

Article

Understanding and Addressing Teacher Shortages in Austria: Emergence, Research and Policy Reactions

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Abstract

Teacher shortages have become a global phenomenon, affecting educational systems across many countries. However, the strategies adopted to address it differ considerably. This study gives a first, detailed account of the reasons and effects of teacher shortages in Austria. For this purpose, a number of documents were analysed: 120 newspaper reports (to mirror the public debate), 43 parliamentary questions and ministerial responses (to mirror the policy debate), and relevant national statistics (to mirror the current situation and remedial measures by quantitative indicators). This allows a first comprehensive synthesis of public debate, policy developments, and research—comparable to country reports for other countries but currently missing for Austria. The findings of these multiple sources reveal that, following a period in the early 2000s with sufficient applicants for teaching positions, Austria gradually experienced an emerging teacher shortage. Initial responses were ad hoc, relying on measures such as increased overtime and the employment of underqualified teaching staff. More comprehensive strategies were introduced only in 2022, including a public image campaign for the teaching profession, reforms in teacher education, and new pathways for career changers. The study concludes by discussing implications for the teaching profession, school practice, and the teacher education system.

Keywords: teacher shortage; teacher recruitment; teacher education; teacher profession; career changer; interventions against teacher shortage; document analysis; media analysis

1. Introduction

Teacher shortages have become a global phenomenon, affecting education systems across many countries, both developing and developed countries. UNESCO's Global Report on Teachers (UNESCO, 2024) forecasts a global need for 44 million additional primary and secondary teachers by 2030. However, the challenge does not seem to be merely finding a sufficient quantity of teachers willing to work in schools, but in addition a qualitative gap is emerging as the proportion of fully qualified teachers among teaching staff is declining: the global average of qualified primary school teachers fell from 96% in 2015 to 88% in 2022, and from 89% to 83% for secondary school teachers (Ruscelli, 2025).

Similarly, Europe (Eurydice, 2021; EC, 2025) and the German-speaking school systems in Germany (Klemm, 2022; Seeliger & Håkansson Lindqvist, 2023; Korneck, 2024; Porsch et al., 2025a), Switzerland (Sandmeier & Herzog, 2024) and Austria (Flick-Holtsch et al., 2024; Schnider & Braunsteiner, 2024) are currently facing challenges posed by teacher shortages. While the problem itself is evident in many countries, national authorities



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appear to be addressing it with an overlapping but not identical combination of strategies (EC, 2025; Symeonidis et al., 2025). For orientation, Austria's approach is similar to that of Germany and Switzerland in relying on targeted lateral-entry under shortage conditions, yet it differs in certification design and central oversight. We cannot provide a detailed cross-country analysis here but can signal broad family resemblances.

Fortunately, several country reports have recently been published that help to better understand context-specific aspects of the teacher shortage and the measures taken to address it (Seeliger & Håkansson Lindqvist, 2023; Domović & Drvodelić, 2024; Flores et al., 2024; Hogg et al., 2024; Korneck, 2024; Leijen et al., 2024; Magni, 2024; Sandmeier & Herzog, 2024; Vanassche, 2024; Dawborn-Gundlach, 2025; Assunção Flores & Imig, 2025; Porsch et al., 2025a). These country reports address multiple causes and effects of teacher shortages in a country and help to contextualise and understand the specific measures taken. As such a report is not available for Austria, we will synthesise and analyse various sources of information that should help to contextualise developments and policy interventions in Austria in this study.

Before doing so, a few characteristics of the school and teacher qualification systems in Austria have to be explained. Primary school is normally offered to pupils aged 6 to 10. Transition to secondary school (based on student/parent choice and teacher judgement), to 'middle school' (Mittelschule; age 10 to 14) or an academic secondary school (AHS; age 10 to 18), reflects the historic distinction between lower practical schooling and the academic 'Gymnasium'. After the end of compulsory schooling at the age of 15, pupils may embark on dual vocational education, continue at an academic secondary school (AHS), or switch to the well-developed system of intermediate and higher vocational schools (BMHS), which provide different combinations of general education and vocational training in 2- to 5-year school types. These structural separations are reflected in the teaching force: Teachers for primary and secondary middle schools (including polytechnic schools and special educational institutions)—collectively referred to as teachers in 'general compulsory schools' (APS)—were considered a group distinct from teachers in the more prestigious 'higher secondary schools' (i.e., AHS and BMHS). While the former were—until recently—educated in six semester courses at post-secondary Universities of Teacher Education, the latter had to undergo university education of 9+ semesters. Even the personnel administration of these teacher groups was handled by different bodies. However, a reform that came into effect between 2015 and 2017 merged the different versions of teacher training programmes into one programme for primary school teachers of 10–10.5 semesters and one programme for secondary school teachers of 12 semesters (Messner et al., 2018).

