Men and classrooms in Qatar: A Q methodology research

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ABSTRACT

Globally, gender differences in the teaching profession are a longstanding public policy concern. International organizations and scholarly research routinely sound alarms concerning the low number of males joining the teaching profession. Although there have been multiple explorations of why the teaching profession has become gender imbalanced in favour of women, such studies have largely focused on the Global North. To this end, this study aimed to elucidate the situation in the Global South. Specifically, through Q-methodology, this study explored the perceptions of a group of G12 Qatari male students on joining teaching as a possible profession. The data showed that, to varying degrees, these students rejected the idea of becoming teachers. They took one of two positions: *non-negotiable refusal* or *negotiable refusal*. These positions are explained, and long-term strategies are proposed for policymakers in Qatar to gradually steer the ship towards a more equitable direction.

Introduction

Globally, gender differences in teaching profession are seen as a longstanding public policy concern (Drudy et al., 2017). International organizations and scholarly research sound the alarm routinely concerning available data on the low number of males joining the teaching profession (e.g., ORCD, 2021). This is frequently followed by media discussions and policy debates on the impact of feminization of teaching. A feminized teaching profession means that women represent a significant majority of the teaching workforce (UNECO, 2011). In most countries, women preponderate the teaching profession, although not at management levels. In the United States, women constitute 89% of teachers at public elementary schools and 60% at public high schools (USA Facts, 2020). In Europe, women account for 72% of the teacher workforce (Euro Stats, 2020). According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2022), women also constitute over 90% of primary teachers in Brazil, Russia, Italy, and Slovakia, and between 70 and 80% of secondary teachers. Drudy et al. (2017) reported only a few countries where the number of women and men in teaching profession is approximately equal: Indonesia, Tunisia, and China. Nevertheless, they also noticed that men outnumber women in teaching profession in economically disadvantaged countries. They argued, 'examination of the proportions of women in teaching in the different regions worldwide suggests that the proportions could reasonably be taken as indicators of economic development in the various regions' (p. 6). Although there

have been multiple explorations of why the teaching profession became gender-imbalanced in favour of women and what the impact of this might have on educational outcomes, such explorations have largely focused on the Global North (UNECO, 2011).

This study elucidates the situation in the Global South, investigating why few men are interested in taking up teaching as a career and exploring whether more men could be attracted into the classroom as teachers. The site for this study is Qatar, which represents an interesting case study in several respects. Qatar was perhaps mentioned for the first time in Western literature in Palgrave (1877), who saw the country as a 'miserable province' and was irritated by the 'miles and miles of low barren hills, bleak and sun-scored, with hardly a single tree to vary their dry monotonous outline' (cited in Said Zahlan 1979, p. 105). Nevertheless, a century later, Qatar became a global energy giant possessing 12% of the world's natural gas reserves, granting its nationals one of the highest per capita incomes worldwide. Qatar's economic success story has attracted various waves of migration, which first began after the discovery of oil in the 1940s. Today, expatriates massively outnumber Qatari nationals, representing 88% of the population. During its rapid economic growth over the last few decades, Qatar undertook a sweeping educational reform aiming to build a knowledge-based society. With this came relentless governmental endeavours of 'educating and training Qataris to their full potential' (GSDP, 2011, p. 19). The results of these endeavours indicate that: (a) 99% is the literacy rate amongst the population (Planning & Statistics Authority, 2019a); (b) 58% of the Qatari

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labour force are highly skilled and hold senior professional and technical positions (Planning & Statistics Authority, 2019b); and (c) 0.2% is the unemployment rate for Qatari males, while 0.4% is the unemployment rate for Qatari females (Planning & Statistics Authority, 2019b).

However, these numbers are only the bright side of the story of turning Qatar into a knowledge-based society. Amongst other challenges, the country is failing to attract, prepare, and employ male Qatari teachers (Alsharq, 2018). Qatari male teachers represent less than 2.5% of the country's 20,364 working teachers, while other teachers are either Qatari female teachers or male and female teachers outsourced from different countries (Ministry of Education & Higher Education, 2020). Although the number of applicants for places on teacher education courses has demonstrated an overall increase during the period of educational reforms, female applicants have dominated. To illustrate, for the last academic year (2020–2021), the undergraduate student cohort at the College of Education in Qatar University consisted of 2016 Qataris (72 males and 1944 females), while the postgraduate student cohort consisted of 35 Qataris (2 males and 33 females) (Qatar University, 2021). These continually declining figures have led community members and officials alike to raise alarms.

To this end, this study undertakes an in-depth investigation of this topic. In particular, using Q methodology, we explore the perceptions of G12 Qatari male students (henceforward referred to as school-leavers) on choosing teaching as a profession. We first review the global decline in the proportion of men entering the teaching profession and outline some of its indirect impacts in the Global North. Next, we relate the discussion to the Qatari context. Then, we introduce Q methodology as our mode of investigation in this study. Finally, we present and discuss our data before providing concluding remarks.

Gender and teaching

As we attempted to demonstrate earlier, the global gender imbalance in the teaching profession is tilted in favour of women, especially in elementary education. Exceptions to this can be found in economically disadvantaged regions of the world. The questions then become: Was this always the case? To what extent can this be seen as a problem that requires further exploration and solutions? The following paragraphs explore some answers to these questions by reviewing the decline in the proportion of men entering the teaching profession historically and by highlighting some indirect impacts of the absence of male teachers in the Global North. The discussion is related to the situation in Qatar, which is described in the following section.

Drudy et al. (2017) wrote, '[in the Irish context] one has to go back to 1874 to find an equal proportion of men and women in the [teaching] profession' (p. 17). For them, in the early 19th century, when education was not officially regulated, male teachers outnumbered female teachers. They explained that 'although other forms of employment were available to males, teaching was attractive to men' (p. 17). Similarly, in the United States, it was common for men to join caring professions, such as teaching and nursing (Tyack & Strober, 1981; Williams, 1995). Nevertheless, the situation changed dramatically in the early 1920s, when these occupations became institutionalised (Williams, 1995), especially in areas where industrial capitalism became dominant (Tyack & Strober, 1981). It has been argued that strict professional and moral codes came with the institutionalisation of education, which made the occupation less glamourous for men. Tyack & Strober (1981) noticed, 'Had mature men constituted a majority of the teaching profession, it is hard to imagine that school patrons would have insisted on such tight supervision of the morals and mores of teachers as they did in the case of young women' (p. 145). Gradually but steadily, males' participation in the teaching profession began to decline, especially as markets opened their doors, and previously exclusive commercial, economic and industrial occupations became accessible.

