# Who is the ideal teacher? Greek pre-service teachers express their views about the characteristics of the "perfect" teacher

# Chi è l'insegnante ideale? Greci insegnanti esprimono il loro parere per le caratteristiche del maestro "perfetto"

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**Astratto**
Lo scopo di questa ricerca è quello di identificare le opinioni di studenti universitari (da dipartimenti elementari e pre-scolastici) sul professore ideale. Questo studio si propone di dare le diverse opinioni sul ruolo e l'immagine del maestro nel discorso sociale come esperienza sociale. Gli autori hanno chiesto 588 studenti di istruzione elementare e l'istruzione pre-scuola per scrivere un testo in cui avrebbero descrivere il loro parere su ciò che rende un insegnante perfetto (Secondo suo parere, quali siano gli elementi che ci danno 'il maestro ideale'?]. Per l'analisi dei testi, gli autori hanno utilizzato l'analisi del contenuto quantitativa e qualitativa (analisi del contenuto - analisi tematica classica). I risultati di questa ricerca in accordo con gli studi precedenti, suggeriscono che il ruolo dell'insegnante e il suo immagine "*ideale*", sono due concetti multidimensionali e non possono essere definite con precisione assoluta.

**Abstract**
The purpose of the research is to identify the views of education department students (from elementary and pre-school education departments), namely potential teachers, on the ideal teacher. This study attempts to map diverse views on the role and image of the teacher inherent in social discourse as social experience, regardless of whether or not there is special knowledge. The authors asked 588 students from elementary education and pre-school education departments to write a text in which they would describe their views as to what makes a perfect teacher [What, in your opinion, makes an ideal educator?]. For the analysis of the texts, the authors used quantitative and qualitative content analysis (content analysis – classical thematic analysis). The findings of this research in accordance with previous studies, suggest that the teacher's role and his/her "*ideal*" image, are two multidimensional concepts and cannot be defined with absolute precision.

**Parole Chiave**
Insegnante ideale; Educazione; Ruolo di insegnante

**Keywords**
Perfect teacher; Elementary and pre-school education; Role and image of the teacher

## 1. How teachers are being assessed

"*Teaching excellence is an on-going engagement with the scholarship of learning and teaching, an understanding of how students learn, a promotion of interactivity, and an all-round enhancement of student learning*" (Gibbs & Habeshaw, 2003).

Contemporary school is a social, pedagogical and bureaucratic organization (Barr and Dreeben, 1983; Sousa and Hoy, 1981; Meyer, 1977). The role of today's school is particularly complex. After family, school is a child's first major social environment. The child, in entering school for the first time, leaves his/her family and is asked to develop new ties with both his teachers and his classmates (Alexander, 2008). School has also an ideological operation in transferring the predominant normative-cultural beliefs and attitudes to students (Konstantinou, 1994, Kyridis, 1997, Engel, 2000). Finally, school transfers knowledge and socially approved information to students. The three knowledge-constitutive interests have been described in the works of Habermas (1972, 1974). Moreover, school is the main social mechanism for the reproduction of social hierarchy and social status (Kyridis, 1997, 2012).

The first to be called to respond to the new social conditions and educational needs is the teacher. The educational process itself is a multi-dimensional process. The new social and economic data together with the composition of modern society impose a new structured role for the educator (Beard, 2008; Esteve, 2000). The quality of this role, among others, can guarantee the quality of the educational process, which is crucial to the quality of human relations within society (Dermitzakis & Ioannidi, 2004). According to Konstantinou (1994) and Wilson (1995: 191), the teacher is called upon to play the role of pedagogue, educator, evaluator and guardian. In literature, we encounter the teacher as an adviser, an innovator, a worker, a molder of minds, etc. To these roles, that of the civil servant is added, which the teacher obtains upon his/her appointment. The teacher's role fulfillment depends on the configuration of the "*pedagogical self-role*" within certain spatiotemporal circumstances (Darling – Hammond, Wise & Klein, 1995).

In the States, there were strong reactions against the profile of the effective teacher described in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) education plan. For instance, the National Education Association (NEA) strongly criticized the specialized (i.e. highly trained) and "*Highly Qualified Effective Teacher"* profile under the NCLB, identifying five reasons to oppose such a plan. The NEA further stated that implementation would result in 25% of teachers being declared ineffective each year since actual working conditions in schools are not taken into account during implementation and evaluation. In fact, penalties are to be imposed that will limit these teachers' employment options. Actual teaching conditions are, however, extremely difficult for teachers, and not only in Greek schools. According to the data presented by Lemke (1994), 26% of new teachers (in large or small school districts) leave the profession within the first two years, while 60% leave within the first five years of teaching (Acocella, 2002: 1).

