



Perceptions of the Ideal Teacher Among Vocational High School Students

Adem BEYHAN¹, Ogün BİLGE²

Abstract

Vocational high school students are observed to experience various difficulties in terms of academic readiness, motivation, self-efficacy, and school perception. Teachers working in vocational high schools are required to undertake multifaceted roles, not only in transferring knowledge but also in motivating, guiding, providing socio-emotional support, and shaping students' career orientations. Therefore, defining the characteristics expected of teachers working in vocational high schools is important. In this context, the main aim of the research is to reveal who the ideal teacher is from the perspective of vocational high school students and to define the personal and professional characteristics expected of an ideal teacher. The research was conducted using a basic qualitative research design based on a qualitative research approach. The population of the research consists of students studying in public vocational high schools in the central districts of Ankara during the 2024-2025 academic year. Using maximum diversity sampling, a purposeful sampling method, a total of 105 male and female students studying in the 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th grades of vocational high schools in four different districts were included in the study group. Data were collected through a semi-structured interview form consisting of two open-ended questions. The data obtained were analyzed using content analysis; codes were created by reading the data, similar codes were grouped under categories, and these categories were linked to higher-level themes. The research results reveal that vocational high school students' perception of the ideal teacher consists of a holistic combination of pedagogical competence, human sensitivity, and ethical-professional attitude. In line with these findings, it is recommended that relational competencies such as empathy and communication skills, positive classroom interaction, and emotional regulation be given more prominence in teacher training programs; and that in-service training focusing on student motivation, classroom management, positive discipline, and adolescent psychology be expanded for vocational high school teachers.

Keywords: Vocational high schools, ideal teacher, student perceptions, qualitative research, teacher competencies

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¹Corresponding author: Dr., Principle, Ministry of National Education, Ankara / Türkiye, adembeyhan@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0002-4173-4217.

² Dr., Education Inspector, Ministry of National Education, Ankara / Türkiye, ogunbilge68@gmail.com , ORCID: 0000-0002-7790-6105

Introduction

Vocational High Schools³ are observed to hold a significant share within general secondary education in Turkey, with approximately 40% of the student population. According to 2022–2023 academic year data, there are 3,790 vocational high schools in Turkey, with 1,745,547 students enrolled. This figure indicates that vocational high schools account for 36.92% of general secondary education (Ministry of National Education [MoNE], 2024). This numerical magnitude highlights the critical role of vocational high schools in the Turkish education system. While this ratio underscores the importance of vocational high schools within the Turkish education system, it also shows that the quality of teachers working in these schools is decisive for student achievement, school commitment, and employability. The field and branch structuring of programs in vocational high schools, workshop-laboratory applications, collaboration processes with businesses, and vocational skill training are the fundamental characteristics that distinguish vocational high schools from other school types (MoNE, 2013; MoNE, 2024). These characteristics require teachers working in vocational high schools to possess different qualifications compared to teachers working in other schools.

When the literature on the subject is examined, it is observed that vocational high school students face various challenges in terms of academic readiness, motivation, self-efficacy, and school perception. Ergün (2012) states that vocational high school students' lack of basic mathematical knowledge and low self-confidence complicate their vocational learning processes. Taş, Selvitopu, Bora, and Demirkaya (2013) note that dropout rates are high among vocational high school students; these reasons are related to school, family, environmental, and individual factors; and teacher and peer attitudes have significant impacts on these students. In their study, Mumcu, Mumcu, and Aktaş (2012) revealed that in choosing a vocational high school, not only students' interest in the profession but also low grade point averages and anxiety about failing the university entrance exam are influential. Other studies in the field have found that vocational high school students sometimes perceive school as an authoritarian and bureaucratic structure (Bülbül & Toker-Gökçe, 2015; Toker-Gökçe & Bülbül, 2014), that teachers and administrators working in vocational high schools have low readiness levels, that workshops and laboratories are insufficient, and that collaboration with the sector and professional development opportunities are limited (Apa, 2024; Peñate et al., 2024). These conditions require teachers working in vocational high schools to assume multifaceted roles—not only the function of transmitting knowledge but also motivating, guiding, providing socio-emotional support, and shaping students' vocational orientations.

It is observed that similar topics are addressed in international policy documents as well. For instance, OECD (2021) and UNESCO (2022) reports emphasize that teachers working in disadvantaged regions and vocational education institutions need to provide more comprehensive support for students' socio-emotional development and career orientations, in addition to their traditional teaching roles. In this context, improving teacher quality is regarded as an important policy area that should be emphasized both in terms of access to education and learning outcomes. In key documents in Turkey such as the 2023 Education Vision and the Twelfth Development Plan, processes related to teacher training, professional development, school-industry cooperation, and curriculum updating aimed at enhancing the quality of vocational and technical education are also among the prioritized issues (MoNE, 2018; Presidency of the Republic of Turkey [PRT], 2023).