However, capitalism and economic development alone did account for the decline in the number of male teachers in the Global North;

ideological factors also played a role. In the early 20th century, women were seen merely in terms of their domestic functions (Drudy et al., 2017). That is, women were considered (by nature and God's design) the ideal teachers of children due to their nurturing and patient demeanour. Moreover, the prevailing sentiment was that teaching prepared women to become better mothers. Teaching was seen as 'a step from the parental home to the schoolhouse and then back again to the conjugal home as wife and mother' (Tyack & Strober, 1981, p. 136). Ironically, then, women's increasing participation in the institutionalised workforce was chaperoned with ideologies of a 'cult of domesticity' and 'true womanhood' that demarcated women in their presumed domestic functions. These cultural assumptions impacted the ways in which males and females developed attitudes towards caring professions, including teaching. They fuelled the existing masculine culture that stressed stereotypical gender roles; men are expected to show competitiveness and a focus on material success, while women are expected to be nurturing and taking care of children. Nevertheless, pigeonholed roles were not the central cause of the constant decline of males as teachers.

After launching education reforms globally in the 1980s, the social status of teachers began to gradually decline (Aydin et al., 2015; Day & Lee, 2011), along with their autonomy (Malkus, 2015) and wages (Allegretto & Mishel, 2016). It is within this context that teaching became a stressful occupation (Kokkinos, 2007). Tsang (2019) wrote, 'In the past three decades, we have witnessed that the population of unhappy teachers, who suffer from stress, exhaustion, frustration, depression, anxiety, and other negative emotions in teaching, is increasing all over the world' (p. 1). More stressed-out male teachers (and female teachers) have started to leave the profession—a trend that it seems will intensify in the future (Eurydice, 2015). When teaching became a dead-end career offering little scope for continuous professional development, it rendered the profession unattractive (Eurydice, 2018). Hence, college-based teacher education enrolment declined (AACTE, 2019), even though it provided easy access to teacher training (Drudy et al., 2017).

To conclude, the global gender imbalance in the teaching profession is firmly rooted in issues relating to economic development and capitalism, the place of women in society, cultural definitions of masculinity and the declining status of the teaching profession. As noted by many, these factors are more influential in economically advantaged countries (e.g., Drudy et al., 2017).

The central concern in several institutional reports and scholarly works has been the lack of 'male role models', especially in elementary education (e.g., Eurydice, 2018; McGrath et al., 2020). It has been argued that the absence of male teachers has a negative impact on students, namely in the reinforcement of gender stereotypes. This is especially true amongst ethnic, linguistic and cultural minorities (Eurydice, 2018). Drudy et al. (2017) reported that schoolboys and schoolgirls are less rigid in their gender role classifications when they have both male and female teachers. In particular, schoolboys are likelier to view both males and females as nurturing and as having authority. Such perceptions provide schoolboys with a wider range of behavioural choices, more academic competency and a greater willingness to share authority and express nurturing behaviour. In a similar vein, McGrath et al. (2020) argued, 'the limited observation of male teachers may result in children's erroneous generalisation of all teacher characteristics as female-specific traits, perpetuating the view that women are better suited to the teaching profession' (p. 6). Hence, for them greater male teacher representation in the classroom may challenge rigid social representations of masculinities, femininities and stereotypical gender roles.

The previous discussion of the gender imbalance in the teaching profession epitomises the situation in Qatar, yet with more particular aspects, as the next section details.

Qatari male teachers and classrooms

There has been a continuous decline in Qatari men joining the teaching profession. Table 1 presents the Qatari Ministry of Education and Higher Education's statistical bulletin (2019–2020), which indicates the limited number of Qatari male teachers working in public and private schools compared to Qatari female teachers and resident teachers of other nationalities. The table illustrates a significant difference between Qatari male teachers and Qatari and non-Qatari female teachers. Of particular concern is the meagre percentage of Qatari male teachers (2.5% of the total Qatari teachers and less than 1% of Qatari and non-Qatari teachers) working in elementary schools.

Some of the reasons for such low figures are similar to those identified in other parts of the world, as discussed earlier. Qatari men prefer occupations other than teaching. They see teaching as an unattractive career option because of its low salary and low status compared to other careers (Al-Mohannadi & Capel, 2007; Barnowe-Meyer, 2013; Macleod & Abou-El-Kheir, 2017). Still, there are other reasons that make the Qatari situation peculiar.

The Qatari government appeals to Qatari males to become teachers based on their low participation in the educational process (although not in management levels). This plea is recurrently echoed in the media, which reports policy debates on the issue. A recent example of such debates is a deliberation launched in March 2022 by the Consultative Assembly, Qatar's highest legislative authority. Members of the Assembly discussed Qatari males' reluctance to become teachers and highlighted the negative impact of their absence on the quality of education in the country. They stressed the need to encourage Qataris to join the teaching profession and called for immediate solutions. For this, the Assembly referred the matter to the Information and Cultural Affairs Committee for further investigation and the proposal of potential solutions. Although this can be considered a step in the right direction, other governmental steps inadvertently work against such endeavours. That is, governmental recruitment policies often tend to facilitate the recruitment of Qatari males to a wide range of military and administrative careers with high salaries and less stringent academic qualifications, as high school certificates could be sufficient for employment. This encourages Qatari males to drift away from careers that might require extra academic effort and pay lower wages, such as teaching.