Teachers and the role they are called upon to play are subject to various influences. For instance their role depends on the social and political formation of the school, their training and social demands (Lawton, 1980; Grundy, 1987). In practical terms, a good teacher is one who meets all these demands. Furthermore, a good teacher is one who achieves the goals the educational system sets (Fenwick, 2001; Muijs and Reynolds 2010; Lissitz, 2005; Rowan, Correnti, and Miller, 2002). In contrast, Rockoff and Speroni (2010: 1) pointed out that "*value-added measures of effectiveness are noisy and can be biased if some teachers are persistently given students that are harder to teach in ways that administrative data do not measure (Woods et al. 1997). Thus, using other information may achieve more stability and accuracy in teacher evaluations*". Moreover, a good teacher is the teacher who pupils and their parents believe to be so (Peterson, Wahlquist, Brown and Mukhopadhyay, 2003). Pupils use a variety of factors in order to decide who is a "*good*" or a "*bad*" teacher. These variables are different from those that stakeholders, principals and parents usually have in mind (Crittenden and Norr, 1975; Peterson, Wahlquist, and Bone, 2000; Kohn, 1993; Kruse, 2000). Teacher assessment is thus a complex and complicated problem and can at any given point in time be viewed from different angles. Moreover, the issue of teacher assessment and the assessment of educational work has

produced voluminous and multifaceted literature over time. Popkewitz (1998:56) argues that particular notions of "*the good teacher*" (activity-oriented instruction, reflective practitioner), combined with particular assumptions about teacher knowledge (celebrating practical wisdom and "*recipe knowledge*") and practices that make teachers "*visible*" (through self-revelation), all work to produce particular teacher identities and behaviors by normalizing teachers' inner beliefs: teachers' "*thought is organized, perception directed, and action controlled*" (Fenwick, 2003).

Policy makers still describe specific competencies which are considered appropriate for a "*good teacher*" (Becker, Kennedy, & Hundersmarck, 2003 as cited in Korthagen, 2004; Cochran-Smith, 2001), even though many doubts have been expressed concerning the description of the quality of teaching in terms of competencies (Barnett, 1994; Hyland, 1994 as cited in Korthagen, 2004; Clandinin and Connelly, 1995). Hart and Teeter (2002: 1) described quality teaching as "*a teacher in every classroom who has a gift for designing learning experiences that engage young people and successfully communicate information and skills*". Smith (1995: 590) stated that: "*All teachers do good things some of the time, and all good teachers do bad things some of the time. The differences among teachers lie not only in the proportions of the good and the bad, but also in their awareness of the effects of what they are doing and their readiness to share this awareness with their students*".

Xochellis (1997-98: 12) noted that: "*The identification of the characteristics of the 'good teacher' or the types of 'effective teaching' has for a very long time been one of the main issues concerning educational research*". Indeed, he draws attention to the fact that *"[t]he debate is visible today with the emphasis placed on teacher education by the European Union and other international organizations. A typical example is the OECD report (1990), which asks the twofold question: How can we ensure the staffing of education with teachers who have a high level of training, skills and motivation and is it possible to increase the effectiveness of teacher education?"*

## 2. Research background

In the research of Kyridis A., et al. (2002), titled *Students describe the ideal university teacher,* 51 university students from the Department of Pre-School Education in Florina and the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki were asked to describe in text format the "*ideal university teacher*". The following were found: Students have demands from their teachers. They, first and foremost, consider them teachers in the literal sense of the term and with all those psychological and social elements associated with that profession. The students had also previously been pupils and had experienced all kinds of teachers. Their answers show that in the face of the University Professor, they expect to see an amazing teacher. Their demands are high: a teacher must be an expert in their academic field, they must have wider knowledge, promote research, have teaching and communicative skills, possess a comprehensive and intense personality and must meet certain student-set standards in terms of their external appearance (Kyridis, Dinas, Vlahaiti, Ioannitou and Lambropoulou, 2002).

In the research of Leondari and Kyridis (1999), 100 elementary school pupils (54 boys and 46 girls) attending schools in Florina and Thessaloniki were asked, during a language course, to write a text describing what they consider to be a good teacher (without mentioning specific persons). The following were found: The overall picture presented shows that children like understanding and support from their teachers, an emotional relationship not dominated by the syllabus. A "*good teacher*" is one that has the ability to preserve order and justice, teaching capability, the ability to explain and provide guidance on school work, offer friendship and demonstrate humor and kindness: these are the attributes typically placed at the top of schoolchildren's lists of what makes a good teacher. This research effort provides a cognitive understanding of pupils' perceptions of a "*good teacher*", seeks their underlying reality and affects both the day-to-day aspects of the educational process and pupil-teacher social interaction, as well as teachers' education.

In the research of Kyridis, Zagkos and Chronopoulou (2012) titled "*The 'qualified', the 'educated' and ... 'handsome teacher'. The profile of the ideal teacher of primary and secondary education according to the views of students in education departments and professorial faculties*", 350 students from early childhood and elementary education departments and professorial faculties were asked to produce a text in which they would describe their opinions on what makes an ideal teacher. The research found that the modern teacher must be constantly up-to-date with new developments that are taking place both in technology and at the psychological, pedagogical and socio-cultural level, and must especially have ingenuity, flexibility and the ability to adapt to new roles. Moreover, it has been pointed out by various individuals that the role of the teacher in the modern school is not limited to the mere transmission of knowledge, but has been expanded to help students in every aspect of their personal development and everyday life (Hart & Teeter, 2002; Gustafsson, 1977; Richards, 1996; Wright, 1987).

