

Teacher Professional Identity, Psychological Well-Being, and Educational Policy in Türkiye

Öğretmen Mesleki Kimliği, Psikolojik İyi Oluş ve Türkiye'de Eğitim Politikası

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Öz

Öğretmen mesleki kimliği, neoliberal reformlar çerçevesinde belirgin biçimde dönüşen eğitim politikalarınca biçimlendirilmektedir. Bu çalışmada, Türkiye'deki devlet ortaöğretim okullarında görev yapan öğretmenlerin aktivist ve girişimci mesleki kimlikleri (Sachs, 2001, 2003) ne ölçüde benimsedikleri ve her bir kimlik türünün öğretmenlerin psikolojik iyi oluşları ile nasıl bir ilişki içinde olduğu incelenmiştir. Çalışmada ilişkisel araştırma modeli kullanılmış olup veriler, Türkiye'nin Batı Karadeniz Bölgesi'ndeki 17 devlet ortaöğretim kurumunda görev yapan 290 öğretmenden elde edilmiştir. Veri toplama aracı olarak, bu çalışma kapsamında geliştirilen Aktivist Öğretmen Kimliği Ölçeği ve Girişimci Öğretmen Kimliği Ölçeği ile Diener ve diğerleri (2010) tarafından geliştirilip Telef (2013) tarafından Türkçeye uyarlanan Psikolojik İyi Oluş Ölçeği kullanılmıştır. Bulgular, öğretmenlerin aktivist kimlik düzeylerinin yüksek ($\bar{X} = 4,14$), girişimci kimlik düzeylerinin ise düşük ($\bar{X} = 2,55$) olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Pearson korelasyon analizi sonuçları, aktivist kimlik ile psikolojik iyi oluş arasında pozitif yönde ve orta düzeyde ($r = ,33$; $p < ,01$); girişimci kimlik ile psikolojik iyi oluş arasında ise negatif yönde ve düşük düzeyde ($r = -,20$; $p < ,01$) anlamlı bir ilişki bulunduğunu göstermiştir. Elde edilen bulgular, demokratik, işbirlikçi ve eleştirel bir biçimde mesleğe bağlı değerlerin öğretmenlerin iyi oluş düzeyini olumlu yönde desteklediğine; buna karşılık yönetimsel ve performans dayalı rollerle özdeşleşmenin iyi oluşu olumsuz etkilediğine işaret etmektedir. Çalışma sonunda elde edilen bulgular; eğitim politikası, öğretmen yetiştirme ve hizmet içi eğitim açısından tartışılmıştır.

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Abstract

Teacher professional identity is shaped by educational policies that have shifted markedly under neoliberal reform. This study examined the extent to which Turkish high school teachers in state schools adopt activist and entrepreneurial professional identities (Sachs, 2001, 2003) and how each identity type relates to their psychological well-being. A correlational survey design was used with 290 teachers from 17 public secondary schools in the Western Black Sea Region of Türkiye. Data were collected using the Activist Teacher Identity Scale (ATIS) and the Entrepreneur Teacher Identity Scale (ETIS), both developed for this study, together with the Turkish version (Telef, 2013) of Diener et al.'s (2010) Flourishing Scale. Teachers reported a high level of activist identity ($M = 4.14$) and a low level of entrepreneur identity ($M = 2.55$). Pearson correlations indicated a positive, moderate relationship between activist identity and psychological well-being ($r = .33$, $p < .01$) and a negative, weak relationship between entrepreneur identity and psychological well-being ($r = -.20$, $p < .01$). The findings suggest that democratic, collaborative, and critically engaged professional values are associated with greater well-being among teachers, whereas identification with managerial, performance-driven roles is associated with diminished well-being. Implications for policy, teacher education, and in-service support are discussed.



Giriş

Since the Industrial Revolution, social demands and labour-market expectations have reshaped schooling and the roles teachers are expected to play. The expansion of neoliberal policies from the 1980s onward has accelerated this transformation, redirecting public education toward market-oriented aims and altering how teachers understand themselves as professionals (Friedman & Friedman, 1990; Hayek, 2013; Schultz, 1971). Against this backdrop, teacher professional identity (TPI) has emerged as a central concept for understanding how teachers negotiate their values, effort, and sense of purpose within shifting policy environments (Gu & Day, 2007; Lamote & Engels, 2010).

Two competing discourses underpin contemporary debates on TPI. The first, rooted in human capital theory, treats education as an investment in workforce productivity and teachers as delivery agents of measurable outcomes (Friedman & Friedman, 1990; Schultz, 1971). The second, informed by critical pedagogy, reframes education as a democratic and humanising practice and casts teachers as intellectual and ethical agents (Apple, 2001, 2004; Dewey, 2001; Freire, 2006; Giroux, 1988; McLaren, 1995; Sachs, 2003; Smyth, 2011). Sachs (2001, 2003) captured these competing pressures in a typology that distinguishes the activist teacher, who values democratic participation, critical inquiry, collaboration, and social responsibility, from the entrepreneur teacher, shaped by managerial discourses of accountability, competition, standardisation, and externally defined effectiveness.

