

## THE PROBLEM OF ENHANCING THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER IN MODERN ARMENIAN SOCIETY

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### **Abstract**

Developments in the 21<sup>st</sup> century demand new approaches in the field of education, at the center of which is the teacher. The model of the teacher-pedagogue, where the teacher was a transmitter of knowledge, has currently exhausted itself. On the other hand, the master teacher model is developing in the world, which primarily implies the formation of abilities and skills in students, which in turn will allow them to acquire knowledge independently. The adoption of this model will, on the one hand, ensure the effectiveness of educational reforms, and on the other hand, will raise the role of the teacher in Armenian society.

**Keywords:** teacher-pedagogue, master teacher, licensed teacher, educational reforms, students, abilities and skills.

### **Introduction**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has posed a number of crucial challenges to the global community. These challenges are diverse, ranging from geopolitical to environmental, but a significant part consists of issues related to the education and upbringing of the next generation. In this regard, the visions of states' educational policies are key, particularly in what direction global civilization is developing and how prepared the next generation is to operate in the context of ongoing transformations. In addition, the availability of teaching capital that can organize and ensure the education and upbringing of the next generation is a serious problem.

Like all modern societies, Armenian society has faced the challenges characteristic of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The educational system that Armenian society has been guided by for decades no longer justifies itself, for the simple reason that it does not provide the student with the necessary abilities and skills for application in life. However, this is only one side of the problem, since in order to carry out any process or reform in the field of education, it is necessary to have teachers equipped with the

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necessary knowledge and abilities. In other words, educational reforms require appropriate resources, first of all teaching capital, which will be able to effectively implement the actions stipulated by the state educational standards and, accordingly, provide the generation with the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities.

In Armenian society, the teacher has been a respected individual; all strata of society have had respect for this figure. The profession and activity of the teacher have been considered the most honorable. However, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when global changes are taking place, naturally the role and image of the teacher are also undergoing changes. In Armenian society, these changes are conditioned by both global transformations and those taking place within society. As a result, the image of the teacher has suffered significantly, and this profession has become unattractive in our country. From this point of view, the educational reforms initiated in the Republic of Armenia are directly related to the role and image of the teacher. Perhaps it would not be an exaggeration to say that the effectiveness of reforms mainly depends on teaching capital. The aforementioned arguments condition the topicality and importance of the topic. In the process of educational reforms, two crucial circumstances must be taken into account: ensuring schools are staffed with qualified educators and raising the quality of pedagogical education.

The aim of the research is to present the approaches related to raising the role of the teacher in modern Armenian society, and an attempt is also made to present some proposals.

At the heart of the vision of the best future for the state lies the school and education, the cornerstone of which is the teacher. Therefore, the training of professional teaching staff should be part of the state's strategy. First, it is necessary to pay attention to the main institution training teaching staff, that is, Khachatur Abovyan Armenian State Pedagogical University. It is necessary to take steps to raise the authority of the pedagogical university, in other words, to increase state patronage and care for the university. Another important issue is the implementation of measures aimed at improving the quality of students admitted to the pedagogical university, in other words, to make the teaching profession attractive, under which conditions students with higher academic performance will be admitted to the university. The revision of curricula at the university, with the application of effective experiences in this field, is also important. And finally, the teaching profession should be one of the highest-paid jobs, which will be an important basis for motivation.

### **About the image of the teacher and the role played in society: A historical overview**

In all civilizations known to mankind, the problem of transmitting existing knowledge to subsequent generations has been emphasized, which has been organized through the educational/teaching process. The teacher has been the individual through whom this process has been organized. Thus, let us briefly touch