A major concern arising from the lack of Qatari male teachers is that Qatari male students tend to lack 'cultural' role models. Although Qatari male students are exposed to male teachers, these teachers come from different nationalities with different cultures, worldviews and dialects. Certainly, it is important that role models come from vastly different genders and backgrounds than our own. However, it is of equal importance that we are inspired sometimes with someone just like 'us'. Relevant literature indicates that 'Having examples of successful role models in fields where they are underrepresented (e.g., women in science, engineering, or management) is a critical signal for members of [a specific group] … that they can also succeed in such environments' (Gartzia et al., 2021, p. 591). For instance, there is empirical evidence that raising the visibility of female role models for girls increases their expectations of success, especially in male-dominated fields (Johnson et al., 2019). Similarly, having Qatari male schoolteachers could increase Qatari male students' willingness to become teachers, while their absence in the classroom may render the teaching profession as the 'others' job'—not for Qataris.

Methodology

To explore the perceptions of Qatari male school-leavers towards choosing teaching as a profession, this study uses the Q methodology (henceforth Q). Watts & Stenner (2012) described the birth of Q, explaining that the methodology made its first appearance in 1935 via a letter to the journal *Nature* authored by the British physicist and psychologist William Stephenson. In his letter, Stephenson proposed a simple yet innovative adaption of Charles Spearman's conventional factor analysis, which is usually used in R methodology (e.g., surveys and questionnaires). Conventional factor analysis is often employed to reveal patterns of association between a series of measured variables (Watts & Stenner, 2012). It studies a selected population of n individuals, each measured in m tests (Stephenson, 1936). Following, as Stephenson (1936) explained, 'the (m) $(m-1)/2$ intercorrelations for these m variables are subjected to… factor analysis' (p. 344). Alternatively, Stephenson suggested starting with a population of n different tests, each scaled by m individuals. Afterwards, 'the $(m)(m-1)/2$ intercorrelations are factorized in the usual way' (Stephenson, 1936, p. 344). Concretely, Stephenson proposed to invert the conventional factor analysis so that individuals, not the variables, are clustered together based on similarities and differences of their perspectives. Hence, Q involves a by-person factor analysis that differs from the by-variable factor analysis employed in R methodology.

Over time, Q has proven to be a 'rigorous, hermeneutic, and iterative technique' (Robbins & Krueger, 2000, p. 636), in several scholarly fields (Watts & Stenner, 2012), employed to discern individuals' views, needs, beliefs, attitudes, opinions, and needs (McKeown & Thomas, 2013). Conducting a Q study consists of three main stages:

1. Defining a *concourse* of items that represents the flow of communicability surrounding a given issue or topic (Brown, 1993). This is followed by developing a Q-set through culling the concourse and selecting a smaller sample of items that represents the communications related to the topic under investigation.
2. Selecting participants (i.e., P-set) strategically and having them sort the Q-set into a grid to capture their perspectives (i.e., conducting a Q-sorting activity)
3. Analysing the Q-sorts using statistical techniques of correlation and inverted factor analysis to uncover the inter-subjective ordering of beliefs shared amongst them. This is followed by interpreting the results of the statistical analysis as narrative accounts.

Defining the concourse and developing the Q-set

The concourse is a preliminary set of all conceivable interrelated statements about the topic under investigation from which a Q-set is derived. For Stephenson (1986), the process of defining a concourse should follow the prism of a 'working theory' of communication where a number of 'messages or communications' about a topic are assembled along 'some broad lines' (p. 43). Reminding the reader that the word originates from the Latin *concursus* which means 'running together', Stephenson emphasized not only the *informational* but also the *conversational* functions and qualities of a concourse. Concretely, a concourse should involve a wide range of ideas that 'run together' on a topic of interest.

To develop a concourse on Qatari male school-leavers' perceptions towards choosing teaching as a profession, we first approached a group of male school-leavers ($n = 17$) and invited them to 3 focus-group sessions, through which they were asked to provide feedback concerning their future career options. More specifically, they were asked to respond to the following questions:

Table 1
Qatari and non-Qatari teachers in Qatar's schools for the years 2019–2020.

Public and Private Schools	Qatari Teachers		Total Qatari Teachers	Non-Qatari Teachers		Total Non-Teachers
Level	Female	Male		Female	Male	
Primary	2203	56	2259	7876	2996	10,872
Preparatory	540	97	637	2295	2047	4342
Secondary	397	69	466	2630	2520	5150

1 What is your future career choice after leaving school? Why?
2 What is your perception of the nature of teaching as a profession in Qatar?
3 What is your perception of the status of teaching as a profession in Qatar?
4 What is your perception of men working as teachers in Qatar?

The responses of the school-leavers were transcribed and recorded in an Excel file, representing the 'conversational' element in the concourse. Adding to this, we conducted item sampling via extensive reviewing of the existing literature (e.g., Alsharq, 2018; amongst others). This represented the 'informational' element in the concourse. Both the school-leavers' responses and the review of literature constituted the concourse in this study. We then needed to reduce the concourse to a Q-sample that is 'small enough for practical purposes and sufficiently diverse in order to approximate the diversity of the concourse' (Brown et al., 2019, p. 3). For this, we extensively culled the Q-sample to discard the repetitive items. We then consulted subject experts as a means of testing the adequacy of the Q-sample, considering 'they are generally best placed to comment authoritatively on [the concourse's] overall coverage, obvious omissions and the phraseology of individual items' (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p. 62). Based on the tripartite framework of teaching motivations (Moran et al., 2001), we also categorized the Q-items into three categories: *intrinsic, extrinsic* and *altruistic* motivations. The definitions of these categories are explained in Table 2. This resulted in a set of 29 Q-items; each item was reformulated in the Arabic language and given an identifying number to facilitate data recording. Then, the Q-items were piloted with one Qatari male school-leaver, leading to some modifications, after which the Q-set was finalized (see Appendix 1).

Selecting the P-set and conducting the Q-sort activities

As explained earlier, every participant in a Q study serves as a variable. This means that 'strategic, rather than opportunity, sampling of participants is usually preferable' (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p. 88). The basic criterion in this strategic sampling is that 'the viewpoint of participants must matter in relation to the subject at hand' (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p. 88). Based on this, 35 Qatari male school-leavers were recruited to conduct the Q-sort activities. These school-leavers (17–18 years old) came from three public secondary schools in Qatar. They were selected based on the previous mentioned criterion, with the help of the school administrations. School-leavers were interviewed in April, which is the last month of the academic year before final exams in Qatar, assuming that they have a clear idea about their career options at that time. Table 3 presents more information on the three selected schools and the number of participating school-leavers from each school.