The concept of the ideal teacher is frequently examined in academic literature in relation to the notions of qualified, effective, and good teachers, and is addressed through a holistic approach encompassing both the professional skills and personal qualities of the teacher. Looking at different definitions in the literature: Clemson and Craft (1981) describe a good teacher as someone who can teach using content-appropriate and efficient methods, while Harden and Crosby (2000) state that the primary function of an ideal teacher is to guide the learning process. Grahn and Gustafsson (2006), on the other hand, suggest that an ideal teacher should possess qualities such as humanity, a sense of

³ Throughout the historical process, vocational high schools have been designated under various names such as Art Institutes, Art School, Industrial Vocational High School, Anatolian Vocational High School, and Vocational and Technical Anatolian High School (MoNE, 2019). Therefore, in this study, the name "Vocational High School" has been used for all types of high schools providing vocational education.

justice, tolerance, a sense of humor, and the ability to maintain classroom order. In the definition provided by Darling-Hammond and Baratz-Snowden (2007), effective teachers are described as individuals who encourage students to participate in active learning processes, diversify instruction through methods such as discussion, inquiry, and modeling, clearly articulate their expectations, provide regular feedback, and strengthen school-family collaboration. Similarly, Bilen (2006) defines an effective teacher as an educator who contributes to the development of basic skills, balances freedom and authority, plans instruction by considering societal values and needs, works in a structured manner, and establishes solid communication with stakeholders.

Research conducted with various groups in the literature is observed to define the ideal teacher. Studies with students show that when defining the ideal teacher, students generally emphasize personal qualities such as tolerance, patience, a friendly demeanor, fairness, communication skills, and motivation, while prioritizing professional qualities such as lesson delivery, classroom management, and material usage (Gültekin, 2015; Gürcan, 2020; Yurdakul, 2019). In studies conducted with vocational high school students, it is indicated that the ideal teacher is one who is accessible, motivating, and uses effective assessment methods (Mızrak Karcı, 2016; Sarier, 2020). On the other hand, pre-service teachers' perception of the ideal teacher is shaped as a professional with a strong sense of responsibility, openness to change, expertise in their field, and developed communication skills (İlgan et al., 2013; Çalışkan et al., 2013; Işıktaş, 2015), while the perspective of teachers and administrators shows that the ideal teacher should possess multifaceted characteristics such as pedagogical competence, student-centered approach, guidance skills, empathy, and openness to innovations (Kılcan & Çepni, 2019; Üstüner, Abdurrezzak & Yıldızbaş, 2021; Gün & Kaya, 2023; Sezer, 2016; Bilge et al., 2025). When these findings are evaluated together, it is observed that the ideal teacher profile in vocational high schools requires a multidimensional structure that goes beyond personal characteristics and includes vocational-technical competencies. In the context of vocational education, the teacher is a fundamental guide who shapes not only students' academic but also their vocational orientation and learning motivation (OECD, 2021). Accordingly, the ideal teacher in vocational high schools is evaluated as a versatile professional who can balance discipline and support, structure learning, and guide students in their vocational development processes.

Although there are many studies in the literature on the characteristics that an ideal/good teacher should possess, very few studies reflecting the perspectives of vocational high school students have been encountered. However, research indicates that a large proportion of vocational high school students are considered a disadvantaged group in terms of academic readiness, motivation, self-confidence, and socio-economic conditions (Mumcu et al., 2012; Taş et al., 2013; Apa, 2024). Therefore, it can be argued that teaching in vocational high schools requires a more complex and multifaceted role compared to other school types. Consequently, this necessitates that teachers working in these schools possess a structure that provides academic, vocational-technical, and socio-emotional support. Determining student expectations is important for developing effective teaching practices in this school type. Indeed, international reports and research findings show that student success in vocational high schools is directly shaped by teachers' abilities to understand students, guide them appropriately, motivate them, and adapt the learning process to individual needs. Therefore, this study aims to reveal how an ideal teacher should be from the perspective of vocational high school students and the characteristics an ideal teacher should possess. In this regard, the current study is expected to fill a significant gap in vocational education literature and provide guiding findings for effective teaching practices in vocational high schools.

One of the fundamental ways to enhance the quality of the educational process in schools is for teachers to accurately understand what their students expect from them (Hattie, 2009). In vocational high schools, this situation is considered even more critical. This is because students studying in these schools may exhibit different characteristics in terms of academic interest, motivation, and readiness compared to other school types. Therefore, identifying the qualities that teachers working in these schools should possess from the students' perspective is deemed important both for improving the learning environment and increasing the effectiveness of the education provided. In this context, the main purpose of the research is to reveal who the ideal teacher is from

the perspective of vocational high school students and to define the personal and professional characteristics expected in an ideal teacher.

To achieve this aim, answers to the following sub-problems have been sought:

1. How do vocational high school students define the ideal teacher?
2. What are the personal and professional characteristics that vocational high school students expect to find in an ideal teacher?