upon the concept of the teacher, which essentially comes from the depths of centuries. All ancient peoples and civilizations have had their teachers: religious, scientific, cultural. In both Eastern and Western societies, teachers have been highly honored, even deified.<sup>1</sup> Later, prophets appeared, who in a broad sense were teachers, as they brought the true word of God to mankind. Among these teachers were Zoroaster, Buddha, Confucius, Christ, and Muhammad, who are the founders of major religions. In addition to religious figures, other prominent individuals are known who dedicated their lives to pedagogical activity. Thus, Pythagoras was an individual with exceptional abilities, mastering magic, mathematics, and music. Among the famous figures is the ancient Greek philosopher Socrates, who accepted death for the sake of science and knowledge, although he could have been saved.<sup>2</sup> It is interesting that the aforementioned figures did not leave written information. Their thoughts, ideas, and activities were written about by their students and associates. In a later period, a more mythical understanding of the teacher emerges: *guru*, *sensei*, *mullah*, *ustadh* (teacher in Arabic/Persian/Urdu). They were carriers of book knowledge and, as a rule, interpreted religious texts. For them, the source of knowledge was the Holy Scriptures, for example, for Christianity, the Old and New Testaments; for Islam, the Quran; for Buddhism, the Tripitaka; for Confucianism, the Analects; for Judaism, the Tanakh; for Hinduism, the Vedas; for Taoism, the Tao Te Ching; for Zoroastrianism, the Avesta, and others.<sup>3</sup>

Our information regarding the educational process and the role of the teacher in ancient Armenian society is limited. Essentially, this is primarily due to the policy implemented after the adoption of Christianity, when Armenian pagan culture was mainly eliminated. Unfortunately, no written information has been preserved about the existence and forms of the educational system in ancient Armenia. However, judging by the close cultural ties and interactions with neighboring countries such as Persia, Assyria, Greece, and Rome, specialists in the history of pedagogy believe that schooling in our reality has ancient traditions. Thus, Ts. Simonyan writes in his book “History of Armenian Pedagogy” that from the Artaxiad period, there were state secular schools in Armenia where instruction was carried out in Greek writing. “Although the writing of instruction (sometimes also the language) was not Armenian, the school was Armenian... During the Arsacid period (before the Mesropian script), non-Armenian-script Greco-Syriac Armenian state schools operated”.<sup>4</sup>

The Mehen schools existed until the adoption of Christianity. After their destruction, Greco-script and Greco-lingual (less frequently, Assyrian-script and Assyrian-lingual) educational institutions operated in Armenia for a century. After

<sup>1</sup> In ancient Egypt, teachers were bowed down to as the god Thoth; in China, they were called “holy sages”; in ancient Greece and medieval Europe, they were also respected as Trismegistus.

<sup>2</sup> Among Socrates’ students were famous political and military figures, scientists such as Alcibiades, Xenophon, and Plato.

<sup>3</sup> Ilyin 2017: 10.

<sup>4</sup> Simonyan 2012: 12.

creating the script and returning to Vagharshapat, Mesrop Mashtots first founded a school in Vagharshapat to train teachers, that is, the first higher school – the *vardapetaran* (seminary). Catholicos Sahak Partev was engaged in the instruction of the “Kainite forces.” “A generation of young people educated in their native language was being prepared, who would better understand the difficult situation of their homeland and be ready to defend it with their chests”.<sup>5</sup> Mesrop Mashtots, along with his students Tirayr Kordzenatsi and Mushegh Taronatsi, traveled to Goghtn to found schools and monasteries. After that, Mashtots went to Syunik, where he also opened schools. To this day, one of the sites of M. Mashtots’s educational activities in the Goghtn region has been preserved – Mesropavan or Msrvanis, which is still a place of pilgrimage for the Armenian population of the surrounding villages. Subsequently, Mashtots also carried out activities in Byzantine-controlled Armenia. When Emperor Theodosius II ascended the throne (his predecessor Arcadius had not allowed it), Mashtots went to Constantinople and, after personally meeting with the emperor and Patriarch Atticus, received official permission to teach Armenian in the schools of Byzantine Armenia. The schools were under the care of the state, the church, and the community, were intended for all social strata, and had the warmest support of the people. After the second partition of Armenia, Byzantium spared no effort to weaken the Armenian forces, and this also affected culture and education.