Professional identity is not only cognitive and discursive but also affective: it carries emotional weight and shapes how teachers experience their work (Nias, 1996; Zembylas, 2003). Among teachers, psychological well-being has been linked to engagement, professional commitment, and resilience (Day & Kington, 2008; Parker & Martin, 2009), while rapid reforms and externally imposed policy changes have been shown to erode teachers' emotional well-being across a range of contexts (Hargreaves, 2005; Kelchtermans, 2005; Lasky, 2005; Schmidt & Datnow, 2005). There are, therefore, theoretical reasons to expect that TPI and psychological well-being are connected: the activist identity emphasises autonomy, meaningful work, collaborative relationships, and purpose, dimensions that overlap directly with core constructs of well-being, whereas the entrepreneur identity is characterised by externally imposed goals, competition, and compliance, which may undermine the same constructs. Yet, although each construct has been investigated extensively in its own right (e.g., Beijaard et al., 2004; Beltman et al., 2015; Canrinus et al., 2011; Fiorilli et al., 2015; Hargreaves, 2005; Lamote & Engels, 2010; Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011), no empirical study to our knowledge has examined the relationship between Turkish teachers' adoption of activist and entrepreneur identities and their psychological well-being. This gap is particularly salient in Türkiye, where centralised education reforms have intensified since the 2000s. The present study, therefore, addresses three research questions:

RQ1. What are teachers' perceptions of their professional identities as 'activists' and 'entrepreneurs'?

RQ2. Do teachers' perceptions of activist and entrepreneur identities differ significantly by gender, educational background, faculty of graduation, years of experience, and union membership?

RQ3. What is the relationship between teachers' activist and entrepreneur identity perceptions and their psychological well-being?

In addressing these questions, the study makes two contributions. Theoretically, it extends Sachs's (2001, 2003) activist-entrepreneur typology beyond its original descriptive scope by linking the two identity orientations to a measurable psychological outcome. Empirically, it provides the first evidence, to our knowledge, on how these orientations relate to teacher psychological well-being in the Turkish context, where centralised education reforms have reshaped the teaching profession.

Literature Review

Teacher Professional Identity (TPI)

Professional identity is a complex and dynamic phenomenon that involves the various roles teachers feel they need to play, balanced with their self-perception (Volkmann & Anderson, 1998). Historical, psychological, and cultural factors can all affect the teacher's self-perception as a professional, and professional identity may involve conflicting or coherent sub-identities (Beijaard et al., 2004). Its formation should begin with professional identity awareness during teacher education (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009) and is shaped thereafter by personal experience, the professional environment, and the external political climate (Day, 2002; Sachs, 2001). Managerial policies have, in recent decades, driven visible changes in teachers' work and, in the expectations, directed at them: a market-oriented, competitive perspective foresees fundamental alterations in teacher roles, pursued through policy instruments that vary across countries. Mockler (2013), for instance, argues that regulations in teacher education policies indicate a tendency to shift the teacher role toward an entrepreneurial form. Within this broader context of discourses, Sachs (2001) distinguishes two professional identities, the 'activist' and the 'entrepreneur', around which teachers orient their practice.

Activist Teacher Professional Identity (ATIS)

The Activist Teacher Professional Identity is characterised by traits that ensure teachers are well-informed and encourage open discussion. Teachers who adopt this identity trust in people's collective capacity and value the critical analysis of ideas, problems, and policies. They also prioritise the welfare of others, the public good, and the rights and dignity of individuals and minority groups, recognising the importance of a well-organised environment to foster a democratic lifestyle (Beane & Apple, 1995). Activist teachers understand that their responsibilities extend beyond the classroom and strive to contribute to the school, the educational system, their students, and the broader community (Day & Sachs, 2004). Giroux (1985) describes the activist teacher as a "transformative intellectual" who must work to enhance students' critical thinking skills; by framing education as a political act and a reflection of power relations in society, he underscores teachers' obligation to humanise education and address economic, social, and political inequalities (Giroux & McLaren, 1986). The activist teacher identity, which contrasts with the entrepreneur identity, thus centres on critical thinking, care, and advocacy for the rights and dignity of minority and disadvantaged groups (Beane & Apple, 1995; Sachs, 2003; Smyth, 2011).

Entrepreneur Teacher Professional Identity (ETIS)

Free-market expectations central to managerial discourses heavily influence the development of teacher professional identity. These discourses emphasise the need for teachers to be effective, accountable, and competitive, and give rise to the concept of Entrepreneur Teacher Professional Identity. This identity is characterised by individualistic, competitive, controlling, and regulating teachers whose roles are defined externally (Day & Sachs, 2004; Sachs, 2001). Entrepreneurial teachers not only meet the expectations set for them but also present their achievements as evidence of alignment with externally defined standards (Day & Sachs, 2004). Profit-oriented working conditions borrowed from private enterprise, expectations of effectiveness and accountability, competition arising from cuts in public investment, and standardised curricula imposed on teachers are commonly cited as the main drivers of ETIS (Apple, 1987; Day & Sachs, 2004; Sachs, 2000, 2001, 2003; Yıldız, 2014).

In Türkiye, Buyruk (2015) analyses a parallel shift: standardised national tests, centralised curricula, and increasingly insecure employment arrangements have narrowed the teacher role toward test preparation. Yıldız (2014), extending Hargreaves's (2000) four-age classification, traces a historical trajectory from the 'religious scholar' teacher of the Ottoman era, through the 'modernising' and 'revolutionist' identities of the early Republic, to a 'technician' identity focused on preparing students for standardised national tests. This shift has been driven by managerial policies that gained traction after the 1980s, including the privatisation of public education services, the prevalence of standardised tests, the adoption of part-time

recruitment practices that undermine job security, and reforms imposed without consulting society or educators (Benade, 2012; Durmaz, 2014; Hill, 2007). The Turkish Ministry of National Education's teacher competency framework (MEB, 2014), with its emphasis on quality, standards, benchmarking, and measurable effectiveness, reflects the same managerial orientation (Dönmez, 2008; Esen, 2004). Studying which of these two identities Turkish teachers recognise in themselves, and how that recognition relates to their well-being, is therefore both theoretically and practically significant.