Recently, a number of studies have been published researching relevant aspects of the teacher shortage in Austria, in particular, the employment of career changers (Flick-Holtz et al., 2024; Gamsjäger et al., 2025), of teacher training students who teach before completing their studies (e.g., Bacher et al., 2024; Helm et al., 2025; Porsch et al., 2025b) and of retired teachers returning to service (Resch, 2025). However, information is missing on the political and institutional context in which this shortage developed (Schnider & Braunsteiner, 2024). And more so, a comprehensive synthesis of empirical studies, media and newspaper reports, and policy documents—comparable to the country reports for other countries—is currently missing for Austria.

This research gap seemed precarious to us and became the starting point of the current study. The following research questions are discussed in this paper:

1. How has the current teacher shortage in Austria emerged as a phenomenon in the public perception—in light of the media and parliamentary debate?
2. Which policy measures have been introduced by public authorities to tackle teacher shortages?

3. Which national indicators and statistics help to understand the current teacher shortage and effects of the policy measures taken?

2. Methodology and Data Sources

As noted above, no attempts have been made so far to synthesise the reasons and effects of the teacher shortages in Austria across documents, policies, and studies. The following documents form the basis of the study: (a) newspaper reports (to mirror the public debate), (b) parliamentary questions and ministerial responses (to mirror the policy debate), (c) other official documents, and (d) national statistics (to mirror the current situation and remedial measures by quantitative indicators) (for an overview, see Table 1):

- (a) *Newspaper reports*: We performed a keyword search in the electronic archive of the Austrian daily newspaper Der Standard¹ from 2010 to June 2025 using the keywords ‘teacher shortage, teacher supply and teacher employment’. The year 2010 was chosen as the starting point as the literature (Lassnigg & Vogtenhuber, 2015; BMBWF, 2021) indicates that early warnings about a potential teacher shortage emerged around this time. Der Standard was selected because the newspaper has a freely accessible electronic archive that allows full-text search, and educational issues are given high priority. After eliminating irrelevant findings, 120 newspaper reports were included in a content analysis that focused on the teacher shortage and the frequency with which the topic was discussed over the years (see Table 2). For quality assurance and to avoid any bias on the part of the selected newspaper, the content foci were selectively compared with those in the Austrian daily newspaper Die Presse² for the years 2010, 2020 and 2024 to ensure that no main topic was overlooked. No significant deviations were found with regard to the frequency and content focus of the articles.
- (b) *Parliamentary questions and ministerial responses*: We performed another keyword search using the keywords ‘teacher shortage, teacher supply and teacher employment’ for the period from 2010 to July 2025 in the electronic archive of the Austrian Parliament (<https://www.parlament.gv.at/> accessed on 12 February 2026), searching for written parliamentary questions and ministerial responses on the subject (see Table 2). Written parliamentary questions from members of the Austrian Parliament are an important political tool for obtaining specific information about the government’s executive management and for scrutinising it. Written parliamentary questions can be submitted to the relevant Federal Ministers or to the President of the Austrian Court of Auditors. They must be submitted by five members of the National Council or three members of the Federal Council and must be answered in writing within two months (Parlament Österreich, 2025). In practice, these questions are mostly submitted by members of the opposition. They are understood as indicators for contentious topics in policy in the context of this study.
- (c) *Ministry of Education websites, public statements, and brochures*: To closely mirror the public and policy debate, we analysed statements by the Ministry of Education on the topics of teacher shortages, teacher supply and teacher employment, which are available electronically or in print. These additional documents offer insights into policy measures taken since 2022 to combat the teacher shortage.
- (d) *National Statistics and data from the Austrian Court of Auditors*: In order to synthesise data about the quantity of missing teaching workforce in Austria, we collected national statistics published by the National Bureau of Statistics (Statistik Austria) and additional information published by the Austrian Court of Auditors (Rechnungshof).