During the Arab rule, education also declined. In the 9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries, schools were established in almost all regions of Armenia, many of which became major educational and scientific centers. One manuscript in the Matenadaran reflects the scholars’ understanding of the organization of educational and scientific work of that period. The following 4 conditions were considered necessary for this: 1. the will of the vardapet (scholar-teacher), free from greed and ambition, 2. warm love for the student, 3. peaceful times, 4. a desert and quiet location.<sup>6</sup>

In the 12<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries, the development of education continued, and major educational and scientific centers, universities, appeared not only in Armenia (Tatev, Gladzor, Haghpats, Sanahin, Getik, etc.) but also in Cilicia (Black Mountain, Sis, Great Stone) and in diaspora communities: Constantinople, Crimea, Tbilisi. Personal example, moralizing conversation, admonition, encouragement, reprimand, punishment (including corporal), persuasion, etc., are mentioned in the sources as methods of upbringing.<sup>7</sup> During the Turkish-Persian rule, many schools had turned into mere elementary literacy schools. However, from the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, several progressive figures organized new and reorganized several old schools (of the Great Hermitage of Harants, the Amrdolu Monastery, Akhtamar, Lim, Ejmiatsin).

The invention of printing was a turning point for world civilization. Books became mass-produced; scientific literature, and then textbooks, were created. Education also

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<sup>5</sup> History of the Armenian People 1984: 426.

<sup>6</sup> Matenadaran, manuscript 573, sheet 39b.

<sup>7</sup> Simonyan 2012: 43.

gradually became mass in nature, alongside which the foundation for the modern image of the teacher was laid, and this was secular rather than religious. The modern image of the teacher took shape 200 years ago and has undergone a series of transformations. The emergence of this image of the teacher is connected with scientific pedagogy and the teaching profession. Starting from the spread of the ideas of humanism and especially during the Enlightenment, church figures (who were also engaged in educational work) and the educational system (scholasticism) were widely criticized. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the famous pedagogue Jan Komensky, who is considered the author of the modern school, criticized the medieval school, particularly the rote memorization of material under the threat of physical punishment. Komensky proposed creating a school that would work like a clock mechanism, but it is obvious that today that mechanism no longer works.<sup>8</sup>

In the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries, pedagogy was given a scientific character, and the connection with scientific psychology gradually deepened. In this case, the teacher acted not only as a subject teacher/lecturer but transformed into a teacher-pedagogue. Essentially, this model has been preserved to this day. During this period, the school system was finally formed, and legislative and regulatory frameworks were created, which also extended to teachers. Although there was no statehood in Armenia during this period, educational work was widely developing in Armenia and in the diaspora communities. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, famous pedagogues carried out their activities, leaving their observations on both educational work and the role and activities of the teacher.

Khachatur Abovyan (1805-1848) is unsurpassed in the field of enlightenment, education, and pedagogy (it is no coincidence that the pedagogical university operating in Armenia bears his name). He was familiar with the advanced European educational system and pedagogical thought, so he sought to reform the Armenian school based on these principles. He spoke a lot about improving education, noting the numerous problems in this area, such as the choice of methods, moral education, etc. In this context, he also addressed teachers. According to him, all such problems are solved thanks to the teacher's diligence and dedication... consequently, he must be perfect in his knowledge and mastery, integrity and diligence, love and care... his characteristics are: honesty, modesty, patience, sincerity, fairness, firmness...<sup>9</sup>

It should be noted that in the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries, pedagogy was increasingly turning into a science, both theoretically and practically. Experiments began to be carried out to improve methods and the teaching process. On the other hand, starting from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, upbringing loses its significance in the educational process. The main task of pedagogy becomes not upbringing, but teaching and instruction.

Thus, throughout history, both the concept of the teacher and the nature of his activity have undergone transformations. The role, image, and functions of the teacher in Armenian society have also undergone changes. Like all over the world, in Armenian

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<sup>8</sup> Ilyin 2017: 11.

<sup>9</sup> Simonyan 2012: 116.

social perceptions, the concept of the teacher has been given a pedagogical-psychological characterization. On the other hand, from ancient times until the collapse of the USSR, the teacher held a high and privileged position in Armenian society.