Method

Research Design

This research was conducted based on a qualitative research approach. A basic qualitative research design was used in the study. Basic qualitative research is an approach that examines how individuals interpret their experiences, how they construct the world they live in, and what meanings they attribute to these experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Basic qualitative studies aim to understand participants' views and perceptions regarding a specific concept or phenomenon (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). The purpose of this research is to reveal vocational high school students' thoughts on the concept of the "ideal teacher"; in this respect, the study was carried out with a descriptive approach within the qualitative research framework.

Study Group

The population of the research consists of students attending public vocational high schools located in the central districts of Ankara province during the 2024–2025 academic year. From this population, 105 students were included in the research. In determining the study group, maximum variation sampling, one of the purposive sampling methods, was used. Maximum variation sampling is a method that aims to reveal possible different perspectives on the subject by including individuals with diverse characteristics related to the research problem (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). Accordingly, in order to ensure diversity in terms of district, school, gender, and grade level, male and female students from grades 9, 10, 11, and 12 in vocational high schools located in four different districts of Ankara were included in the research. Thus, it was aimed to evaluate student opinions regarding the ideal teacher from a broad perspective, considering different grade levels and demographic characteristics. Demographic information regarding the students participating in the research is presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

Demographic Information of Participants

Districts	9th Grade		10th Grade		11th Grade		12th Grade		Total		Overall Total
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	
A	4	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	13	11	24
B	3	3	3	3	4	3	3	3	13	12	25
C	4	4	3	3	5	3	3	3	15	13	28
D	6	4	3	2	3	3	3	4	15	13	28
Total	17	14	12	11	15	11	12	13	56	49	105
	31		23		26		25		105		

Table 1 shows that a total of 105 students from four districts participated in the research. There are 24 students from District A, 25 students from District B, and 28 students each from Districts C and D. When examining the distribution by grade level, there are 31 students from 9th grade, 23 students from 10th grade, 26 students from 11th grade, and 25 students from 12th grade. Regarding gender distribution, it is understood that 56 female and 49 male students participated in the research.

Data Collection Method and Instrument

In this research, data were collected using an interview form consisting of two open-ended questions. The questions on the form are: "How would you define an ideal teacher?" and "What personal and professional characteristics would you like to see in an ideal teacher?" During the preparation of the interview form, expert opinion was sought to ensure that the questions were clear, understandable, and non-directive. Participants responded to the questions in writing. The data collection process was conducted entirely on a voluntary basis, and all students signed a voluntary consent form. Participants were coded according to grade level, gender, and order of participation (e.g., 9K3, 12E17). Throughout the research process, participants were assured that they could withdraw from the study at any stage they wished, that their personal information would be kept confidential, and that the collected data would be used solely for scientific purposes.

Data Analysis

The data obtained in the research were analyzed using the content analysis method. The primary aim of content analysis is to reach meaningful concepts present in participant statements and the relationships between these concepts (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). Accordingly, the data were first carefully read, meaningful codes were determined, and codes with similar content were grouped under common categories. The categories were named to reflect the semantic integrity of the codes and were combined under a higher-order theme. The coding process consisted of stages including examining the data, comparing them, separating them according to similarities and differences, and conceptualizing them. The obtained codes, categories, and themes enabled a holistic understanding of vocational high school students' views on the ideal teacher. When presenting the findings, care was taken to ensure that interpretations were directly based on the data, and relevant participant statements were quoted where appropriate. To enhance the reliability of the analysis, Miles and Huberman's (1994) reliability formula was used, and the reliability ratio was calculated as 84%. Additionally, opinions were obtained from two experts during the process of associating codes with themes, and the themes were finalized in line with expert evaluations.

Findings

Regarding the Definition of the Ideal Teacher

Vocational high school students' views on who the ideal teacher is are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.

Findings Regarding the Definition of the Ideal Teacher

Theme	Category	Codes	f
Definition of the Ideal Teacher	Guidance and Support	A teacher who guides students and supports them in every matter	36
		A teacher who motivates students and boosts their self-confidence	15
		A teacher who converses with students	9
		A teacher who makes students love school/the subject	8
		A teacher who does not leave a negative impression on students	7
	Human and Relational Qualities	Understands students' situation/language	24
		A teacher who loves students and treats them well	24
		Compassionate, kind-hearted, loving	15
		Teacher who is like-minded and acts like a friend	10
		Behaves like a parent, older sibling	6
		Trustworthy, honest	4
		Helpful	3