Psychological Well-Being

Psychological well-being refers to a person's overall flourishing and includes self-acceptance, autonomy, positive relationships, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth (Ryff et al., 1999). Cultural context matters in how these dimensions are defined and weighted. For teachers, well-being extends beyond personal life satisfaction to the capacity to engage positively with others and to experience meaning in their professional role. Diener et al. (2010) integrate these dimensions into a single flourishing index; related work frames well-being not only as an emotional state but as a foundation for setting meaningful goals, pursuing self-development, and maintaining healthy relationships (Forgeard et al., 2011; Keyes et al., 2002). Among teachers, strong psychological well-being has been associated with professional performance, career focus, and classroom creativity.

Conceptual and empirical work has examined TPI and well-being largely in parallel rather than in combination. TPI has been theorised and operationalised in multiple ways (Beijaard et al., 2000, 2004; Beltman et al., 2015; Harris, 1995; Hargreaves, 2000; Korthagen, 2004; Lamote & Engels, 2010; Schepens et al., 2009; Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011; Volkmann & Anderson, 1998), with particular contributions from critical and activist scholars (Apple, 1995; Day & Sachs, 2004; Freire, 2006; Giroux, 1985, 1988; Marshall & Anderson, 2009; McLaren, 1995, 2014; Sachs, 2001, 2003, 2005; Smyth, 2011). A parallel literature examines the relationship between teachers' emotions, identities, and educational reform (Bolívar & Domingo, 2006; Esen, 2010; Flores & Day, 2006; Hargreaves, 2005; Nias, 1989; Schmidt & Datnow, 2005; Thomas, 2005; van Veen & Lasky, 2005; Verme, 2009; Zembylas, 2003, 2005), as well as teachers' psychological well-being and related constructs (Arıcı, 2011; Cihangir-Çankaya, 2009; Day & Kington, 2008; Doğan & Eryılmaz, 2013; Fiorilli et al., 2015; Parker & Martin, 2009; Telef et al., 2013). However, no study has examined the specific relationship between activist and entrepreneur identity orientations and psychological well-being. The present study addresses this gap by identifying the professional identities Turkish teachers adopt in relation to Sachs's (2001, 2003) typology and exploring the connection between those identities and teachers' psychological well-being.

In the present study, these constructs are conceptualised as follows. Following Sachs (2001, 2003), teacher professional identity is treated as the way teachers position themselves between two orientations: an activist identity defined by democratic participation, critical inquiry, collaboration, and social responsibility, and an entrepreneur identity defined by accountability, competition, standardisation, and externally defined effectiveness. Following Ryff et al. (1999), psychological well-being is conceptualised as teachers' overall flourishing across autonomy, positive relationships, environmental mastery, purpose in life, personal growth, and self-acceptance. The two identity orientations are operationalised through the ATIS and ETIS subscales, and well-being through the Psychological Well-Being Scale described in the Method.

Research Design

This study used a correlational survey design to examine the extent to which public high school teachers in Türkiye adopt activist and entrepreneurial professional identities, and the relationship between these identity orientations and teachers' psychological well-being.

Participants

The target population comprised 693 teachers across 17 public secondary schools in the Western Black Sea Region of Türkiye. Using a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, the minimum representative sample size was calculated to be 277 (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). Simple random sampling was used, and 290 complete responses were obtained.

Of the 290 participating teachers, 61% (n = 177) were female, and 39% (n = 113) were male. Years of teaching experience were distributed as follows: 1–5 years (14.5%), 6–10 years (10.3%), 11–15 years (20%), 16–20 years (23.8%), 21+ years (31%). Educational background: undergraduate degree 89%, master's degree 10.3%, doctoral degree 0.3%. Faculty of graduation: Faculty of Education 47.9%, Faculty of Science and Letters 34.5%, other faculties 15.5%. Union membership: member 70.3%, non-member 29.7%. Percentages are based on valid responses; owing to rounding and a small number of unreported cases, some category totals do not sum to exactly 100%.

Instruments

Activist Teacher Identity Scale (ATIS)

The ATIS was developed for this study to measure teachers' adoption of activist professional identity characteristics derived from the literature (Beane & Apple, 1995; Day & Sachs, 2004; Giroux, 1985, 1988; Sachs, 2001, 2003). An initial pool of 56 items was drafted based on the literature review and reviewed by nine experts in educational sciences, including Prof Judith Sachs, the theorist of activist identity; their feedback reduced the pool to 51 items. The draft scale was piloted with 149 teachers (54 female, 95 male) from a province in the Western Black Sea Region. Exploratory factor analysis was conducted using principal components with varimax rotation. Items with factor loadings below .45 or item-total correlations below .30 were removed. The final scale consists of 26 items across six factors: transformative policies, collaboration, responsibility, strategic positioning, work commitment, and autonomy. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was .85, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 = 1597.51$, $df = 325$, $p < .01$), indicating the data are factorable. The six factors together explained 60.24% of the total variance. Cronbach's α for the total scale was .90. Items are rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Disagree, 2 = Slightly agree, 3 = Partially agree, 4 = Highly agree, 5 = Totally agree). Total scores range from 26 to 130, with higher scores indicating stronger identification with an activist professional identity. Psychometric details are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Exploratory Factor Analysis and Reliability Results for the Activist Teacher Professional Identity Scale