The selected Qatari male school-leavers were first asked to complete some ethical formalities (i.e., sign consent form if they were 18 years old or provide a signed parental consent form if they had not yet attained the age of 18 years). Next, they were asked to provide some personal and demographic information that has a good chance of influencing their

Table 2
Q-items in relation to motivation factors.

Intrinsic Factors	Extrinsic Factors	Altruistic factors
Intrinsic factors refer to internal satisfaction towards becoming a teacher. They include job satisfaction and fulfilment.	Extrinsic factors include benefits related to teaching, such as pay, prestige and job conditions.	Altruistic factors are those that regard the teaching profession as a socially worthwhile endeavour that contributes to the growth of individuals and the advancement of society.
Q-items: 3, 4, 15, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28 and 29	Q-items: 1, 2, 5, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17, 18, 19 and 21	Q-items: 7, 8 and 9

Table 3
P-set.

School	Information	Number of participating school-leavers
A	School A is located in Doha's most popular high-income area. The school offers a Qatari curriculum to its 694 male students (487 Qatari and 207 non-Qatari). This school is considered to be a model school dedicated to high-achieving students.	11
B	School B is located in a quiet upper-middle-class area of Doha, far from the hustle of the traffic-filled capital's centre. It provides a Qatari curriculum for its 626 male students (373 Qatari and 253 non-Qatari).	11
C	School C is located in one of the later-developed areas of northern Doha that is popular amongst middle-class Qatari families. The school provides a Qatari curriculum for its 484 male students (295 Qatari and 189 non-Qatari).	13

perceptions (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Then, a written copy of the condition of instruction (i.e., the research question) was provided to the school-leavers; this was also stated verbally: *Qatari male youth have various opinions regarding joining the teaching profession. These cards present some of these opinions. With which opinions do you agree, with which do you disagree, and about which do you feel uncertain?* Prior to that, the school-leavers were given a blank grid and the Q-set cards in a signal pile, explaining that each card offers a different response to the condition of instruction. We used an 11-point sorting grid for our 29-item Q-set. The values ranged from −5 (Most disagree) to +5 (Most agree) (see Fig. 1).

Analytical procedures

The Q-sorts gathered from the 35 Qatari male school-leavers were statistically analysed using PQMethod software – a statistical program tailored to the requirements of Q studies (PQ-Method website). First, the Q-sorts were entered as 'piles' of statement numbers. Second, a number of factors were extracted through performing a centroid factor analysis and then rotating the factors analytically (Varimax). In deciding on the final number of factors to be execrated, we followed Webler et al. (2009) criteria of simplicity, clarity, distinctness, and stability. Based on these criteria, a four-factor solution (F-1, F-2, F-3, and F-4) was chosen, explaining 36% of the opinion variance. Next, Brown's (1980) equation was helpful in calculating each Q-sort's significance at the $p < 0.01$ level: $2.58 \times (1 \div \sqrt{\text{the no. of items in the Q-set}})$. Factor loadings of at least ± 0.52 were significant at the $p < 0.01$ level.

Of the total number of Q-sorts, 26 loaded on one of the four factors, while 9 were null cases. The *z* scores for each individual item were
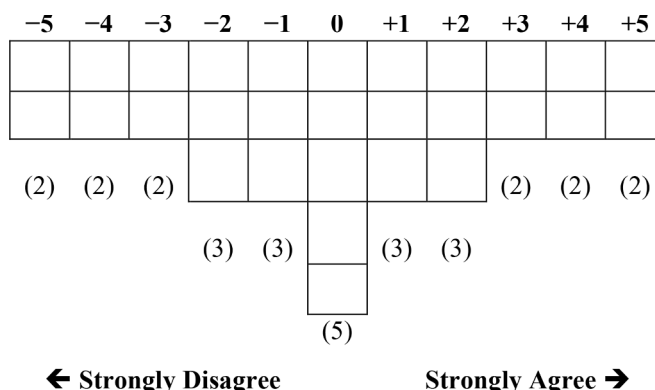

Fig. 1. Grid.

converted into a single *factor array*, that is, a single Q-sort configured to represent the viewpoint of a specific factor (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Figs. 2–5 show the factor array for the four emerging factors in this study.

Results

As mentioned earlier, four factors (F-1, F-2, F-3, and F-4) were extracted, accounting for 36% of the opinion variance. Each of these factors represents a perception shared by a group of school-leavers concerning their choice of teaching as a profession. Table 4 presents a quantitative summary of the emerging factors and is followed by a qualitative description and interpretation.

In general, data shows that there is a level of unanimity amongst all the emerging perceptions. That is, although teaching is seen as an important profession, it is rejected by all school-leavers participating in this study. However, the level of rejection varies from one group of school-leavers to another. On the one hand, school-leavers loaded on F1 and F2 showed a steadfast refusal and emphatic rejection to consider teaching as a profession. On the other hand, school-leavers loaded on F3 and F4 appeared to be more flexible in their rejection of becoming teachers and opened windows for negotiating their positions. In each way, we gave labels for each emerging factor that 'provide readers with a shorthand identification of what the perspective is about' (Zabala et al., 2018, p. 1189) as the following section further demonstrates.