In the "Guidance and Support" category, students particularly highlighted the characteristics of "a teacher who guides students and supports them in every matter" (f=36) and "a teacher who motivates students and boosts their self-confidence" (f=15). These two findings show that students' expectations from teachers encompass not only lecturing skills but also holistic roles such as guidance, support, and reassurance. The definition of a teacher who guides students is clearly evident in participant statements. Student coded 9E11 emphasized the importance of the guidance aspect by stating, *"The teacher... should show us the way instead of shouting and getting angry even when we*

make mistakes." Similarly, student coded 12E1 indicated that the teacher's supportive role extends beyond the lesson, saying, *"The ideal teacher should both be able to teach and engage in conversation... The teacher should not only teach but also prepare us for life."* The expectation of a teacher who motivates students and boosts their self-confidence was also strongly expressed. Student coded 9K3 highlighted the importance of this aspect with the words, *"Should joke with students, should motivate students,"* while student coded 9K1 emphasized the teacher's role in providing motivation by stating, *"A person who can motivate us to learn, who can explain the lesson in an enjoyable and non-boring way... is an ideal teacher."*

Among the other findings, the characteristics of "a teacher who converses with students" (f=9), "a teacher who makes students love school/the subject" (f=8), and "a teacher who does not leave a negative impression on students" (f=7) also indicate that the teacher should create a positive classroom environment. For example, student coded 12E1 defined a teacher who can engage in conversation and is open to communication by saying, *"In my opinion, the ideal teacher should both be able to teach and engage in conversation. If we only have lessons, we might get bored."* Meanwhile, 10E11 expressed the expectation of making the subject enjoyable by stating, *"The teacher should make the person opposite them love the lesson, meaning the student should be happy when that lesson comes."*

In the "Human and Relational Qualities" category, students most emphasized the characteristics of "a teacher who understands students' situation/language" (f=24) and "a teacher who loves students and treats them well" (f=24). These findings show that students place high importance on the human aspect of teachers. Student coded 9E10 described a teacher who understands students' situation with these words: *"A person who understands the student's situation, does not shout, and approaches like an older sibling."* Similarly, student coded 10K8 emphasized the importance of the teacher's empathetic approach by stating: *"An ideal teacher should treat students well, not shout, help students where necessary, support them, not insult us, not shout loudly at us, be understanding, and teach students how they should behave."* The expectation of a teacher who loves and treats students well is also quite high. Student coded 9E51 indicated that love and good approach are fundamental parts of teacher quality by saying: *"They should be kind and understanding within a framework of respect and love."* Student coded 11E6 supported this situation with the words: *"They should approach students in a gentle, loving, and compassionate manner."*

Among the other findings, the qualities of "being compassionate, loving" (f=15), "being like-minded/like a friend" (f=10), "behaving like a parent, older sibling" (f=6), "being trustworthy and honest" (f=4), and "being helpful" (f=3) show that the human aspect of the ideal teacher is strongly perceived by students. For example, 9K1 emphasized both helpfulness and positive personality traits by stating: *"I would want them to be helpful, happy, energetic, and have a funny personality."* Meanwhile, 9E10 indicated that the teacher should establish a close yet respectful relationship with the expression: *"... who understands the student's situation, does not shout, approaches like an older sibling..."*

Findings Regarding Personal Characteristics

The personal characteristics expected of teachers, obtained in line with student opinions, are presented in Table 3.

Table 3.

Personal Characteristics Expected in Teachers

Theme	Category	Codes	f
Personal Characteristics	Values and Ethics	Respectful toward students	33
		Does not insult, humiliate, offend, or use slang	20
		Fair, just	19
		Non-discriminatory	16
		Treats equally	7
		Non-judgmental	4
	Emotional and Social	Understanding, tolerant	32
		Establishes empathy	20

Characteristics	Values students, their ideas, and decisions; shows compassion to students	17
	Communicates well with students	14
	Funny, humorous, joking	10
	Gentle, polite	8
	Calm, does not get angry often, does not shout	87
	Friendly-faced, cheerful, happy, warm, positive	51
Personality Traits	Should be young	8
	Energetic	6
	Balanced / firm but kind	6
	Patient	6

Table 3 presents student opinions within the "Personal Characteristics" theme. It is observed that students participating in the research define the personal characteristics of an ideal teacher under three main categories. These have been identified as "Values and Ethics," "Emotional and Social Characteristics," and "Personality Traits." The findings show that students most value qualities such as respect, understanding, a friendly demeanor, calmness, and fairness in an ideal teacher.

In the "Values and Ethics" category, the most emphasized characteristic by students is "the teacher being respectful toward students" (f=33). Participant statements show that respect is seen as a fundamental quality of the ideal teacher. For example, participant coded 12E7 emphasized that respect is decisive in the teacher's approach to their profession and students by stating: *"For me, the ideal teacher is one who comes to classes on time, teaches properly, and respects me."* Similarly, 9K2 supports this view with the words: *"In our opinion, the ideal teacher is respectful, does not humiliate students..."* The finding of "a teacher who does not insult, humiliate, or use slang" (f=20), as the second most dominant characteristic in the category, is also an important personal quality for students. Participant 10K6 expressed this situation by stating: *"In my opinion, the ideal teacher is one who receives all our behaviors and thoughts with understanding. No matter what happens, they should not insult or assault. A teacher should not forget that the person opposite them is also a human being. They should not become rude with slang words. I think a teacher should never forget that students also have feelings."* Meanwhile, 9K5 supported this expectation by saying: *"...when a student makes a mistake, they should explain it with proper language instead of humiliating them in front of everyone in the classroom."*