### **The teacher in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: facing global and local challenges**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has brought a number of challenges that are both global and local in nature. Global challenges are faced by all societies and existing institutions and systems in the world, which are primarily related to globalization, innovations, the development of information technologies, and artificial intelligence. People's attitudes towards the environment and phenomena are radically changing. In these conditions, the educational system is naturally not isolated, so it is also subject to influences and transformations. In addition to global challenges, the teacher also faces local challenges. Local challenges are mainly conditioned by the attitude and perceptions of the state and society related to the educational system and its components.

There are many global challenges, but let's mention the pandemic that has spread in recent years and its consequences for the educational system. In the conditions of the pandemic and universal restrictions, when the educational process seemed to stop, the teaching community faced serious problems: how to organize the lesson process? The lesson process was organized on an online platform, but this brought new problems, among which two main ones should be singled out: technical equipment and the issue of teachers mastering modern technologies. In these conditions, it became obvious that no matter how well a teacher masters the subject they teach, they will not achieve results if they do not master technologies. Another important rule becomes that mastering technologies must also be a mandatory part of the teacher's activity. This is one of the main problems that the teaching community in Armenia is still overcoming, as a large number of teachers with 20<sup>th</sup>-century perceptions continue to work in schools.

Local challenges are no less important for teachers. As mentioned above, this is primarily related to the attitude of society. It should be stated that in recent decades, the role and image of the teacher in our society have suffered significantly. Even if we compare it with the Soviet period, we see obvious differences. Naturally, the formation of such an attitude is conditioned by both objective and subjective factors. We believe that, first of all, it is necessary for the teacher to be aware of modern challenges and problems and, by meeting them, try to find solutions. From this point of view, let's try to consider a few issues. First, it is necessary to take into account that the nature of the school has changed. From a general school, whose idea was J. Comenius's motto "to teach everyone everything," there is a transition to specialized school-institutions, where they teach only what is necessary to obtain a profession. Previously, the teacher was mainly a source of knowledge, in school life he was the leader and educator of his students, and now the teacher transmits information and shows his students how to use

it.<sup>10</sup> In fact, the teacher is no longer the only source of knowledge. In the digital age, the student can obtain any information from many other sources, mainly the internet. Second, one of the important challenges for the 21<sup>st</sup>-century teacher is the new generation, which has new needs and, most importantly, different perceptions about them than teachers and parents. Teachers need to know what 21<sup>st</sup>-century learners need to learn and how 21<sup>st</sup>-century learners should learn.<sup>11</sup> That is, the goal of the teaching process is the formation of abilities and skills in students, rather than the direct transmission of knowledge.

Thus, all over the world, the teacher is the main implementer of educational work, therefore, he is the first to face both global and local challenges. The teacher-pedagogue model has exhausted itself. At the heart of the education of the modern generation should be the formation of skills and abilities, not the transmission of knowledge.

### **Some Observations on Raising the Role of the Teacher**

Educational reforms are currently being implemented in the Republic of Armenia, the effectiveness of which will be conditioned by several circumstances. The teacher should be considered a primary and important condition. This means motivating the teacher and the teaching profession in general, and taking steps to raise his role in society. One of the characteristics of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century teacher is that he must take into account the needs of his students and prepare them to face challenges. The teacher's work is complex and responsible. To create a high-quality professional teaching force, it is important to have a high-quality professional teacher development program that should include the integrated use of technologies.<sup>12</sup>

The qualification, specialization, and professionalism of the teacher are of great importance for raising the teacher's role. It is necessary to especially emphasize the role and significance of pedagogical education. Here, two circumstances must be taken into account: what quality of students are admitted to the pedagogical university and what programs they study and are prepared as teachers. After graduating from the bachelor's program of the pedagogical university, the student is awarded the qualification of a teacher. However, in reality, this certified specialist is still quite far from being a pedagogue, although pedagogical practices – passive and active – are mandatory educational components, the purpose of which is to produce personnel with the most practical skills possible. Obtaining a bachelor's degree should be the first step, as the teacher must constantly self-educate and self-develop, raising professional and pedagogical abilities and skills. Regarding the professional growth and career advancement of teachers, a differentiated model is currently being proposed in the world. According to it, certified teachers should begin their pedagogical activity as

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<sup>10</sup> Szucs 2009: 3.