F-1: i would not fit the bill, sorry

A total of eight Qatari male school-leavers loaded significantly on F-1, accounting for 13% of the explained opinion variance. These school-leavers consider teaching to be an important job and strongly acknowledge the necessity of attracting Qatari youth to the teaching profession (Q-item 8: +5). They seem to be extremely aware of the declining number of male Qatari teachers (Q-item 7: +5) and their un-fulfilled role in building society (Q-item 9: +3). However, they strongly perceive teaching as a demanding and stressful profession that requires much effort, both during and after working hours, unlike other employment options available to Qatari males (Q-item 4: +4). For them, the choice of teaching as a profession in Qatar is situated within a wide spectrum of occupations. Conspicuous amongst these are military careers, which, according to school-leavers loaded on this factor, are highly coveted and desirable because of their higher salaries and inherent social status (Q-item 15: +4). Hence, for school-leavers loaded on this factor, compared to military careers, the teaching profession does not match the aspirations and ambitions of Qatari youth (Q-item 11: +2). Moreover, school-leavers here seem to have a 'domestic ideology', so they believe that women are best suited for the teaching profession
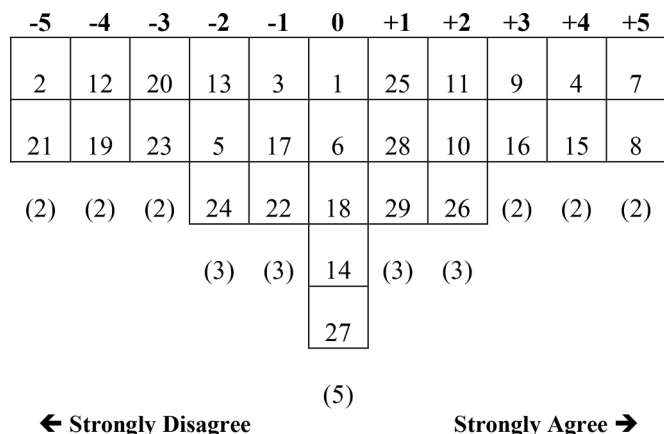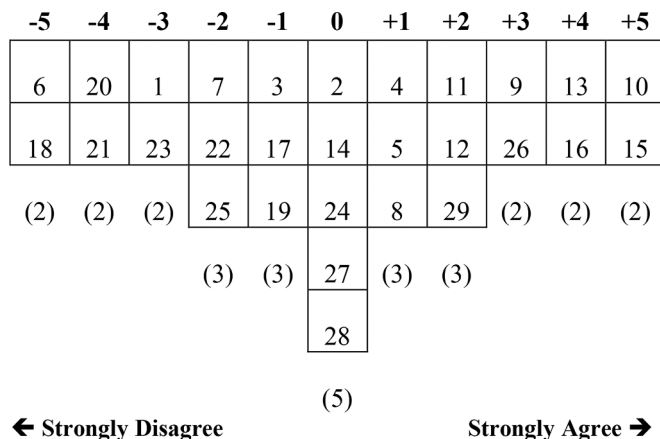
-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
2	12	20	13	3	1	25	11	9	4	7
21	19	23	5	17	6	28	10	16	15	8
(2)	(2)	(2)	24	22	18	29	26	(2)	(2)	(2)
			(3)	(3)	14	(3)	(3)			
					27					
					(5)					

← Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree →

Fig. 2. Factor array for F-1.

-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
6	20	1	7	3	2	4	11	9	13	10
18	21	23	22	17	14	5	12	26	16	15
(2)	(2)	(2)	25	19	24	8	29	(2)	(2)	(2)
			(3)	(3)	27	(3)	(3)			
					28					
					(5)					

← Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree →

Fig. 3. Factor array for F-2.

-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
26	28	8	9	7	11	5	3	4	13	15
12	2	27	1	10	19	6	14	25	29	22
(2)	(2)	(2)	16	17	21	18	20	(2)	(2)	(2)
			(3)	(3)	23	(3)	(3)			
					24					
					(5)					

← Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree →

Fig. 4. Factor array for F-3.

-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
25	27	4	11	8	10	5	6	14	16	15
26	28	29	1	9	3	13	18	17	19	7
(2)	(2)	(2)	2	21	12	20	22	(2)	(2)	(2)
			(3)	(3)	23	(3)	(3)			
					24					
					(5)					

← Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree →

Fig. 5. Factor array for F-4.

Table 4
Quantitative summary of emerging factors.

Emerging factor	F-1	F-2	F-3	F-4	Null
Loading	8	7	4	7	9
Explained Opinion Variance	13%	8%	8%	7%	–

(Q-item 16: +3). Their argument is that women's domestic roles make them more naturally disposed towards nurture than do men's. In short, for school-leavers loaded on this factor, the teaching profession is a 'no-go' destination, especially as teachers' salaries failed to attract male Qatari youth (Q-item 2: −5). It seems that their refusal to become teachers is steadfast and emphatic. Qatari school-leavers loaded on this factor will not become teachers even if the negative social views of teachers are changed (Q-item 21: −5), even if the social status of teaching is enhanced (Q-item 12: −4), even if colleges of education in the country make greater efforts to introduce and promote their specializations (Q-item 19: −4), even if teachers' job conditions are improved (Q-item 23: −3), and even if better policies for career advancement are guaranteed (Q-item 20: −3). Rather, school-leavers loaded on this factor prefer to join a profession that requires less effort than teaching does (Q-item 25: +1), especially since social media is oversaturated with complaints about the state of the teaching profession, which further discourages them from choosing to teach (Q-item 10: +2).

F-2: it is not a good idea for me, sorry

A total of seven Qatari male school-leavers loaded significantly on F-2, accounting for 8% of the explained opinion variance. Like their counterparts who loaded on F-1, school-leavers here believe that Qatari males have an important role to play in building society by becoming teachers (Q-item 9: +3). However, teaching as a profession does not match their aspirations and ambitions as Qatari youth (Q-item 11: +2). First, social media is bursting with complaints about the state of schools in Qatar. This strongly discourages school-leavers who loaded on this factor from choosing teaching as a profession (Q-item 10: +5). Second, teaching is seen here as a woman's job, based on the prevalent belief that they are more nurturing than men (Q-item 16: +4). Third, teachers seem to have lost their status and prestige amongst some students (Q-item 13: +4) and in society (Q-item 12: +2). Finally, school-leavers here are not interested in studying educational courses and topics (Q-item 26: +3). Additionally, education majors require obtaining higher high school GPAs than other majors (i.e., military and administrative majors) (Q-item 29: +2). All these reasons drive Qatari male youth to pursue careers that they perceive as masculine and prestigious, such as the military (Q-item 15: +5). Hence, school-leavers loaded on this factor will not become teachers even if granted the same financial benefits as those of military careers (Q-item 18: −5), even if teachers' job conditions are improved (Q-item 23: −3), even if better policies for career advancement are developed (Q-item 20: −4), even if society's negative views on teaching are changed (Q-item 21: −4), and even if external scholarship programmes are initiated within educationally advanced countries (Q-item 22: −2). Hence, school-leavers loaded on this factor are extremely apathetic towards receiving career counselling on the process and requirements of joining the teaching profession (Q-item 6: −5), although their families and friends would encourage them to be teachers (Q-item 1: −3). In short, they are unaware of the declining number of male Qatari teachers (Q-item 7: −2) and uninterested in being part of the solution.