Activist Teacher Identity Scale					
Names of factors	Number of items	Factor Loading value ranges	Item-total correlation value ranges	Explained Variance (%)	Cronbach Alpha Coefficient
1. Transformative Policies	9	.45 - .75	.46 - .73	16.39	.80
2. Collaboration	5	.51 - .70	.41 - .56	10.46	.88
3. Responsibility	3	.59 - .66	.31 - .43	9.14	.70
4. Strategic Positioning	3	.77 - .80	.69 - .73	9.07	.80
5. Work Commitment	3	.49 - .75	.66 - .75	8.49	.85
6. Autonomy	3	.59 - .81	.38 - .64	6.65	.65
Total Scale	26	<i>Total Scale KMO= .85 Total Explained Variance= 60.24%</i>			
<i>Bartlett's Test of Sphericity [$\chi^2=1597.51$ $sd=325$, $p<0.01$]</i>					<i>Cronbach Alpha= .90</i>

Entrepreneur Teacher Identity Scale (ETIS)

The ETIS was developed in parallel with the ATIS to measure identification with entrepreneurial professional identity characteristics (Day & Sachs, 2004; Sachs, 2001, 2003). An initial pool of 47 items was reduced to 43 after review by nine experts and to 31 items after the pilot study with 149 teachers and subsequent factor analysis. The final scale consists of 31 items across six factors: autonomy, work commitment, competition, standardisation, accountability, and responsibility (KMO = .83; Bartlett's test: $\chi^2 = 2244.44$, $df = 465$, $p < .01$; 60.02% of variance explained; Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$). Items use the same five-point Likert format. Total scores range from 31 to 155, with higher scores indicating stronger identification with an entrepreneurial professional identity. Psychometric details are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Exploratory Factor Analysis and Reliability Results for the Entrepreneur Teacher Identity Scale

Entrepreneur Teacher Identity Scale (ETIS)						
Names of factors	Number of items	Factor Loading value ranges	Item-total correlation value ranges	Explained Variance (%)	Cronbach Alpha Coefficient	
1. Autonomy	9	.53 - .75	.42 - .67	14.43	.85	
2. Competition	6	.41 - .83	.47 - .78	12.15	.85	
3. Work Commitment	6	.49 - .79	.36 - .65	13.65	.82	
4. Standardization	3	.77 - .80	.68 - .78	8.19	.79	
5. Accountability	4	.56 - .79	.49 - .67	7.75	.81	
6. Responsibility	3	.62 - .72	.51 - .68	6.81	.70	
Total Scale	31	<i>Total Scale KMO= .83 Total Explained Variance= 60.02%</i>				
		<i>Bartlett's Test of Sphericity [$\chi^2=2244.44$, $df=465$, $p<0.01$]</i>				<i>Cronbach Alpha= .89</i>

Psychological Well-Being Scale

Teachers' psychological well-being was measured using the eight-item Flourishing Scale developed by Diener et al. (2010) and adapted into Turkish by Telef (2013). Telef's validation study with 599 preservice teachers confirmed a single-factor structure. Items are rated on a seven-point Likert scale. Permission to use the Turkish version was obtained from Telef. In the present sample, Cronbach's α for the scale was .88.

Procedure

Ethical approval was obtained from the xxx University Ethics Committee (document decision number 3xxx), and institutional permission was granted by the Provincial Directorate of National Education. Participation was voluntary. All teachers were informed of the study's purpose, their right to withdraw at any time, and the confidentiality of their responses, and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. Questionnaires were distributed in person during school visits.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 22. Prior to analysis, missing data were imputed. Assumptions of normality, homogeneity of variance, and linearity were examined and met. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were computed for all scale items and subdimensions. Group comparisons were conducted using independent-

samples t-tests for two-group variables (gender, educational background, union membership) and one-way ANOVA with Scheffé post hoc tests for multi-group variables (years of experience, faculty of graduation). Pearson product-moment correlations were used to examine the relationship between the identity subscales and psychological well-being. Statistical significance was set at $\alpha = .05$.

Findings and Discussion

Teachers' Perceptions of Activist Teacher Professional Identity (Subdimensions)

Transformative Policies

Teachers are in strong agreement ($M = 4.27$) with the items in this subdimension. They particularly resonate with "I make efforts for my students to gain universal values" ($M = 4.53$), while showing the least agreement with "I determine the classroom rules with the students" ($M = 3.66$). Despite the highly centralised and hierarchical management structure of the Turkish education system, teachers' commitment to conveying universal values and fostering social sensitivity aligns with Sachs's (2003) activist teacher, Freire's (2006) democratic teacher, and Giroux's (1985) transformative intellectual.

Collaboration

Teachers 'totally' agree ($M = 4.54$) with the items. They most strongly endorse "I believe in the importance of working in a mutual trust environment at school" ($M = 4.62$), while the lowest agreement is with "I would be pleased to share my knowledge and experiences with colleagues on professional issues" ($M = 4.47$) — still a high endorsement in absolute terms.

Responsibility

Teachers 'totally' agree ($M = 4.34$) with the items. The highest agreement is with "I think that teaching is a profession that requires a sense of responsibility towards society" ($M = 4.57$), and the lowest with "I think it is my responsibility to support the personal and social development of my students as well as their course success" ($M = 4.18$) — again, still high in absolute terms. The item "I believe in the importance of cooperation with educational stakeholders such as parents, unions, local authorities and universities to improve the quality of education" ($M = 4.26$) indicates that teachers value collaboration beyond the school.