In Manesis, research *["In search of the perfect teacher: What do parents of various social groups expect?*" (2006)] attempted to study the views of parents of different social groups on their children's teachers in modern life conditions (social, economic, cultural, etc.). Pierre Bourdieu's theory was used, in which the action of the social agent is more understood. The following research question was set: *"What are the characteristics of the ideal teacher in the modern school?"* The hypothesis was as follows: *"Does parents' social class affect their expectations regarding the teacher?"* A questionnaire and interview were used to collect data. The findings suggest that a good teacher (his/her qualities) is not defined on the basis of the same criteria by parents of different social groups. Their social determinations and horizons make them see teachers from a different perspective and within a different context.

The icon-idea of the teacher is not the same. It differs in essential features. Parents from privileged social groups have more and qualitatively higher expectations. They consciously expect more from the teacher as an expert in their field, as a person and as a professional, while parents from disadvantaged social groups have far fewer, more practical and more specific expectations which relate mostly to the needs of their children (love, protect, control) (Manesis, 2006).

In another study, 17,414 8th-grade pupils from 6,429 classes of a Swedish school answered the question: "*What do you think are the characteristics of a good teacher?"* The answers were categorized by type of school, pupil gender, socio-economic status and intelligence scores. The analytical results depending on the combinations of the above parameters differ substantially. Different groups of pupils have different views on what constitutes a good teacher (Grahn and Gustapsson, 1969 in Thompson, Greer, Greer, 2004).

In a survey conducted in four schools from two provinces in Turkey, 181 16-18-year old pupils (141 girls and 40 boys) were asked to state the characteristics of a "*good*" teacher. The list of characteristics fell into three categories: technical/teaching ability (e.g. "explains well", "*maintains control and order*"), professionalism (e.g. "*immediately returns your work corrected and annotated*", "*is always well prepared*") and finally personal information related in terms of the "*style of the teacher or style of teaching*" (e.g. "*He/she is friendly*", "*says hello*" or "*acknowledges you outside the classroom*") (Açıkgöz Fırat (2005: 105).

At this point we should point out that humor has been described as an example of poor preparation and indifference on the part of the teacher who employs it ("*Characteristics of a good teacher*", 2010). Acocella (2002: 84), on the other hand, refers to humor as one of the parameters that determine the "*ideal teacher*" (pp. 24-38). She even cites research indicating that on the part of learners, humor indicates that there is social interaction with the teacher and should exist side by side with such interaction. Indeed, it is used to increase coherence or mitigate critical situations. Acocella (2002: 5) also states that pupils' perceptions of the ideal teacher remained unchanged over time, while the way in which a teacher responds to a given situation (e.g. facial expressions, tone of voice, gestures and body language) provides useful insight on their behavior, which is influenced by several factors, such as teacher training and professional training (knowledge of teaching methods for the subject in question). Instead, the

teaching style is measured by a combination of behaviors and personality traits and categorized as authoritarian versus democratic.

## 3. Purpose of the research

The attitudes, opinions and perceptions on teachers, regardless of the level of education that students form during their studies follow them throughout their student life. Moreover, they often reproduce the pattern they have internalized when they in turn are asked to serve as teachers in elementary or secondary education. Thus, we considered that the period when pupils become students — and particularly those in university faculties leading to teaching professions — is essential to capture what remains of their twelve-year experience of teachers in elementary or secondary education, which, having entered higher education, they have now begun to distance themselves from.

Although these views have not been systematically explored, they have often been recorded in international and in Greek literature. The literature covers this subject directly, from the perspective of primary sources, i.e. the teachers (Salteris and Raptis, 1993) and students (Bombas, 1995) themselves, on the issues primarily affecting them, and also indirectly, from the narrower (Koryfidis, 1983) or wider educational circle (Achlis and Loppa-Gountarouli, 1987). Consequently, we consider that listing students' attitudes, opinions and perceptions (Papapanou & Loukeri, 1993) will help to clarify what qualities approach that of the "*ideal teacher*". Reality, of course, is far from the "*ideal*", but we will ultimately outline the current "*standard*" of the ideal teacher through the students' experiential replies while the temporal distance between their current status and their time as schoolchildren contributes to a more objective opinion.

The purpose of the research is to identify the views of education department students (from elementary and pre-school education departments), namely potential teachers, on the ideal teacher. These views may be regarded as a combination or result of personal experiences from the school years, but at the same time also as structured views which were formed during studies in university departments dominated by pedagogical discourse (education departments and schools of education). At the same time, this study attempts to map diverse views on the role and image of the teacher inherent in social discourse as social experience, regardless of whether or not there is special knowledge.

## 4. Methodology

We asked 588 students from elementary education and pre-school education departments to write a text in which they would describe their views as to what makes a perfect teacher [What, in your opinion, makes an ideal educator?]. For the analysis of the texts, we used quantitative and qualitative content analysis (content analysis – classical thematic analysis) (Holsti, 1969; Berelson, 1971; De Sola Pool, 1959; Palmquist, 1990; Weber, 1990; Moscovici, 1970; Mucchielli, 1988; Veron, 1981; Bardin, 1977; Grawitz, 1981) (classical thematic analysis). The "*theme*" was considered as the basic unit of analysis (Lasswell, Lerner, & Sola Pool, 1952; Lasswell & Leites, 1965).