According to other findings in this category, students stated that the ideal teacher should demonstrate a personality that is "fair and just" (f=19), "non-discriminatory" (f=16), "treats equally" (f=7), and "non-judgmental" (f=4). Participant 11K15's statement clearly reveals this aspect: *"A teacher who approaches students with motherly affection, loves and values their students without distinguishing them from their own child. They should treat every student equally. A person who acts fairly toward students, without discrimination and often not driven by personal desires."*

In the "Emotional and Social Characteristics" category, the most frequently emphasized feature was an "understanding" and "tolerant" teacher (f=32). Participant 10K10 defined the ideal teacher as "... someone who receives all students with understanding," while 11E10 supported this expectation with the statement: "Having an understanding teacher toward us makes us very happy." Secondly, the finding of "a teacher who can establish empathy" stands out (f=20). Participant coded 9E10 said, "Should not be dominant, should be able to empathize, should understand our situation," while 11E1 showed how important this characteristic is in defining the ideal teacher with the statement: "The ideal teacher... should not be prejudiced against students, should talk to students by listening with understanding, should establish empathy."

Students also expect the ideal teacher to be "one who values students and shows compassion" (f=17), "communicates well" (f=14), "has a humorous side" (f=10), and "gentle/polite" (f=8). Participant 10K3's statement supports the need for a compassionate, polite, and humorous approach: "Should behave understandingly and compassionately. If a student has a deficiency, they should try to help close that deficiency... respectful, loving, compassionate, gentle, fun, firm when necessary,

should know their responsibility, should not be too punctual because otherwise it becomes very boring."

In the "Personality Traits" category, the highest frequency finding is a "calm, not easily angered, and non-shouting" teacher (f=87). Students stated that the teacher's tone of voice, anger control, and communication style directly affect the learning environment. Participant 10E3 clearly expressed this situation with the words "should not shout at the smallest sound," while 9K3 made a similar emphasis by saying "if they get angry at something, they should not take out their anger on students." The second finding in this category is a "friendly-faced, cheerful, happy, warm teacher" (f=51). Participant 10E2 explained the impact of this characteristic by saying "should enter the class happily, spread energy around," while 10K10 expressed the same expectation with the emphasis on "having a friendly face."

Other personality traits included in this category are "being young" (f=8), "being energetic" (f=6), "being firm but kind" (f=6), and "being patient" (f=6). Participant 11E10's statement particularly emphasizes the energetic, patient, and understanding aspects of teaching: "..., a teacher who can repeat for us tirelessly and patiently when we say we don't understand something with patience and tolerance. ... Their age should not be too advanced; they should retire when it's time. They should spread energy around. Otherwise, they reflect their fatigue onto us too much. Having an understanding teacher toward us makes us very happy."

Findings Regarding Professional Characteristics

According to student opinions, the professional characteristics that teachers should possess are presented in Table 4.

Table 4.

Professional Characteristics Teachers Should Possess

Theme	Category	Codes	f
Professional Characteristics	Teaching Skills	Explains lessons fluently and understandably, conducts efficient lessons	44
		Conducts activities in class, makes lessons enjoyable	41
		Entertaining, not boring	30
		Knowledgeable, master of subject matter	27
		Has proper diction, speaks fluently, has good tone of voice	10
		Makes eye contact	3
		Not boring, not overwhelming	13
		Disciplined in profession/lessons	12
		Comes to class on time	12
	Classroom Management	Does not use physical violence	5
		Does not give too much homework	4
		Exams are not difficult	3
		Gives speaking turns	3
	Professionalism and Appearance	Loves their profession, fulfills job requirements, knows responsibilities	23
		Pays attention to attire, appears clean and neat	5
		Solution-oriented	2

Table 4 presents findings related to the "Professional Characteristics" theme. This theme has been classified under three categories: "Teaching Skills," "Classroom Management," and "Professionalism and Appearance." In the "Teaching Skills" category, it is observed that students particularly emphasize the characteristics of "explaining lessons fluently and understandably" (f=44) and "conducting activities in class, making lessons enjoyable" (f=41) the most. This situation shows that students place great importance on the teacher's pedagogical competence in the classroom and their ability to structure the learning process in an engaging manner. Participant 9E10 expressed this

situation with the following words: *"The ideal teacher is one who does not bore students in class, who teaches the subject fluently and enjoyably."* Similarly, 10K11 also drew attention to the efficiency of the teacher's lesson delivery by using the expressions: *"..., efficient lesson delivery, conducting activities, a teacher who is not too strict about the lesson topic is ideal."* These views reflect that students believe the methods and techniques used in class directly affect their learning motivation. Another important finding regarding teaching skills is the characteristic of "conducting lessons in an entertaining and non-boring manner" (f=30). Students define the lesson not only as an academic process but also as an interaction area requiring motivation and interest. As an example of this situation, the following statements by 9K1 can be given: *"..., a person who can explain the lesson well and without being too boring, who can help us have a good time when we get bored in between, is an ideal teacher."* Similarly, 10E1 also highlighted the importance of activities and genuine interaction during the lesson flow by saying: *"Being strict and only teaching the lesson and leaving bores students. I would like them to spare a few minutes for students during the lesson break."*