Strategic Positioning

Teachers 'highly' agree ($M = 3.74$) with the items. They most strongly endorse "I look for solutions to problems related to the functioning of the school" ($M = 3.82$) and least strongly "I take responsibility for determining the vision of the school" ($M = 3.69$). This pattern suggests that teachers think holistically to generate innovative ideas and contribute to organisational objectives and are willing to participate in management.

Work Commitment

Teachers 'highly' agree ($M = 3.70$) with the items. The highest agreement is with "Apart from legal working time, I allocate time to studies that will improve education and training" ($M = 3.75$), and the lowest with "Apart from legal working time, I allocate time for my students" ($M = 3.66$). These findings suggest that teachers tend to do their jobs with devotion and do not see working hours as limited to standard contracted hours. Despite rising workloads and expectations in the teaching profession, teachers' commitment to their work remains high. Esen's (2010) findings support this pattern: teachers can take the initiative to address systemic problems and resist prescribed behavioural patterns, finding solutions to issues arising from 'macro' policies at the 'micro' level. Durmaz (2014) and Buyruk (2015) report that teacher labour and identity have come under profound political pressure and are evolving under neoliberal policies; the present findings, however, suggest that teachers retain idealist values despite the workload and curtailed autonomy imposed by central policies.

Autonomy

Teachers 'highly' agree ($M = 3.70$) with the items. They most strongly endorse "I believe that school management should avoid authoritarian governance" ($M = 3.97$) and least strongly "I do not need permission from the authorities to provide students with information that I believe is true" ($M = 3.40$). Overall, teachers feel autonomous and report that this is reflected in their practice.

A summary of teachers' perceptions of Activist Teacher Identity subdimensions is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Summary of Teachers' Perceptions of Activist Teacher Identity Subdimensions

Activist Teacher Identity	Transformative Policies	Collaboration	Responsibility	Strategic Positioning	Work Commitment	Autonomy	Total
M	4.27	4.54	4.34	3.74	3.70	3.70	4.14
SD	.50	.59	.64	.79	.89	.81	.48

Taken together, teachers' general perceptions of Activist Teacher Identity are quite high ($M = 4.14$). This aligns with Day et al. (2006), who reported that 67% of teachers had a positive perception of professional identity and frequently described themselves as able to 'create a difference' in their educational processes, an ethic that maps directly onto the ATIS subdimensions. Teachers with an activist identity do not merely meet professional standards; they aspire to make a meaningful difference in their students' lives.

Teachers' Perceptions of Entrepreneur Teacher Professional Identity (Subdimensions)

Autonomy

Participants slightly agree ($M = 2.39$) with the items in the entrepreneur autonomy subdimension, which captures counterpart characteristics of the activist 'autonomy'. The highest agreement is with "I can easily adapt to all changes made by the Ministry of Education regarding the education system" ($M = 2.84$), and the lowest with "I believe that I should accept all the changes made by the Ministry of National Education regarding the education system without question" ($M = 1.98$). Items in this subdimension describe teachers who accept the existing system as given and confine their autonomy to what laws and regulations permit, extending this obedient stance to their students. The low means reflect teachers' preference for a higher, more substantive sense of professional autonomy.

Work Commitment

Teachers 'slightly' agree ($M = 2.19$) with the items in this subdimension. The highest agreement is with "I prefer to solve problems with students without receiving help" ($M = 2.55$), and the lowest with "I don't think I have a responsibility to be a role model for students" ($M = 1.62$). Items here capture commitment framed from a managerial perspective; the low agreement indicates that teachers do not view themselves as model entrepreneurs and reject a purely practitioner self-image.

Competition

Teachers partially agree ($M = 2.71$) with the items. The highest agreement is with "I believe that competition increases the quality of education" ($M = 3.12$), and the lowest with "I am in tough competition with my colleagues" ($M = 2.02$). Competition is rated higher than most other ETIS subdimensions, likely because managerial rhetoric and the performance standards expected of teachers, through national tests, performance indicators, and similar mechanisms adopted worldwide and in Türkiye, actively trigger competitive orientations even where teachers do not personally endorse them.

Standardisation

Teachers partially agree ($M = 2.69$) with the items. The highest agreement is with "I believe that my students' success in the central examinations (YGS, LYS) is an indicator of my success" ($M = 2.79$), followed by "I believe that the success of the students in the central exams is a criterion that proves the quality of the teacher" and "students' success in centralised exams is my priority" (both $M = 2.64$). The relatively low means are consistent with Buyruk (2015) and Dönmez (2008), who argue that policies implemented after the 1980s devalued teacher labour and transformed teachers into practitioner-technicians. Although teachers are expected to adopt an entrepreneurial identity under such centralised, test-focused curricula, those in this study reported relatively low identification with it.

Accountability

Teachers partially agree with the items. The highest agreement is with "I believe that the Ministry of National Education should supervise teachers according to measurable performance criteria" ($M = 3.03$), and the lowest, strikingly low, is with "I believe in the necessity of accountability to parents" ($M = 1.19$). The latter may indicate that teachers view 'accountability to parents' as a threat to their professional expertise. Akşit's (2006) study on performance evaluation criteria reports converging findings: 45.7% of teachers found the criteria unclear and unfair, and 54.3% stated that the criteria were not applied equally. Within the present study, the moderate overall accountability perception may also reflect a wish to be evaluated 'fairly' by measurable criteria in the face of concerns about injustice and inequality, and the low mean on accountability to parents is consistent with Akşit's findings.