Qualitative content analysis does not produce counts and statistical significance. Instead, it uncovers patterns, themes, and categories important to a social reality. Qualitative content analysis defines itself within this framework as an approach of empirical, methodological controlled analysis of texts within their context of communication, following content analytical rules and step by step models, without rash quantification (Mayring, 2000). Qualitative content analysis involves a process designed to condense raw data into categories or themes based on valid inference and interpretation. This process uses inductive reasoning, by which themes and categories emerge from the data through the researcher's careful examination and constant comparison. But qualitative content analysis does not need to exclude deductive reasoning

(Patton, 2002). Generating concepts or variables from theory or previous studies is also very useful for qualitative research, especially at the inception of data analysis (Berg, 2001).

It should be noted that in our research effort we used variables that broadly describe familial socio-economic origins, such as education, parents' occupation, the school attended by the children [private/public] and the degree of urbanity. Other variables were gender and age. From the writings gathered, 2,690 relative statements emerged, which were incorporated into 8 thematic categories as well as related subcategories. Cohen's Kappa Coefficient, measuring the agreement among the researchers in the distribution of reports by topic and subject category, showed agreement κ= 0.98 (Cohen, 1960; Uebersax, 1987; Smeeton, 1985; Strijbos et al. 2006; Scott, 1955). Cohen's Kappa Coefficient is expressed by the following equation:

$$\kappa = \frac{\Pr(a) - \Pr(e)}{1 - \Pr(e)},$$

## 5. Results
## 5.1 Quantitative analysis
## 5.1.2 Sample of subjects

**Table 1.**
The Sample: Demographic and Social Characteristics

| Gender | f | | % | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Male | 162 | | 27.6 | | |
| Female | 426 | | 72.4 | | |
| **Father's profession** | **f** | **%** | **Mother's profession** | **f** | **%** |
| Freelance professional | 78 | 13.3 | Freelance professional | 25 | 4.3 |
| Civil servant | 168 | 28.6 | Civil servant | 133 | 22.6 |
| Private sector employee | 108 | 18.4 | Private sector employee | 138 | 23.5 |
| Freelance technician | 82 | 13.9 | Freelance technician | 59 | 10.0 |
| Trader | 51 | 8.7 | Trader | 36 | 6.1 |
| Blue collar worker | 35 | 6.0 | Blue collar worker | 15 | 2.6 |
| Farmer | 66 | 11.2 | Farmer | 35 | 6.0 |
| Domestic duties | | | Domestic duties | 147 | 25.0 |
| **Father's education** | **f** | **%** | **Mother's education** | **f** | **%** |
| Illiterate | 10 | 1.7 | Illiterate | 6 | 1.0 |
| Elementary School Graduate | 125 | 21.3 | Elementary School Graduate | 120 | 20.4 |
| Secondary School Graduate | 209 | 35.5 | Secondary School Graduate | 251 | 42.7 |
| Technological Institute Graduate | 116 | 19.7 | Technological Institute Graduate | 98 | 16.7 |
| University Graduate | 86 | 14.6 | University Graduate | 91 | 15.5 |
| Post Graduate Degree | 42 | 7.1 | Post Graduate Degree | 22 | 3.7 |
| **Graduate level** | **f** | **%** | **Age** | **f** | **%** |
| Department of Elementary Education | 276 | 46.9 | 17 - 20 | 375 | 63.8 |
| Department of Preschool Education | 312 | 53.1 | 21 - 23 | 133 | 22.6 |
| **Residence** | **f** | **%** | 24 - 30 | 44 | 7.5 |
| Major urban area | 200 | 34.0 | 31 and over | 36 | 6.1 |
| Urban area | 262 | 44.6 | | | |
| Town | 104 | 17.7 | | | |
| Rural area | 22 | 3.7 | | | |

**Table 2.**
Distribution of Statements according to Demographic and Social Characteristics

| Gender | f | | % | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Male | 739 | | 27.5 | | |
| Female | 1951 | | 72.5 | | |
| **Father's profession** | **f** | **%** | **Mother's profession** | **f** | **%** |
| Freelance professional | 328 | 12.2 | Freelance professional | 99 | 3.7 |
| Civil servant | 824 | 30.6 | Civil servant | 567 | 21.1 |
| Private sector employee | 502 | 18.7 | Private sector employee | 623 | 23.2 |
| Freelance technician | 344 | 12.8 | Freelance technician | 306 | 11.4 |
| Trader | 238 | 8.8 | Trader | 208 | 7.7 |
| Blue collar worker | 173 | 6.4 | Blue collar worker | 72 | 2.7 |
| Farmer | 281 | 10.4 | Farmer | 145 | 5.4 |
| Domestic duties | 0 | 0 | Domestic duties | 670 | 24.9 |
| **Father's education** | **f** | **%** | **Mother's education** | **f** | **%** |
| Illiterate | 41 | 1.5 | Illiterate | 24 | 0.9 |
| Elementary School Graduate | 593 | 22.0 | Elementary School Graduate | 551 | 20.5 |
| Secondary School Graduate | 969 | 36.0 | Secondary School Graduate | 1175 | 43.7 |
| Technological Institute Graduate | 503 | 18.7 | Technological Institute Graduate | 415 | 15.4 |
| University Graduate | 418 | 15.5 | University Graduate | 447 | 16.6 |
| Post Graduate Degree | 166 | 6.2 | Post Graduate Degree | 78 | 2.9 |
| **Graduate level** | **f** | **%** | **Age** | **f** | **%** |
| Department of Elementary Education | 1162 | 43.2 | 17 - 20 | 1698 | 63.1 |
| Department of Preschool Education | 1528 | 56.8 | 21 - 23 | 643 | 23.9 |
| **Residence** | **f** | **%** | 24 - 30 | 198 | 7.4 |
| Major urban area | 944 | 35.1 | 31 and over | 151 | 5.6 |
| Urban area | 1179 | 43.8 | | | |
| Town | 476 | 17.7 | | | |
| Rural area | 91 | 3.4 | | | |