Students also consider it necessary for the teacher to "be knowledgeable and master the subject matter" (f=27). 10E2 clearly expressed this expectation with the statements: *"The ideal teacher... should know their subject well, should master their topic."* "Having proper diction and using tone of voice effectively" is also among the professional competencies mentioned by students (f=10). This expressed expectation suggests that students see the teacher not only as a knowledge transmitter but also as a learning leader with strong communication skills. Although at lower frequencies, students also emphasized "a teacher who makes eye contact" (f=3). This finding is supported by 9K4's statement: *"Should explain the lesson well, should make eye contact during class but should not fixate on just one person."*

In the "Classroom Management" category, another fundamental area that students see in the ideal teacher is classroom management skills. Students particularly expressed expectations for "a teacher who is not boring, not overwhelming" (f=13) and "a disciplined teacher" (f=12). This finding shows that students seek a balance that includes both freedom and order. 9E6's statement clearly reflects this expectation: *"In my opinion, teachers should be both fun, funny, disciplined and rule-oriented when necessary, and like-minded. They should have a sense of humor, explain the lesson well, ..."*

Additionally, students consider "a teacher who comes to class on time" (f=12) important. 12E7 clearly stated this expectation by saying: *"For me, the ideal teacher is one who comes to classes on time, teaches properly, and respects me."* Students also defined "a teacher who does not use physical violence" (f=5) as ideal. This expression particularly materializes in 10K3's words: *"Should not shout at the smallest sound, Especially should not throw books at heads."* Similarly, this finding is supported by 10K6's statement: *"... No matter what happens, they should not insult or assault."* The expectations for "a teacher who does not give too much homework" (f=4), "exams that are not difficult" (f=3), and "a teacher who gives students speaking turns" (f=3) in this category also show students' demands regarding the in-class learning environment.

The "Professionalism and Appearance" category appears to be related to the teacher's professional attitude. Students particularly define as ideal "a teacher who loves their profession, fulfills job requirements, and knows their responsibilities" (f=23). 10E2 expressed this situation by saying: *"Should know their duties and responsibilities."* Additionally, students stated that they prefer "a teacher who pays attention to attire" and "appears clean and neat" (f=5). This finding is supported by 10K6's statement: *"Personally, I want a teacher who pays attention to their clothing, even if they smoke, their clothes don't smell like smoke, whose hair is properly tied, and whose nails are not yellow."* Finally, the expectation of "a solution-oriented teacher" (f=2) has been expressed by students. This expectation of students indicates a demand for the teacher to address encountered problems with a constructive approach.

Discussion

In this research, how the ideal teacher is defined from the perspective of vocational high school students and the personal and professional characteristics that should be present in an ideal

teacher have been examined. The research findings have been addressed under three main themes. These are listed as (1) Definition of the Ideal Teacher, (2) Personal Characteristics, and (3) Professional Characteristics. Each theme has been classified into subcategories, and students' perceptions regarding the ideal teacher have been discussed and compared in light of national and international literature. Thus, the consistency of the emerging themes regarding the pedagogical, relational, and personal aspects of teachers with existing research has been evaluated.

The findings regarding the "Definition of the Ideal Teacher" theme show that students perceive the ideal teacher not only as an expert transmitting knowledge but also as a guide of the learning process, a supporter, and an emotionally reassuring adult. Students' emphasis on a teacher who guides, motivates, makes the subject enjoyable, and communicates particularly highlights the transformative role of the teacher in the learning environment. This situation is consistent with theoretical approaches that emphasize the facilitative role of the teacher. Mezirow (1997) argues that for the transformation of students' thinking structures, the teacher must be a guide who directs, encourages questioning, and provides support. Similarly, research indicating that teacher support enhances students' attitudes toward learning, motivation, and academic self-confidence (Wentzel, 1997; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020) supports the current findings.

In the research, students' emphasis on a teacher who can converse, listen, and create a positive classroom environment shows parallelism with literature that reveals the determining effect of teachers' communication skills on classroom climate and student adaptation. Studies in the literature show that teacher-student relationships play a significant role in both the academic and affective development of students. It is stated that positive teacher-student relationships significantly increase students' academic achievement (Liu, 2024). Similarly, it has been demonstrated that teachers' understanding and friendly approaches strengthen students' class participation (Cebelleros, 2024). Additionally, it is expressed that effective communication between teachers and students, increases students' desire to learn, facilitates learning, and enhances academic success (Diktaş Yılmaz et al., 2023).

