policy' to avoid student permissiveness to ensure a safer learning environment for both students and teachers.
5. Build a school culture where all teachers connect with each other and develop a sense of belonging to the school.
6. Ensure teacher wellbeing is carefully considered through offering counselling services for teachers.
7. Establish a mechanism to protect teacher rights and safeguard them from being threatened or harmed physically or emotionally.

RECOMMENDATION 5: PROMOTE TEACHING AS A VALUABLE PROFESSION

The findings of the research concur with those from similar studies done elsewhere, as cited in the literature, on the aspect of devaluing of the teacher profession over time. The literature cites the value given to a profession as an influential factor that makes a profession favourable. The quantitative findings revealed that community participants with a teaching history, pre-service and in-service teachers did not feel that teachers were valued by society. The findings also reveal that in-service teachers felt unhappy about how teachers are valued by society. Qualitative findings highlighted issues such as heaviness of the work, the long working hours, and the mismatch of the salary which may have impacted upon the value given to teaching by society and as a career choice, and the devaluing of the profession compared to the past.

The following recommendations are made to promote teaching as a valuable profession:

1. Advocate for teaching as an attractive career with positive teacher stories using social media/mainstream media.
2. Create awareness about teaching as a highly valued profession targeting all stakeholders.
3. Acknowledge and appreciate teachers' work by offering teacher excellence awards at national level and other reward systems at organisational level to add value to the teaching profession.
4. Promote teaching within the education system and teachers portray themselves as role models.
5. Strengthen the role of teacher education institutions and teacher associations to promote teaching profession.

RECOMMENDATION 6: CONDUCT PROGRAMMES TO ATTRACT SCHOOL LEAVERS

The research findings indicate that there are no specific activities targeted at delivering information related to the teaching profession to school students, unlike organised career guidance programmes from other sectors like tourism. It is also identified in the qualitative findings that students want to have some teaching related experience at school level in order to know the profession before they choose one. Another important finding is the need to attract high achievers to the teaching profession to make it an attractive one.

The following recommendations are made to conduct programmes to attract school leavers:

1. Organise teaching specific career guidance programmes for school leavers to attract potential candidates for teaching.
2. Provide early career experiences for school leavers to explore the teaching field.
3. Devise strategies to attract and direct high achievers to the teaching profession.
4. Introduce high achiever overseas scholarship awards of teaching to promote the teaching profession to high achievers.

RECOMMENDATION 7: STRENGTHEN SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

A major finding of the research emphasized the need to strengthen leadership and management of schools. 77.80 percent of the community members, 62.88 percent of pre-service teachers and just over 50 percent of the in-service teachers suggested improving management practices. Qualitative findings reflected the quantitative results and indicated the teachers' need for management to show caring towards teachers, consider teachers' voice when decisions are made and defend teachers.

The following recommendations are made to strengthen school leadership and management practices:

1. Build the capacity of school leaders to promote a collegial work environment and manage schools effectively.
2. Allow autonomy to school leaders in decision making and allocating budget and human resources more effectively within the school.
3. Establish a school-based management system in the country.

4. Establish mentoring and coaching activities across different schools to strengthen the leadership practices.
5. Empower school communities involving them through a range of activities to contribute to school improvement.

RECOMMENDATION 8: DEVELOP INCENTIVE SCHEMES FOR TEACHERS

The quantitative findings revealed that about 45 percent in-service teachers, pre-service teachers and community members preferred provision of health insurance for teachers and their families as an important change to make teaching profession attractive. Additionally, 31.63 percent in-service teachers and 42.05 percent pre-service teachers mentioned about provision of accommodation for teachers. In focus group discussions, several participants talked about a range of different support and incentives that they also deserve as given in other government sectors such as health insurance packages and retirement schemes. Participants pointed out that the non-existence of such benefits for teachers was indication of the weak status given to teaching in the country.

The following recommendations are made to develop incentive schemes for teachers:

1. Provision of health insurance scheme for teachers and their family members.
2. Expand housing schemes for teachers.
3. Introduce subsidized equipment schemes such as devices for teaching.
4. Provide interest free loan schemes for teachers' expenses.
5. Grant professional development leave for teachers both local and abroad.
6. Allot retirement incentive schemes for teachers.

RECOMMENDATION 9: PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROFESSIONAL GROWTH OF TEACHERS

The qualitative findings of this study revealed that teachers raised concerns regarding the limited opportunities for capacity building, professional growth, and promotion. This finding was complimented by the quantitative result, indicating that job security was perceived as one of the hindering factors influencing teachers' decision of choosing teaching as a career. One of the indicators of job security was offering a steady career path for teachers.

The following recommendations are made to provide opportunities for professional growth of teachers:

1. Conduct necessary professional development and skill development training for teachers and other staff to facilitate student learning effectively.
2. Conduct induction and mentoring programmes to foster a positive work culture.
3. Arrange exchange programmes to foster teacher collaboration between and across other schools in the Maldives or abroad to enhance their professional experiences.
4. Provide opportunities for teachers for further in-service training and exposure from recognised schools abroad to upskill teacher expertise.

RECOMMENDATION 10: STRENGTHEN TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAMMES

The quantitative findings of the present study showed that, for pre-service teachers, course quality and modality were strong influencers when choosing a teaching course. A further preference of the pre-service teachers was attending teaching courses conducted in physical settings.

The following recommendations are made to strengthen teacher training programmes:

1. Monitor and evaluate teacher-training programmes closely to ensure the quality of teacher education is being carried out by the Ministry of Higher Education, especially the Maldives Qualifications Authority.
2. Offer face to face teacher education programmes to improve graduate teacher quality.
3. Offer student-teacher exchange opportunities of practicum in other countries to enhance their theoretical understanding of teaching in different contexts.
4. Arrange opportunities for student teachers to work in schools as teacher helpers/assistants on minimum wages during their study period in the teacher education programmes.

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