**Table 3.**
Distribution of Statements by Thematic Category and Subcategory

| Thematic categories and subcategories | f | % |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Background knowledge and training | 430 | 16.0 |
| *1.1. Knowledge/Training* | *330* | *12.3* |
| *1.2. Experience* | *21* | *0.8* |
| *1.3. Creativity/Imagination* | *23* | *0.9* |
| *1.4. Intelligence* | *44* | *1.6* |
| *1.5. General Education* | *12* | *0.4* |
| 2. Personality traits | 1055 | 39.2 |
| *2.1. Politeness* | *117* | *4.3* |
| *2.2. Patience/Understanding* | *266* | *9.9* |
| *2.3. Political awareness/Democratic elements/Progressiveness* | *88* | *3.3* |
| *2.4.* | *1* | *0* |
| *2.5. Meritocracy/Justice* | *138* | *5.1* |
| *2.6. Characteristics of authority* | *81* | *3.0* |
| *2.7. Approachable /Friendly* | *192* | *7.1* |
| *2.8. Cheerful* | *79* | *2.9* |
| *2.9. Communicative* | *93* | *3.5* |
| 3. Educational process | 991 | 36.8 |
| *3.1. Effectiveness in communication* | *261* | *9.7* |
| *3.2. Spirit of cooperation* | *225* | *8.4* |
| *3.3. Consistency* | *50* | *1.9* |
| *3.4. Flexibility / Organization* | *234* | *8.7* |
| *3.5. Industriousness* | *81* | *3.0* |
| *3.6. Child-centrism* | *139* | *5.2* |
| 4. Love for his/her profession | 167 | 6.2 |
| 5. There is no ideal teacher | 18 | 0.7 |
| 6. External appearance | 21 | 0.8 |
| *6.1. Age* | *5* | *0.2* |
| *6.2. Beauty* | *11* | *0.4* |
| *6.3. Other features* | *5* | *0.2* |
| 7. Evaluation | 3 | 0.1 |
| 8. Socialization of children | 5 | 0.2 |
| Total | 2690 | 100.0 |

**5.2 Qualitative analysis**
**5.2.1 Presentation of data by thematic category and subcategory**

A. The first thematic category concerns Background knowledge and training. In this category we find five subcategories:

a) One of the first things that students look for in an ideal teacher is for him/her to have knowledge and to be trained (330 statements, 12.3%). The demands on the teacher range from knowledge of the subject he/she teaches *("to have lots of knowledge …/ to hold a plethora of knowledge on the subject taught …")* to specialized training on that subject *("excellent knowledge of the curriculum …/ to be highly trained …/to have specialized knowledge of pedagogic science …")*. This training does not stop and is hardly ever completed *("University, pedagogic training …/ sufficient in order to make proper use of the right to evaluate students …/ to participate in training seminars to update his/her knowledge …")*.

b) A small but not negligible requirement of students is teaching experience (21 statements, 0.8%), not only in terms of the knowledge possessed, but also in terms of the psychology of the children that the teacher has undertaken to teach, in order to be able to provide his/her assistance as appropriate in each case *("to have a master's degree in children's psychology…/to know where the student needs help…/to have full knowledge…").*

c) Knowledge and training is enhanced by creativity/imagination, which is another factor deemed necessary (23 statements, 0.9%) for the ideal teacher. At all levels of education these are respected qualities, and it seems especially in elementary education *("to have creativity and imagination…/to be creative…/to have imagination…").*

d) Intelligence is also an important factor for a teacher according to students (44 statements, 1.6%), who wish the ideal teacher to have ingenuity and inventiveness in his/her teaching methodology and to think critically *("to be inventive …/ to be smart …/ be imaginative …"* as well as *"critical … / witty …").*

e) The first thematic category concludes with general education being a necessary quality of an ideal teacher: i.e., it is not enough for an educator to simply know his/her subject very well; they must also be cultivated. For this reason, solid academic training must be complemented by a broad general education. Therefore, students responded that a teacher's general education is useful (12 statements, 0.4%) and that a teacher should also, among other things, be a bearer of moral values *("to transmit and disseminate to them moral values so that they may become better people…/ to have values and ideals …/ to be cultivated …/ to know how to behave …").*

B. The second thematic category concerns the personality traits of a teacher and is subdivided into eight subcategories.

a) Politeness is considered to be a key characteristic by a large proportion of students (117 statements, 4.3%) since the teacher not only has to respect children but also to show that respect, i.e. to behave accordingly in the classroom *("not yelling at children (rigorous) .../ not to offend children …/ to be good with children …/* be kind-hearted …")