F-3: if and only if …

A total of four Qatari male school-leavers loaded significantly on F-3, accounting for 8% of the explained opinion variance. These school-leavers shared their strong inclination towards joining military careers with their counterparts who loaded on F-1 and F-2 (Q-item 15: +5). This is because, teaching is seen as a demanding and stressful profession (Q-item 4: +3), and teachers have lost their status amongst students (Q-item 13: +4). Moreover, for school-leavers loaded on this factor, education majors require a higher high school GPA than other available majors (Q-item 29: +4), and they are considered inferior compared to other disciplines (Q-item 14: +2). For all these reasons, school-leavers here prefer choosing a profession that requires less effort and a lower GPA than the teaching profession (Q-item 25: +3). Unfortunately, these school-leavers never had a teacher role model who inspired them to join the teaching profession (Q-item 5: +1). Perhaps because of this, they do not believe in the necessity of attracting Qatari men to the teaching profession (Q-item 8: −3), or in their importance in building society (Q-item 9: −2). For them, the absence of male Qatari teachers could be attributed to the profession's unattractive salary (Q-item 2: −4).

However, unlike their counterparts who loaded on F-1 and F-2, school-leavers here are willing to reconsider their position. For them, teaching might be a rewarding profession with appealing extrinsic features, such as long holidays (Q-item 3: +2). Afterall, it seems that these school-leavers refuted their complete lack of interest in studying educational majors or their inability to do so (Q-item 26: −5; Q-item 28: −4). More importantly, they do not subscribe to the belief that women are best suited for the teaching profession in Qatari society (Q-item 16: −2). Fortunately, their families and friends would encourage them if they chose to become teachers (Q-item 1: −2). Hence, a window for serious negotiations might be opened if these school-leavers are offered external scholarships to educationally advanced countries (Q-item 22: +5) and if better policies for career advancement that guarantee access to higher administrative positions were developed and implemented (Q-item 20: +2). With these conditions, school-leavers loaded on this factor would consider teaching as a profession, even if society does not grant them the highest public esteem (Q-item 12: −5). Hence, they might consider receiving career counselling on the process and requirements of joining the teaching profession (Q-item 6: +1).

F-4: it might be a good idea if…

Seven Qatari male school-leavers loaded significantly on F-4, accounting for 7% of the explained opinion variance. Following the same arguments of their counterparts who loaded on F-1, F-2, and F-3, school-leavers loaded on this factor strongly believe that Qatari males prefer joining military careers (Q-item 15: +5). For them, teaching is a 'soft option' and suitable for women whose assumed roles and identities involve caring for and raising children (Q-item 16: +4). Additionally, teaching does not pay well (Q-item 2: –2), and teachers have lost their status and prestige amongst students (Q-item 13: +1). For school-leavers here, Qatari society will have a different perspective on the teaching profession when social media highlights its importance (Q-item 17: +3).

However, school-leavers loaded on this factor strongly acknowledge the declining number of Qatari male teachers (Q-item 7: +5), especially that they have never had a teacher role model who inspires them (Q-item 5: +1). They believe that male Qatari students will benefit from relationships with male Qatari teachers. As Qatari male youth, school-leavers loaded on this factor strongly denied looking for easy career paths (Q-item 25: −5) and were open to negotiations for becoming teachers. First, they are willing to join the teaching profession if colleges of education make greater effort in introducing and promoting their specializations (Q-item 19: +4), especially that these specializations are considered inferior. That is, of a lower status and importance than other specializations (Q-item 14: +3). However, they do not see educational courses as mind-numbing or dull (Q-item 27: −4). Consequently, they firmly rejected being uninterested in being education majors (Q-item 26: −5) or lacking the required skills and abilities to do so (Q-item 28: −4). They do not also believe that becoming teachers requires attaining a high school GPA beyond their capacities (Q-item 29: −3). Hence, these school-leavers are willing to obtain career counselling on the process and requirements of joining the teaching profession (Q-item 6: +2). Second, they would join the teaching profession if they received the same financial benefits as those in military careers (Q-item 18: +2), or if they received a scholarship to an educationally advanced country (Q-item 22: +2). In this situation, for school-leavers loaded on this factor, their image of teaching as a stressful profession would be changed (Q-item 4: −3) into a career that meets their aspirations and ambitions as Qatari youth (Q-item 11: −2).

Discussion: why are there so few Qatari male teachers?

Through Q methodology, this study explored the perceptions of 35 Qatari male school-leavers on choosing teaching as a profession. To varying degrees, these school-leavers rejected becoming teachers based on different grounds. They took one of two positions: *non-negotiable refusal* or *negotiable refusal*. School-leavers loaded on F-1 and F-2 took the former position, whereas those loaded on F-3 and F-4 took the latter position.

Interestingly, on the one hand, the school-leavers holding the non-negotiable refusal position seemed to acknowledge the altruistic aspects of becoming teachers. Nevertheless, they rejected joining the profession based on a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic factors. That is, they gave high positive scores to Q-items specifying the necessity of attracting Qatari males to the teaching profession (Q-item 8, F-1: +5, F-2: +1) and Qatari male teachers' vital role in building society (Q-item 9, F-1: +3, F-2: +3). Some of them (those loaded on F-1) were extremely aware of the declining number of Qatari male teachers and saw it as a problem (Q-item 7, F-1: +5). However, a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic factors prevented them from being part of the solution. That is, for them, teaching is a demanding and stressful profession that pays poorly and is represented badly in the media. On the other hand, the school-leavers with the negotiable refusal position seemed to disregard the altruistic aspects of becoming teachers. Remarkably, they neither believed in the necessity of attracting Qatari males to the teaching profession (Q-item 8, F-3: −3, F-4: −1) nor acknowledged their critical role in Qatari society (Q-item 9, F-3: −2, F-4: −1). Still, contrary to their counterparts who loaded on F-1 and F-2, it is a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic factors that – if secured – would encourage them to consider becoming teachers.