<sup>11</sup> Ming & Guan 2016: 3.

<sup>12</sup> Hafsah 2017: 51.

teacher assistants. Only after this stage can they move to the status of a master teacher, when they master the appropriate pedagogical skills and abilities, and then they can become licensed teachers. The idea of the master teacher is currently an actual phenomenon, although it was written about at the beginning of the century<sup>13</sup>. “The idea of the teacher as a researcher has been accepted with considerable enthusiasm for years. University education departments have adopted it as the basis for project work, on the basis of which they have awarded master’s degrees”<sup>14</sup>. Essentially, the pedagogical university in Armenia should also adopt this policy. On the other hand, this will be aimed at raising the role and importance of the teacher, which to some extent will also ensure career growth for him. It should be noted that this approach is currently widespread in the world, in which the teaching council is presented in the following hierarchy:<sup>15</sup>

1. Authorized teacher
2. Master teacher
3. Certified teacher

Perhaps one of the most important outcomes of the educational reforms started in the Republic of Armenia should be providing schools with the necessary teaching staff. The 21<sup>st</sup>-century teacher must:

1. Know the normative legal documents related to the field of education;
2. Know the content of their taught subject and modern psycho-pedagogical technologies;
3. Possess in-depth knowledge of pedagogy and developmental psychology;
4. Be able to establish relationships with colleagues, parents, and students of different categories;
5. Engage in self-education, self-development, and professional growth;
6. Be able to create an individual learning trajectory for students during their education;
7. Be able to differentiate the application of various psycho-pedagogical technologies and methods related to education and upbringing;
8. Apply modern tools to assess students’ strengths.<sup>16</sup>

In fact, to provide the next generation with quality education, highly qualified, competent, socially active, creative, and proactive teachers who keep up with the times must work in the educational system. The prominent Armenian pedagogue Ghazaros Aghayan (1840-1911), who possessed exceptional teaching abilities, highly valued the role of the teacher and demanded deep professional and pedagogical knowledge, mastery of teaching, innovation and ingenuity, and moral integrity. A teacher can only be loved for their “decent behavior” ... when they are the “ideal for students,” then “be not so sweet that they swallow you, and not so bitter that they spit you out.” The honor

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<sup>13</sup> Davidson 2009: 27-33.

<sup>14</sup> Frost 2008: 80.

<sup>15</sup> Rashid 2011: 82.

<sup>16</sup> Antonova 2020: 193.



of the teacher must be kept high; wretched is the “nation that does not honor and provide for the teacher”.<sup>17</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The 21<sup>st</sup>-century has brought a number of new challenges for the field of education and especially for the teacher. First, the conditions and nature of life have changed, which in turn have necessitated changes in the educational system. On the other hand, perceptions about the role and activity of the teacher have changed, based on objective and sometimes subjective conditions. It is obvious that the 21<sup>st</sup>-century teacher faces new challenges and problems, and therefore, steps must be taken to raise their role accordingly.

For centuries, the teacher has been one of the most honorable figures in Armenian society. However, with the development of society, the functions and role of the teacher have somewhat changed. This is due to both internal social developments and the establishment of pedagogical science and the teaching profession. The 21<sup>st</sup>-century teacher faces global and local challenges that require new approaches to their solution. In this regard, it is necessary to emphasize the teacher's qualification, particularly the preparation of a research-oriented teacher. In this case, the teacher transforms from a mere transmitter of knowledge into someone who also observes the problem and, consequently, seeks solutions. On the other hand, a teacher with purely professional knowledge is no longer competitive, as other characteristics are also needed: pedagogical abilities and skills, competence, creativity, etc. Education is one of the important foundations for the transformation of modern Armenian society, the purpose of which should be the preparation of a knowledgeable generation equipped with practical skills, for whom national and state interests will be a priority.

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