*b)* Patience and understanding are deemed to be key elements in the ideal's teacher character (266 statements, 9.9%). Such a teacher should support children's efforts and be a patient presence during the teaching process. *To listen and understand the needs of all children ("Patience with children …/ knowing the needs of the students …/ be calm.../ tolerant …/resilient with kids…").*

*c)* Attributes such as political awareness/ democratic elements/ progressiveness are desired for the ideal teacher by a substantial number of students (88 statements, 3.3%). These attributes are important tools in a world that is constantly changing, and are necessary for an educator, so that they may be able to have a rapport with children and demonstrate a solid understanding of social issues and problems in the context of teaching *("receptivity to diversity …/ to be conciliatory / to be a humanist, in order to nurture the spirit and placate the soul …/ to be a restless spirit – a visionary – a carrier of progressive ideas.../ to be able to listen…").*

d) Meritocracy/Justice is an equally important aspect of a teacher's character (138 statements, 5.1%). According to students, a teacher should treat pupils equally and try not to be unfair or discriminatory against some of them *("to be impartial …/ not to discriminate …/ be objective …/ equal treatment of children …/ respect for the diversity of children …/* to be fair ...").

*e)* Characteristics of authority reinforce the image of a teacher (81 statements, 3.0%), who must function as a teaching model, inspiring respect and serving as a proper example for children to follow *("to be able to impose order.../ to be a model for kids …/ to gain the respect of children ... / to be a model of behavior …/ to inspire respect and appreciation in children …").*

*f)* Another crucial element is for a teacher to be *approachable and friendly* (192 statements, 7.1%), thus facilitating the educational process since students feel free to ask questions, express their views on the subject under discussion and obtain the answers they want in a familiar, friendly teaching environment *("to be close to children …/ not to be too strict ... / be friendly ... /approachable to young people…/ communicative …")*

*g)* Clearly, according to students, a teacher is required to be cheerful (79 statements, 2.9%), an element necessary for them to better perform their pedagogical function, to be simultaneously productive and also to use easily understood, lively language during lessons. Therefore, students seek a cheerful teacher, with humor, a teacher who leaves his/her problems outside the classroom, attributes which makes them feel happy and pleased *("to have humor …/ always be cheerful …/ to have fun …/ excitement.../ to use laughter as a facilitator of learning …/ to be able to hide his/her personal problems and not to transmit them to the children…/ pleasant to pupils …").*

h) Finally, in students' opinion (93 statements, 3.5%), a key trait in a teacher is the ability to be communicative, since adopting a methodical approach when dealing with children is a decisive factor in ensuring that the educational process progresses smoothly *("sociable …/ to have direct contact with children …/ must be willing to listen to his/her students ...").*

C. The third thematic category refers to the educational process. In this category six subcategories are included.

a) Effectiveness in communication is an important factor**,** necessary for the curriculum to be assimilated and to achieve a broader understanding of the material taught (261 statements, 9.7%). According to students, the teacher must be an effective communicator, i.e. through his/her teaching, the transmitted knowledge must be easily understood. *("to be understandable …/ to communicate effectively…/ to be able to clarify things …/ to teach in the right way …/to be able to teach in an easily understood manner…").*

b) To have a spirit of cooperation in order to become an ally to pupils in their acquisition of knowledge, to diligently answer any of their queries and comment on their reflections. According to students, the ideal teacher should be cooperative (225 statements, 8.4%): *"to use motivating words …/ to promote dialogue …/to work together with the children's parents…/ to respond to children's questions…/ to converse with children …/ to be conciliatory with schoolboys and girls…».*

c) Moreover, consistency should be one of the ideal teacher's characteristics, according to a considerable number of students (50 statements, 1.9%) since lesson planning, consistency in terms of the curriculum and the broader educational program are considered to be fundamental *("to properly do his job …/ consistent with its obligations …/ responsible …/ to have accountability on his/her obligations and duties…/ to be motivated by responsibility… / be consistent …").*

d) Flexibility and organization (234 statements 8.7%) as a means of time management in teaching are useful traits for a teacher who knows how to maneuver in order to fully exploit the possibilities a lesson provides and at the same time adapt to pupils' needs and interests; i.e. to comply with their spirit, not imparting knowledge in a sterile manner but rather using his/her imagination and thinking progressively (*"to follow the*

*curriculum… / to be conciliatory…/ creative …/ organizational …/ open to new stimuli …/ not to hesitate to try new things and to evolve …/ to properly organize the classroom and teaching time …/ no stereotyping...).*

e) Industriousness is presented by students as a fundamental prerequisite for an ideal educator (81 statements, 3.0%). The ideal teacher must not be static and passive in his/her work. Instead, he/she must use diligence as an internal tool that enhances the efficiency and functionality of the course *("striving to shape his/her students into tomorrow's good citizens …/ a love of learning …/ not to be indifferent …/ be industrious …/ to have an appetite and enthusiasm for the profession…/ devoted to his/her work…/to have a pro-research profile…/ insatiable character …/ energetic …").*

f) Child-centrism is judged by students as an essential yardstick for the ideal teacher (139 statements, 5.2%). The teaching project and the full attention of teaching are focused on each student. The correct understanding of the function of education from a child-centered perspective is essential *("he/she should be interactive and not teacher-centered …/to consider pupils to be important and not to behave as though they are inferior…/ personal contact with the child …/ the focal point of teaching is not the teacher but the children …/ to respect the needs and interests of children …/to be interested in the progress of pupils at both the educational and personal level …").*