Responsibility

Teachers partially agree with the items ($M = 3.00$). The highest agreement is with "I prefer the Ministry of National Education to determine the course curriculum under the content of the central examinations" ($M = 3.15$), and the lowest with "I avoid commenting on issues other than those of my own course" ($M = 2.92$).

A summary of teachers' perceptions of the Entrepreneur Teacher Identity subdimensions is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Summary of Teachers' Perceptions of Entrepreneur Teacher Identity Subdimensions

Entrepreneur Teacher Identity	Autonom y	Work Commit ment	Competit ion	Standardization	Accoun tability	Responsi bility	Total
M	2.39	2.19	2.71	2.69	2.80	3.00	2.55
SD	.77	.84	.93	.98	1.01	.94	.61

As shown in Table 4, teachers' perceptions of ETIS are low overall ($M = 2.55$). Within ETIS subdimensions, 'responsibility' is rated highest ($M = 3.00$) and 'work commitment' lowest ($M = 2.19$). In response to the critique that policies and practices in Türkiye push teachers toward a technician role (e.g., Buyruk, 2015; Yıldız, 2014), the present findings indicate that the participating teachers do not tend to adopt an entrepreneur teacher identity; on the contrary, they tend to identify with the activist teacher image.

Teachers' Perceptions Concerning Professional Identity Types by Independent Variables

By gender, teachers' perceptions do not differ significantly across the subdimensions of ATIS and ETIS, except for the ETIS competition subdimension [$t(288) = 3.07, p < .05$]. Male teachers report higher perceptions of competition than female teachers. This finding is consistent with Akın and Özdemir (2009), who report a statistically significant gender difference in the 'collaboration' dimension of teachers' democratic values: female teachers more strongly endorse a collaborative, democratic working environment, while male teachers appear more individually driven by the competitive orientation captured in the ETIS.

By years of experience, teachers' perceptions of the 'collaboration' subdimension of ATIS differ significantly [$F(4, 284) = 3.09, p < .05$]. Scheffé post hoc comparisons indicate that teachers with 1–5 years of experience have higher collaboration perceptions ($M = 4.76$) than teachers with 15–20 years of experience ($M = 4.42$). This supports the findings of Tunacan and Çetin (2009), who report that teachers with 1–5 years of experience are more satisfied with their colleagues than those with 6–10 years of experience. Pillen et al. (2013) further note that teachers in their first year may feel insecure and inadequate, thereby increasing the felt need for collaboration. Hargreaves (2000) likewise reports that teachers in their first five years are more flexible, cooperative, and open to change, and Akpınar and Aydın (2007) show that teachers with 1–5 years of experience need more support than those with 21 or more years of experience. Taken together, these results suggest that the inclination or need for collaboration within an activist orientation diminishes as professional experience accumulates.

Teachers' perceptions of the 'responsibility' subdimension of ATIS also differ significantly by experience [$F(4, 284) = 2.72, p < .05$]: teachers with 1–5 years of experience ($M = 4.50$) score higher than those with 6–10 years ($M = 4.04$). This contrasts with Canrinus et al. (2011), who report no significant experience effect in their professional identity profile (measured via job satisfaction, occupational commitment, self-efficacy, and motivation), but aligns with Hargreaves (2005), who emphasises that teachers' identity perceptions differ significantly across career phases.

For ETIS, perceptions of the 'competition' subdimension differ significantly by experience [$F(4, 284) = 3.09, p < .05$]: teachers with 21 or more years of experience ($M = 2.95$) score higher than teachers with 1–5 years ($M = 2.42$). Professional identity formation in the first five years is a period of emotional turmoil, dilemmas, and negotiation, which may leave less room for competitive orientation than does a more consolidated mid-to-late career position in a test-focused system.

Teachers' perceptions do not differ significantly across the subdimensions of ATIS by educational background. However, perceptions of the 'competition' [$t(285) = 2.16, p < .05$] and 'standardisation' [$t(285) = 2.19, p < .05$] subdimensions of ETIS do differ: teachers with an undergraduate degree score higher on 'competition' ($M = 2.74$) than those with a master's degree ($M = 2.35$), and similarly on 'standardisation'. Teachers with only an undergraduate degree thus tend to adopt an entrepreneurial orientation to a higher degree, possibly reflecting weaker ties to the academic research environment and a gradual loss of inquiry-oriented habits over time.

Teachers' perceptions do not differ significantly across the subdimensions of ATIS by 'faculty of graduation', but perceptions of the 'autonomy' subdimension of ETIS do [$F(2) = 3.67, p < .05$]: 'graduates of other faculty' have a higher 'entrepreneur autonomy' score than 'graduates of the Faculty of Science and Letters'. A higher score on ETIS autonomy indicates what Friedman (1999) terms 'weak autonomy', limited freedom of choice constrained by rules and administrators regarding subjects, courses, and curricula. Teachers who graduated from faculties other than Education may experience limited autonomy due to weaker pedagogical content knowledge and subject-matter knowledge. Beijaard et al. (2000) show that subject-matter and pedagogical content knowledge are key factors shaping professional identity, and Bullough (2005) identifies the university teacher-education phase as one of the most important in identity formation. Teachers who graduated from other faculties may therefore consciously prefer 'weak autonomy', the entrepreneurial form of autonomy, because of their limited pedagogical expertise.