In the "Human and relational qualities" category, among the elements most frequently emphasized by students are qualities such as "understanding students' situation/language, approaching students with love, compassion and good intentions, friendly communication, trustworthiness." These findings show that the warm, supportive, and trust-building relationship styles exhibited by teachers transform the classroom environment into a positive learning climate. Indeed, research in the literature reveals that emotionally oriented teacher-student relationships are significantly related to school engagement and academic achievement (Roorda et al., 2011); when considered together with learning enjoyment, commitment, and emotional experiences, they contribute to students developing positive affective attitudes toward school (Li & Zhang, 2024); and furthermore, respectful communication is an important factor in creating a positive atmosphere in the classroom environment (Sarıer, 2023).

According to the research findings, another theme where student opinions converge is the "Personal Characteristics" theme. This theme has been examined under three main categories: "Values and Ethics," "Emotional and Social Characteristics," and "Personality Traits." The research findings show that the ideal teacher must possess extremely strong qualities in terms of values and ethics, emotional and social competencies, and personality traits. In the "Values and Ethics" category, students most emphasized ethical behaviors such as "being respectful toward students" and "not insulting or humiliating" in the ideal teacher. This finding shows that respect, non-hurtful communication, and ethical attitudes in teacher-student relationships play a decisive role in students perceiving the classroom environment as a safe and supportive learning space. It is possible to find research results in the literature that support this finding. Studies emphasize that teachers' respectful and value-based approaches toward students create positive effects on school climate and the quality of the learning environment (Alkan Başkan, 2024; Çakabay & Mete, 2025).

Furthermore, current empirical and longitudinal studies examining the quality of teacher-student relationships reveal that respect- and support-based interactions significantly strengthen students' class participation, academic motivation, and psychological well-being (Luo & Derakhshan, 2024; Valdez et al., 2024). Additionally, they show that positive and non-hurtful interactions

sustainably support students' attitudes toward the learning process and their academic engagement (Di Lisio et al., 2025). In this context, the findings of the current research demonstrate that ethical and respect-based teacher behaviors are perceived by students as one of the fundamental components of ideal teaching and directly affect the quality of the learning environment.

In the research, students defined the ideal teacher as an understanding and tolerant individual who can establish empathy, values students' emotions and thoughts, and is compassionate and has strong communication skills. These findings align with international literature that reveals teachers' empathic and supportive attitudes have significant effects on students' class participation, academic adaptation, and perception of the classroom environment. A teacher-student relationship in which students feel valued and understood strengthens in-class interaction, creating a supportive foundation for more active participation in the learning process (Liu, 2024). In this context, the findings of the current research show that in students' perception of the ideal teacher—particularly for vocational high school students—this situation demonstrates sensitivity to the human aspect of the teacher rather than academic achievement alone.

In the research, students emphasized that in terms of personality traits, the ideal teacher should most importantly possess a calm, non-shouting attitude and the ability to control their emotions. Additionally, a friendly-faced, positive, and warm teacher profile is perceived by students as an element that makes the classroom environment safer and more open to learning. These findings show that teachers' emotional regulation skills and supportive attitudes contribute to students feeling valued and understood, thereby strengthening in-class interaction and active participation in the learning process. Research conducted by Sarier (2020), Kalkan and Dağlı (2021), and Wentzel (1997) has reached results supporting this finding.

The final theme where student opinions converge is the "Professional Characteristics" theme, which has been examined under the categories of "Teaching Skills," "Classroom Management," and "Professionalism and Appearance." The research findings show that in the "Teaching Skills" category, students place great importance on professional competencies when defining the ideal teacher. For students, the ideal teacher is a person with developed professional characteristics, strong teaching skills, effective in classroom management, and exhibiting a professional attitude toward their profession. In this category, the professional characteristics most emphasized by students are "explaining lessons fluently and understandably" and "conducting lessons in an enjoyable and activity-based manner." This finding is consistent with studies showing that one of the fundamental elements of effective teaching is the teacher's pedagogical content knowledge and delivery skills. According to Hattie (2009), clarity in lesson delivery, feedback, and lesson structuring are among the factors that most affect student achievement. Stronge (2018), on the other hand, has shown that effective teachers not only know the subject but also convey it in ways appropriate to student levels using various methods and techniques. The finding of "making lessons enjoyable" in the research is similarly supported by studies in the literature (Gültekin, 2015; Kalkan and Dağlı, 2021; Sarier, 2020).

In the "Classroom Management" category, findings show that students expect effective classroom management from the ideal teacher. Students' emphases such as "a teacher who is not boring-overwhelming," "being disciplined," and "coming to class on time" reveal the importance of the classroom environment being both orderly and student-friendly. Marzano's (2003) 30-year data-based analyses show that teachers' classroom management skills have a strong effect on academic achievement. Findings in the literature indicate that effective classroom management is not achieved solely through rules but is possible through teachers' consistent behavior, clarity, and student-centered approach (Wentzel, 1997). In this context, students expect teachers to exhibit an attitude based on equality and justice principles, free from violence and respectful (İçme & Büyüük, 2023).