D. The fourth thematic category refers to the love a teacher feels for his/her profession. For a teacher, a joyful willingness to work is essential, together with a dedication to the teaching profession, an immense love for children and an awareness of his/her noble calling *("to love kids …/to adore children…/to love his/her work…/ love for his/her profession…/to see his/her work as a vocation and not view it in a utilitarian manner…").*

E. The fifth thematic category refers to the notion that there is no ideal teacher. This view is supported by some students (18 statements, 0.7%), who believe that there cannot be an ideal teacher, such a belief being due to their own personal experience (frustration), or because they feel that what is ideal for one person may not be ideal for another, so it is something entirely subjective *("There is no ideal teacher profile …/ moody, funny, stupid, uneducated, retarded, epileptic …/Is there such a thing??…/ I think the ideal educator does not exist …/ the profile of an ideal educator is completely subjective …").*

F. The sixth thematic category refers to a teacher's external appearance. This category is divided into three subcategories.

a) An older age is desired by some due to the experience it represents, but not by other students (5 statements, 0.2%), who want a younger teacher, since a young teacher brings a youthful mentality, educationally innovative ideas and imagination into the language and the approach of the subject taught as well as into the interpersonal student-teacher relationship itself *("of a young age …/young.../to be young in order to come closer to pupils' 'wants'…").*

b) For a number of students (11 statements, 0.4%) beauty is also another factor supportive to the ideal teacher's profile. A "*good-looking*" teacher is important to some students, who place importance on outer appearance, which for the particular object of teaching is for many irrelevant *("with a nice look …/ handsome …/to have a good external appearance… / attractive... /easy going appearance…").*

c) Other features that the ideal teacher must have according to students (5 statements, 0.2%) are his/her language, his/her "*warm voice*", his/her overall aesthetics and views which, according to some spurs the imagination and creativity of students *("to be lovable …/ to have a soulful voice …/ to appreciate beauty …").*

G. The seventh thematic category is the teacher's practice of evaluation. A number of students (3 statements, 0.1%) emphasize the evaluation factor, according to which the teacher should actually encourage pupils with the grades he/she gives them *("to give good grades …/ be lenient ...")*.

H. The eighth thematic category refers to children's socialization. Students believe (5 statements, 0.2%) that the ideal teacher's basic criterion is to facilitate children's socialization and to prepare them for the future, and it is in this direction that the ideal teacher needs to steer his/her pedagogical objectives *("to have a sense of social responsibility …/ to promote their socialization, but also educate them …/ must encourage students to say what they think and to criticize.../ to help them adapt to the needs of society …")*.


## 6. The 'ideal teacher's' profile according to students

According to the surveyed students, the "*ideal*" elementary school teacher is defined as follows:

A sound educational background and training is a fundamental prerequisite for the "*ideal teacher*". It is therefore necessary for a teacher to have "*a lot of knowledge*", "*be skilled*" and generally have "*good personal training*". Experience is an equally important factor since the teacher must "know where the pupil needs help", "*know the psychological situation of the child*" and in general "*be aware of what he/she does*". Creativity and imagination are an additional factor: "*with creativity and imagination*", "*to have imagination*", "*creativity*", *"to be creative"*. Intelligence is equally important as he/she ought to be "*clever*", "*inventive*" and "*imaginative*". General education (being cultivated) also characterizes the ideal teacher, since he/she is the one who can "*transmit and disseminate moral values to children so that they may become better people*", and "*have values and ideals*", while being "*cultivated*".

In terms of personality traits: to be polite, "*kind*", "*well-mannered*", "*goodhearted*", "*cheerful*", "*not to yell at children (strict)*"; to have patience and understanding, "*to have patience and to listen*", "*tolerance, lenience*", to "*understand children*", "*to have patience with children*". Political awareness, democratic traits and progressiveness are important: "*updated transmitted knowledge*", "*receptivity to diversity*", "*to respect the diversity of some children and try to smoothly integrate them into the classroom*", to be "*open-minded, progressive*", "*a restless spirit – visionary – bearer of progressive ideas*", "*teach depending on children's diversity*".

The ideal teacher should be characterized by meritocracy and justice, "*to include all the children in the lesson rather than simply reciting it*", be "*objective*", be "*fair and treat all children the same*", "*not to discriminate*", "*treat each student individually, and also equally and fairly*". The characteristics of authority also feature in the ideal teacher's profile: "*to be able to impose order*", "*to be a model for kids*", "*to gain the respect of children*", "*to be a model of behavior*", "*to inspire respect and appreciation in children*". To be approachable/friendly: "*to be approachable to young people*", "*friendly*", "*close to children*", "*not to be unapproachable*", "*to be accessible, so as to gain the confidence of children*". The ideal teacher is cheerful, "*has humor*", is "*always good-tempered*", "*enthusiastic*", "*fun*", "*conceals his/her personal problems and doesn't transmit them to children*" and is "*pleasant to the pupils*". The ability to be communicative is another feature of the ideal teacher, who "*converses with his/her pupils*", "*helps pupils when they need it*", is "*direct*", "*listens to children's questions*", is "*communicative*", "*eager for dialogue/debate*", "*has direct contact with children*", is "*straight*", "*listens not only to the questions*".