By union membership, teachers' perceptions of the 'responsibility' subdimension of Activist Teacher Identity differ significantly [$t(288) = 2.70, p < .05$]: union-member teachers ($M = 4.41$) report a stronger sense of responsibility in ATIS than non-members ($M = 4.18$). This is consistent with Akın and Özdemir (2009), who find higher democratic-value perceptions among union-member teachers. Teachers' perceptions do not differ significantly across ETIS subdimensions by union membership.

The Relationship between Activist and Entrepreneur Teacher Identities and Psychological Well-Being

Table 5 presents the correlations between the two identity orientations and teachers' psychological well-being.

Table 5. The Relationship between Adopted Activist and Entrepreneur Teacher Identities and Psychological Well-Being of Teachers

	M	SD	Psychological Well-being of Teacher
Activist Teacher Professional Identity	4.14	.48	.330**
Entrepreneur Teacher Professional Identity	2.55	.61	-.206**

Note. ** $p < .01$

As Table 5 shows, Activist Teacher Identity is positively and moderately associated with teachers' psychological well-being ($r = .33, p < .01$), whereas Entrepreneur Teacher Identity is negatively and weakly associated with well-being ($r = -.20, p < .01$). Teachers' well-being thus varies with the professional identity they adopt: those who exhibit the characteristics of the Activist Teacher Identity tend to experience higher psychological well-being, while those who identify with the Entrepreneur Teacher Identity tend to experience lower well-being.

These findings align with Zembylas's (2005) examination of how teachers' emotions relate to power, identity, and resistance in school. Zembylas argues that identity, formed through discourse, can be understood through 'resistance' and 'hegemony', and that the teacher's resistance to the hegemonic pressure of the 'entrepreneur' role under a national testing system leads to positive outcomes via effective communication with students. The resistance captured by Activist Teacher Identity in the present research aligns with these behaviours of seeking autonomy and strong communication.

From a sociocultural perspective, changing political conditions and rapid reforms directly affect teachers' professional identity (Lasky, 2005). At the same time, teachers' passion for their work arises not from external policies but from meaningful emotional communication with their students. Lasky (2005) further emphasises 'risk-taking' as essential to the formation of an effective teacher identity, a capacity the Activist Teacher Identity explicitly values. Teachers in Lasky's study, as in the present research, believed that their involvement in educational reform is often curtailed and their professionalism reduced to an entrepreneurial role, yet they continue to teach on their own ethical terms.

Teaching is defined as an emotional profession in which personal and professional identities are difficult to separate (Nias, 1996). The fact that ATIS-oriented teachers in this study tend to be happier suggests that they align with the values embedded in the activist identity: they want to work in a democratic, collaborative, autonomous environment of trust and to participate actively in decision-making about education. Their psychological well-being tends to be higher when they hold these values and lower when they encounter 'obedience,' 'lack of collaboration,' and constrained 'autonomy', the entrepreneurial characteristics supported by rhetoric opposed to activist values.

Educational reforms negatively affect teachers' psychological well-being when they are not accepted by teachers (Kelchtermans, 2005). Thomas's (2005) discourse analysis of teacher identity in the context of reform similarly underscores that centrally prescribed policies are not effective without teachers' willingness to implement them. Therefore, these analyses converge on the view that professional identity and psychological well-being are deeply intertwined (Kelchtermans, 2005; Lasky, 2005; Nias, 1996; Thomas, 2005; Zembylas, 2005): as teachers adopt activist characteristics, their well-being tends to increase, whereas adopting an entrepreneurial identity is associated with lower well-being.

Extended Discussion on Main Findings

This study extends Sachs's (2001, 2003) typology by, to our knowledge, providing the first empirical examination of how activist and entrepreneurial identity orientations relate to teachers' psychological well-being in the Turkish context. It thereby adds Türkiye-based evidence to the rapidly expanding field of teacher-identity research mapped in recent systematic reviews (Rushton, Rawlings Smith, Steadman, & Towers, 2023). Three main findings stand out. First, participating teachers reported a high level of activist professional identity ($M = 4.14$) and a comparatively low level of entrepreneur professional identity ($M = 2.55$). Among activist subdimensions, collaboration and responsibility were rated most highly; among entrepreneur subdimensions, responsibility and accountability were rated highest, which we interpret as reflecting the centralised structure of the Turkish education system rather than a genuine internalisation of market logic. These patterns suggest that the participating teachers retain an idealist, socially oriented view of their profession despite the managerial pressures documented in recent Turkish scholarship (Buyruk, 2015; Durmaz, 2014; Yıldız, 2014).

Second, identity perceptions varied by demographic variables in limited but interpretable ways. Teachers with 1–5 years of experience showed stronger activist orientations on the collaboration and responsibility subdimensions than more experienced teachers, consistent with prior findings that early-career teachers are more open to cooperation and value-driven practice (Akpınar & Aydın, 2007; Hargreaves, 2000; Tunaçan & Çetin, 2009). Male teachers reported higher competition perceptions than female teachers, and teachers with only an undergraduate degree reported higher scores on competition and standardisation than those with a master's degree, possibly reflecting weaker ties to the academic research environment over time. Union-member teachers reported a stronger sense of responsibility in the activist identity than non-members, echoing Akın and Özdemir (2009). In their study, Akın and Özdemir (2009) reported that union-affiliated teachers showed greater commitment to collective professional concerns and social responsibility, which parallels the present finding. More recent evidence similarly indicates that teachers' involvement in activist organisations strengthens collective professional commitment and socially just practice (Carl, Jones-Layman, & Quinn, 2022).