The "Professionalism and Appearance" category, another sub-dimension of the "Professional Characteristics" theme, encompasses teachers' commitment to their profession, sense of responsibility, and professional appearance. Students' expectation of "a teacher who loves their profession, fulfills job requirements, and knows their responsibilities" demonstrates that teaching requires ethical responsibility, professional motivation, and a professional stance. The literature emphasizes that effective teaching involves, beyond knowledge and skills, attitude toward the profession, self-

reflection, and commitment to ethical values (Wentzel, 1997; OECD, 2021). Students' expectation of "clean and neat appearance" points to the outwardly reflected aspect of teachers' professional identity. Although appearance does not directly affect academic achievement, research shows that first impressions regarding teachers' appearance influence students' perception of professionalism (Sarier, 2023; Marici et al., 2023). These findings show that professional competencies are not limited to in-class practices alone; they constitute a holistic structure with teachers' behavioral, attitudinal, and representational aspects.

Conclusion

In this research, vocational high school students' perceptions of the ideal teacher have been examined, and the obtained findings have been grouped under three main themes. Overall, the conclusion derived from the themes shows that students' perception of the ideal teacher possesses a multidimensional structure encompassing both instructional and human aspects.

The first theme, the definition of the ideal teacher, reveals that students view the teacher not only as a person transmitting knowledge but also as a guide who directs, supports, motivates, and provides reassurance. For students, the ideal teacher is a person who facilitates the learning process and offers developmental support extending beyond the lesson. Additionally, the ideal teacher is evaluated as someone who creates a positive, warm, and communication-open classroom environment. This result shows that especially in vocational high schools, the teacher's role includes not only academic but also social and emotional guidance.

The second theme, personal characteristics, shows that students value personal qualities when evaluating the ideal teacher. According to the findings, students expect the teacher to have an attitude committed to ethical values, respectful, fair, non-discriminatory, and free from hurtful discourse. Moreover, an understanding, empathetic, tolerant, strong in communication, friendly-faced, and patient teacher profile is among the most emphasized elements in students' definitions of the ideal teacher. These expectations of students demonstrate the importance of a relationship model based on safe, supportive, and human connections in the classroom environment.

The third theme, professional characteristics, reveals that students view pedagogical competence and classroom management as indispensable components of ideal teaching. Students consider the fluent, understandable, and enjoyable delivery of lessons as important professional competencies. Additionally, among students' expectations are the teacher's mastery of the subject, use of methods that do not bore students, and enrichment of the learning process with activities. When considered from a classroom management perspective, the ideal teacher is accepted as a person who maintains order in the classroom, comes to class on time, stays away from violence, exhibits a fair and student-centered approach. Students also evaluate the teacher's love for their profession, fulfillment of responsibilities, and display of a professional appearance as an important dimension of the teaching profession.

Recommendations

Within the scope of the research findings, the following recommendations have been made for practitioners, policy developers, and researchers:

- Teacher training programs should include more relational competencies such as empathy, communication skills, positive classroom interaction, and emotional regulation.
- In pedagogical formation processes, the practical development of activity-based teaching, differentiated instruction, and student-centered methods should be ensured.
- Training programs on student motivation, classroom management, positive discipline, and adolescent psychology should be organized for vocational high school teachers.
- School administrators should encourage practices that strengthen teacher-student relationships (student clubs, guidance activities, individual support hours).

- Regulations that reduce teachers' workload could contribute to allocating time for higher-quality teaching and student communication.
- Perceptions of the ideal teacher could be compared across different school types (Anatolian high school, imam-hatip high school, vocational high school, etc.) and study groups (teachers, parents, administrators, etc.).
- The impact of ideal teacher characteristics on student motivation, school commitment, and academic achievement could be examined using quantitative methods.

Limitations

Like every research, this study has certain limitations. Firstly, the research is limited to students in vocational high schools located in only one province. Therefore, the results are limited in terms of generalizability. Similar studies could be conducted in different regions and school types. Secondly, the data are based on students' subjective opinions. Consequently, expectations regarding the ideal teacher may have been influenced by students' personal experiences. Additionally, a semi-structured interview form containing open-ended questions was used as a qualitative data collection tool, and students were asked to complete this form. Students provided answers that came to mind at that moment for the questions asked. Conducting face-to-face in-depth interviews or focus group studies with students could contribute to enriching the findings. On the other hand, this research was conducted within time constraints. Since students' perceptions may change over time, longitudinal studies could contribute to the literature.

Disclosure Statements

Contribution rate statement of the researchers:

Both authors contributed equally to this study.

Conflict of interest statement:

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

CRedit Authorship Contribution Statement

Adem Beyhan, Ogün Bilge: Conceptualization, methodology, data collection, data analysis, writing – review & editing.

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Ethical Declaration and Committee Approval

In this research, the principles of scientific research and publication ethics were followed.