In the educational process, the ideal teacher should be an effective communicator, "*to try impart his/her knowledge*", "*be able to communicate his/her knowledge*", "*be interested in offering his/her knowledge to students*", "*be able to find ways to approach children*". The ideal teacher should be characterized by a spirit of cooperation, "*to discuss with children*", "*to not be indifferent*", to help "*strengthen dialogue*", "*to be cooperative*", "*know how to listen*", "*offer support with children's problems*", "*encourage pupils to ask questions*", "*be 'accessible'*", "*cooperate with parents and guardians*", "*be approachable*". In addition, the ideal teacher must possess consistency: he/she must "*be consistent*", "*conscious and aware*", "*show

*perseverance*", be "*disciplined*" and have "*demands*". Flexibility/organization is an additional feature of the ideal teacher, who has to be "*creative*", "*evolve*" his/her teaching, "*also draw children's attention to what he/she is teaching*", and "*find different ways of transmitting knowledge, beyond just talking incessantly and making kids bored*". "*The ideal teacher is one who does not impose knowledge, but in using discussion and possibly by disagreeing he/she tries to elicit knowledge in students or even learn from them*". Hard work should characterize him/her: such a teacher must "*fight so that his/her students become tomorrow's good citizens*", have "*a love for learning*", "*not be indifferent*", "*be hardworking*", "*should want to work hard and not only be well settled as a civil servant*", and generally "*be good at his/her work*". He/she should also be characterized by child centrism, "*to have the ability to stimulate children's interests*", "*not adopt a teacher-centered role*", "*care for children"* and *"and be interesting*", "*have interaction*", and "*adapt to pupils' needs*".

The ideal teacher should also love his/her work, *"love children*", "*adore children*", and generally "*have a love for the profession*". As for his/her external appearance, age is important since "*he/she should be young in order to be close to pupils needs*", should be "*young*", "*of a young age*", and as of beauty, he/she "*should have good looks*", "*be attractive*", "*be handsome*", "*have looks*", and as regards additional features, be "*lovable*", "*likable*", "*playful*".
In terms of evaluating students: an ideal teacher must "*give good grades*" and be "*lenient*".

Finally, where children's socialization is concerned, he/she has to "*have a sense of social responsibility*", "*promote their socialization but also their education*", as "*we need to encourage pupils to say what they think and also be able to criticize*" and "*help them adapt to the needs of society*".


## 7. Conclusions

The findings of this research in accordance with previous studies, suggest that the teacher's role and his/her "*ideal*" image, are two multidimensional concepts and cannot be defined with absolute precision. We show that different entities/subjects express different opinions on this role (the media, the State, the students). Even taking into consideration individuals belonging to the same category, as are students from education departments, there cannot be a "*definition*", a "*recipe*" that could make someone an "*ideal*" teacher.

However, through the students' answers on "*what makes an ideal teacher*", a number of characteristics were identified, which we could say form the profile of a "*good teacher*". These, according to the findings, are summarized in the following thematic categories: a) background and training, b) personality traits, c) educational process, d) a love for his/her profession, e) external appearance, f) evaluation and g) children's socialization. There were also views arguing that there is no "*ideal*" teacher. It was impressive that the majority of students pay special attention to personality traits in defining the "*ideal*" teacher, i.e. he/she should be polite, cheerful, approachable, with a lot of understanding and patience, democratic and fair. This is followed by a teacher's behavior during the educational process (be organized, put children above all, be cooperative) and subsequently by his/her thorough knowledge of the subject, his/her training, intelligence and in general his/her academic status.

 To sum up, the ideal teacher according to the subjects of the research should, among others characteristics, be "*highly trained*", "*creative*", "*critical*", "*kind-hearted*", "*tolerant*", "*carrier of progressive ideas*"," *objective*", "*communicative*", "*sociable*", "*conciliatory*" and "*responsible*". Furthermore, according to the findings of the research, the ideal teacher should "*have an appetite and enthusiasm for his/her profession*", "*have personal contact with the child*", "*know where the student needs help*", "*know how to behave*", "*have fun*", "*converse with children*" and finally "*inspire respect and appreciation in children*"

Students have gone through all the learning phases in getting to become teachers themselves, studying at education departments and having had pleasant and unpleasant experiences in the course of their schooling so far. In fact, they will continue to have meaningful educational

experiences until the completion of their studies. What they have concluded from these experiences and from their contact with various teachers, is that in order for someone to be a good teacher, he/she must first be a good person, with moral standards and character. It transpires from their answers that this is the most fundamental, and all the other attributes follow.

Thus, the entire educational practice should consider these 7 categories that include the characteristics of a "*good teacher*" as part of an evaluation that will bring only positive results to those assessed. It is also a way to facilitate the smooth progress of pupils in all areas.

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