Most importantly, the adopted identity was significantly related to psychological well-being. Activist identity was positively and moderately correlated with well-being ($r = .33$), whereas entrepreneur identity showed a weak negative correlation ($r = -.20$). These findings support the view that teaching is not a merely technical profession but a value-laden and emotional one (Nias, 1996; Zembylas, 2005), and they are consistent with earlier work showing that managerial reforms pulling teachers toward an entrepreneur role may erode the conditions under which they flourish (Kelchtermans, 2005; Lasky, 2005). This also accords with recent findings linking a stronger professional identity to better psychological well-being and mental health among teachers (Zhao, Dong, & Luo, 2022).

Conclusion

This study set out to examine, in a policy context shaped by three decades of centralising, market-oriented reform, which image of the profession Turkish public upper-secondary school teachers recognise in themselves, and whether that self-recognition matters for their psychological well-being. Taken together, the findings offer a clear, and in some respects unexpected, answer. Despite a reform climate that increasingly frames teaching as a technical, measurable, and performance-driven occupation, the teachers in this sample continued to identify strongly and consistently with an activist professional self. They understood their work as collaborative, responsibility-laden, oriented toward the public good, and grounded in a commitment to students as developing persons rather than as examination scores. Identification with the entrepreneur image, competitive, standardised, and compliant with externally defined effectiveness, remained weak. A profession that the literature had led us to expect as largely reshaped by neoliberal logics appeared here as one still resisting that reshaping at the level of self-understanding.

The second layer of findings deepens this picture rather than complicating it. Where differences emerged across demographic groups, they were modest but interpretable. Early-career teachers were the most strongly oriented toward collaboration and

a sense of responsibility, suggesting that activist values are part of what teachers bring into the profession rather than something that long exposure to the system produces. Male teachers and teachers holding only an undergraduate degree reported comparatively higher perceptions of competition and standardisation; teachers from faculties other than Education were more willing to accept the constrained autonomy characteristic of the entrepreneur role. These patterns point to the strength of pedagogical preparation and continued contact with academic inquiry as resources against managerial drift in identity. The higher activist sense of responsibility among union members, similarly, locates democratic professional values in social and organisational conditions rather than in individuals alone.

The central contribution of the study is the link between these identity orientations and psychological well-being. Activist identity was positively and moderately related to flourishing, whereas entrepreneur identity was negatively related to it. The two associations are not symmetrical in magnitude, but their direction tells the same story: the more a teacher recognises themselves in the democratic, collaborative, critically engaged image of the profession, the better they tend to feel; the more they experience themselves as a compliant, competitive, externally evaluated performer, the less well they tend to feel. This gives empirical weight to what has long been argued at the theoretical level, that teaching is a morally and emotionally saturated practice, and that the professional identity a teacher inhabits is not a neutral descriptor but a condition of their psychological life.

Read as a whole, the study suggests that educational reforms built on managerial assumptions carry costs that do not appear on standardised performance indicators. When policy pulls teachers away from the conditions, autonomy, collaboration, ethical purpose, meaningful relationships with students and colleagues, that constitute an activist professional identity, it simultaneously pulls them away from the conditions that sustain their well-being. The resilience of activist identity in this sample indicates, however, that Turkish teachers are not passive recipients of the policy climate in which they work; they continue to carry a democratic, student-centred vision of the profession and appear to be sustained by it. Protecting and widening the space in which that vision can be enacted is therefore not only a matter of educational quality and democratic citizenship, but also a matter of the human flourishing of those who teach.

Implications

For policy, the findings suggest that expanding teachers' autonomy, recognising their role in curriculum and decision-making, and protecting space for collaborative and ethically grounded practice may support both professional commitment and well-being. For teacher education, strengthening pedagogical and subject-matter preparation, particularly for graduates of faculties other than Education, and explicitly addressing professional identity as a reflective construct may increase teachers' capacity to navigate competing policy demands. The Ministry of National Education could extend targeted in-service programmes for teachers from non-education faculties, with richer content on pedagogical content knowledge and reflective practice.

Directions for Future Research

Future research should extend these findings to larger and more heterogeneous samples, including teachers in metropolitan, rural, and private-sector contexts; employ longitudinal designs to examine how identity and well-being co-evolve across career stages and in response to specific policy changes; and incorporate qualitative or mixed-method approaches to better understand how teachers narrate and negotiate the competing activist and entrepreneur identity pressures they encounter.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the sample was drawn from a single geographic region, the Western Black Sea region of Türkiye, limiting generalisability to teachers in metropolitan or culturally diverse regions. Second, the cross-sectional correlational design precludes causal inference: although activist identity is associated with higher psychological well-being, the direction of this relationship and the influence of potential

third variables cannot be established from these data. Third, all measures were self-reported, raising the possibility of social desirability bias, particularly for items concerning professional values such as collaboration and responsibility. Fourth, the ATIS and ETIS were developed and initially validated within the present study; although their psychometric properties are promising, further validation in independent samples, ideally including confirmatory factor analysis, is needed before the scales can be used with full confidence. Finally, the study focused exclusively on public upper-secondary school teachers; the identity patterns observed here may not extend to primary-school, preschool, or private-sector teachers, who operate under different policy and employment conditions.

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Ethics Statements

The author/s declare that all Ethics Statements required for the ethical conduct of research using human subjects are in place.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest relevant to this study.

Generative AI Use

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used generative AI tools (DeepL, Grammarly) to assist with language refinement, translation, and editing.

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