Still, both groups seemed to agree on one thing – and one thing only: preferring military careers. The only Q-item that received unanimous consent amongst the school-leavers was Q-item 15 (+4, +5, +5, +5), which articulates that Qatari males prefer joining military careers over becoming teachers. This preference arises for plenty of reasons: for the country, their families, honour and for economic reasons. For school-leavers who participated in this study, a military career is a job first and a calling second. But why is teaching not seen as a worthwhile calling amongst these school-leavers? According to the findings of this study, the primary reason for the decline in the number of Qatari males in the teaching profession is that they are busy pursuing *higher-paying, masculine, prestigious*, and *attainable* careers in other fields. The following sections further clarifies each of these elements.

The appeal of other careers

Drudy et al. (2017) reported that the 'opportunity cost' has a strong influence on men's decisions to join the teaching profession. Opportunity cost is an economic concept that refers to the potential benefits an individual might lose by selecting one alternative over another. Becoming a teacher is argued to be 'subjectively more costly for males than for females' (Drudy et al., 2017, p. 88). This is because, presumably, males who become teachers forego other potentially higher-paying careers available for them that might not be available for females. School-leavers in this study perceived teaching as a low-paying profession (Q-item 2: −5, 0, −4, −2). Hence, the sense of potential material loss could drive them to reject the teaching profession. One could argue that the values associated with teaching are not as homogenous as they once were. Economic considerations appear to have trumped the concept of teaching as a service to society. Empirical research shows that lower pay could discourage males from becoming teachers (Cushman, 2005). Paul et al. (2021) analysed over 70 factors in global data on teacher retention and turnover, involving more than 3 million participants over the past 40 years. They discovered that salary plays a significant role in teacher retention. They also pointed out that increasing starting salaries would attract more high-quality candidates. It should be

noted here that the economic concerns about choosing teaching as a profession stem from personal concerns rather than concerns about the nature of teaching as a job per se. By omission, teaching might be more appealing to Qatari males.

The social construction of masculinity and femininity

Except those who loaded on F-3, school-leavers who participated in this study strongly believed that women were best suited for the teaching profession in Qatari society (Q-item 16: +3, +4, −2, +4). Clearly, the teaching profession for them is ideologically *gendered*. Gender ideology refers to 'a set of beliefs about the proper order of society in terms of the roles women and men should fill' (Saguy et al., 2021, p. 1). As a social construct, gender ideology leads to the differentiation of individuals based on their assumed gender roles. During childhood, children acquire gender role behaviours through socialisation and by doing things that boys do or things that girls do. According to Leuze & Helbig (2015), girls are more willing to challenge this gender differentiation and endorse non-stereotypical activities than boys are. By adolescence, boys experience social pressure to prove their masculine identity. Hence, they follow and conform to strict gender role expectations (van der Vleuten et al., 2016). They start to develop a stable pattern of career interests, based on their socially constructed understandings of femininity and masculinity (Xu & Tracey, 2016). According to van der Vleuten et al. (2016), the disproportionate representation of one gender in a certain career strengthens notions of feminine and masculine behaviours, which, in turn, underpin expected gender role patterns. 'The more an occupation is dominated by women, the more it becomes socially identified as a feminine occupation at societal level' (Han et al., 2020, p. 3). Investigating high school students' occupational expectations in 29 countries, Leuze & Helbig (2015) reported that both schoolboys and schoolgirls have stronger gender-typical career expectations in regions with greater occupational gender differentiation.

In short, gender ideology influences the ways in which individuals view their employment chances and career decisions (Leuze & Helbig, 2015). School-leavers who participated in this study are not an exception. Their perception of teaching as female-dominated and the associated perceptions (both negative and positive) of the men who work as teachers have implications for their perceptions of the career and their willingness to join it.

Socialising influences

The orientations and interests that individuals bring to their career choices are heavily influenced by socialisation. The four most important influences that socialise individuals to make career choices are family, peers, school, and media. In light of this study, these agents of socialisation do not communicate consistent views about the teaching profession, nor do they have a consistent impact (positive or negative) on school-leavers regarding becoming teachers. Although most of the school-leavers denied that family and friends would discourage them from joining the teaching profession (Q-item 1: 0, −3, −2, −2), the influence of social media seemed to vary across the emerging perceptions (Q-item 10: +2, +5, −1, 0). Also, as most of these school-leavers had never met a male teacher who inspired them to join the teaching profession (Q-item 5: −2, +1, +1, +1), their attitudes towards receiving career counselling on becoming a teacher varied substantially (Q-item 6: 0, −5, +1, +2). In concrete terms, the influence of these agents of socialisation was unique for each emerging perception. Hence, it seems that the level of comfort that was communicated to the school-leavers by their families, peers, schools, and media did not provide them with the required career-readiness attitudes and dispositions to become teachers.

Several factors play a role in individuals' career decisions. Drudy et al. (2017) stated that 'socialisation processes that occur both inside and outside the school environment must be taken into account' (p. 86).

In this study, none of these agents of socialisation seemed to play a continuous, positive and sufficient role in orienting and motivating the school-leavers to embark on a teaching career.

The 'boy problem'

Some of the school-leavers who participated in this study seemed to prefer choosing a profession that requires less effort than the teaching profession (Q-item 25: +1, −2, +3, −5), and the majority of them believed that education majors require obtaining a high school GPA that was beyond their academic levels (Q-item 29: +1, +2, +4, −3). Although sufficient empirical evidence is lacking, there might be a 'boy problem' amongst these male school-leavers. The 'boy problem' (or the boys' debate) is a concept that originated in the United States in the 20th century to address issues related to immigrant boys, who were seen as troublemakers and placed in reform schools. The concept has since evolved to address the global phenomenon of educational under-achievement amongst boys and men (UNESCO, 2022; World Bank, 2022). It has been argued that in high-income countries, regardless of the grade or subject, boys have been underperforming in school compared with girls, and men have become less represented in higher education (UNESCO, 2022). Men are also less likely to finish their study programmes. Similar concerns were raised in the Qatari context a decade ago (AlMisnad, 2012). Keane et al. (2018) relate the 'boy problem' to the negative experiences of education. For them, schoolboys, especially those from lower socio-economic groups, generally 'report quite negative experiences of schooling' (p. 72). Drawing on empirical data, they argue that schoolboys' educational experience could be characterised by a lack of support and negative relationships with their teachers (Keane et al., 2018).

Still, in their book, *Failing Boys? Issues in Gender and Achievement,* Epstein et al. (1998) challenge the conception that all boys are under-achieving at schools. Rather, they raise some critical questions regarding the identity of these boys (Which boys? At what stage of education? And according to what criteria?). By posing such questions, Epstein et al. (1998) challenge the 'conventional' discussion on the 'boy problem', describing it as simplistic, partial and focussed more on 'quick fixes' than on investigation and research (Epstein et al., 1998). We argue that future studies should attempt to examine whether Qatari schoolboys' have a 'boy problem' by elucidating their academic experiences to examine if these experiences influence their future career decisions.

Concluding remarks

The results of this study highlight the complexities of the problem of attracting more Qatari males to the teaching profession. As is the case in other parts of the world, a combination of economic, sociological, and cultural factors is at play. It is difficult to see how any society facing the challenge of gender differences in the teaching profession could effect an immediate reversal of the situation. To a certain extent, attempts to change the patterns of gender imbalance in teaching, in Qatar and elsewhere, could be described as attempts to change societies' ways of life. In short, 'teaching has been, and will undoubtedly continue to be, an important professional career path for women, one in which they have distinguished themselves extremely well. It has also been an important career for men, one in which they too have been very distinguished [by their absence]' (Drudy et al., 2017, p. 130).

Still, several achievable long- term strategies could be implemented by policymakers in Qatar to gradually steer the ship towards a more equitable direction. To begin with, policymakers should ensure that the teaching profession has a pay and career structure that is as attractive as those of other professions in the country. The Ministry of Education and Higher Education, as well as the country's colleges of education, should mount effective campaigns to promote the value and importance of teaching to the country. Schools need to actively endorse caring as a central human value. Male teachers should emphasise the benefits and importance of their profession to their male students. Families should actively propose and support the choice of teaching as a career amongst their male members. The challenges are enormous in this regard. Nevertheless, Qatar will be a better place if in both female and male teachers' hands.

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The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Appendix 1. Q-sort values for items

Q-item	F-1	F-2	F-3	F-4
1 Family and friends will not encourage me to join the teaching profession.	0	−3	−2	−2
1 Teaching salary attracts many Qataris.	−5	0	−4	−2
1 Teaching is a rewarding profession.	−1	−1	+2	0
1 Teaching is a demanding and stressful profession, unlike many other professions available to Qatari males.	+4	+1	+3	−3
1 I have never met a teacher role model who inspires me to join the teaching profession.	−2	+1	+1	+1
1 I would like to get career counselling on the process and requirements of joining the teaching profession.	0	−5	+1	+2
1 I am aware of the declining numbers of Qatari male teachers.	+5	−2	−1	+5
1 I believe in the necessity of attracting Qatari males to the teaching profession.	+5	+1	−3	−1
1 Qatari males have an important role to play in building society by becoming a teacher.	+3	+3	−2	−1
1 Social media is bursting with complaints about the state of schools in Qatar.	+2	+5	−1	0
1 The teaching profession does not match the aspirations and ambitions of Qatari male youth.	+2	+2	0	−2
1 The low social status of teaching is one of the most important reasons why I am reluctant to become a teacher.	−4	+2	−5	0
1 Teachers have lost their status and prestige amongst some students.	−2	+4	+4	+1
1 Specializations at the colleges of education are considered inferior compared to specializations at other colleges.	0	0	+2	+3
1 Qatari males prefer attending military careers.	+4	+5	+5	+5
1 Women are best suited for the teaching profession in Qatari society.	+3	+4	−2	+4
1 Society will have a different perspective on the teaching profession when social media highlight its importance.	−1	−1	−1	+3
1 I would consider becoming a teacher if I get the same financial benefits as those obtained from military careers.	0	−5	+1	+2
1 I would consider becoming a teacher if colleges of education in the country make greater effort in introducing its specializations and their importance.	−4	−1	0	+4

(continued on next page)

(*continued*)

Q-item	F-1	F-2	F-3	F-4
1 I would consider becoming a teacher if there are clear policies for career advancement that guarantee access to high administrative positions.	−3	−4	+2	+1
1 I would consider becoming a teacher if society's negative views on teachers change.	−5	−4	0	−1
1 I would consider becoming a teacher if an external scholarship program is initiated within educationally advanced countries.	−1	−2	+5	+2
1 I would consider becoming a teacher if teachers' job conditions improve.	−3	−3	0	0
1 I would consider becoming a teacher if teachers have more authority related to maintain order amongst students as they see fit.	−2	0	0	0
1 I would prefer choosing a profession that requires less effort than the teaching profession.	+1	−2	+3	−5
1 I am not interested in studying educational theories, teaching methods and classroom management techniques.	+2	+3	−5	−5
1 I think that the educational subjects that I will study to become a teacher are boring in comparison to other disciplines.	0	0	−3	−4
1 I do not want to join the teaching profession because it requires theoretical and practical abilities, unlike other professions that require practical abilities only.	+1	0	−4	−4
1 Educational majors require a higher high school GPA compared to military and administrative majors and professions. This is beyond my academic abilities.	+1	+2	+4	−3

Italic statements represent the consensus across the emerging factors. Reading this table by column, explains the comparative ranking of Q-items that characterize a given factor, whereas reading the table by row, clarifies the comparative ranking of a particular Q-item across the emerging factors.

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