Table 1. Research Methodology.

Research Question	Data Sources	Analysis
RQ 1 How has the current teacher shortage in Austria emerged as a phenomenon in the public perception?	(a) Newspaper reports <i>Der Standard</i> 2010–2025 (b) Parliamentary questions and ministerial responses 2010–2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of 120 documents <i>Der Standard</i> • Analysis of 41 parliamentary questions and ministerial responses
RQ 2 Which policy measures have been introduced by public authorities to tackle teacher shortages?	(a) Newspaper reports from 2010 to 2025 (b) Parliamentary questions and ministerial responses 2010–2025 (c) Ministry of Education websites, public statements and brochures from 2022 to 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reductive content analysis revealed 3 main policy measures
RQ 3 Which national indicators and statistics help to understand the current teacher shortage and effects of the policy measures taken?	(a) National statistics published by Statistik Austria (b) Public report published by the Austrian Court of Auditors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statistics on the extent of the teacher shortage using data of newly hired teachers • Data on the number of teacher education students • Data on the number of career changers

Table 2. Number of Media Reports and Parliamentary Questions by Year (Source: own calculations).

Year	n of Media Reports (Standard)	n of Media Reports (Presse)	n of Parliamentary Questions & Responses
XXIV. Parliamentary Period ¹ 28 October 2008–28 October 2013		Government: Coalition Social Democrat–Conservative	Minister of Education: Social Democrat
2010	14	14	0
2011	10	-	2
2012	5	-	2
2013	8	-	3
XXV. Parliamentary Period 29. October 2013–8 November 2017		Government: Coalition Social Democrat–Conservative	Minister of Education: Social Democrat
2014	2	-	0
2015	2	-	0
2016	2	-	1
2017	6	-	3
XXVI. Parliamentary Period 9 November 2017–22 October 2019		Government: (1) Coalition Conservative–Right Populist (2) Expert (June–October 2019)	Minister of Education: (1) Conservative (2) Expert
2018	4	-	0
2019	5	-	2
XXVII. Parliamentary Period 23 October 2019–23 October 2024		Government: Coalition Conservative—Green	Minister of Education: Conservative
2020	0		1
2021	1		3
2022	15		5
2023	23		12
2024	20	26 (thereof 6 (guest) commentaries)	6

Table 2. Cont.

Year	n of Media Reports (Standard)	n of Media Reports (Presse)	n of Parliamentary Questions & Responses
XXVIII. Parliamentary Period 24 October 2024–		Government: Coalition Conservative—Social Democrat—Liberal	Minister of Education: Liberal
2025	3	-	1
Total	120	-	41

¹ The lines highlighted in gray indicate the legislative periods and the party composition of the governments.

Previous studies by other Austrian authors on teacher shortages, teacher supply and teacher employment were additionally considered as sources of information. The documents mentioned in (a), (b) and (c) were subjected to a reductive content analysis according to Mayring (2014). The unit of analysis was an individual article or the parliamentary question with the corresponding response. The coding framework was initially deductive (e.g., problem framing, evaluative statements, and measures proposed/taken) and was then refined inductively. The analysis was completed by a single coder, supported by a 12% audit by a second coder. Any discrepancies were discussed and resolved, with minor refinements made to the definitions of the codes. Table 1 summarises the data sets used for this study.

3. Results

3.1. The Emergence of Teacher Shortages in the Public Debate

In research question (1) we asked: How has the current teacher shortage in Austria emerged as a phenomenon in the public perception? In this section, documents from media and parliamentary questions and responses are cited in endnotes, while research studies and ministerial publications addressed to the public are cited as primary sources.

In 2001, the Minister of Education in office sent a letter to all upper secondary school graduates warning them against taking up teacher training courses³—a document that was later repeatedly cited as an example of lacking political foresight⁴. In fact, the situation on the teacher labour market and public awareness of teacher employment changed in the following years. Our media analysis reveals several phases in the public debate on teacher shortages, which differ in terms of the frequency with which the topic is discussed and the specific patterns of argumentation used.

In 2010 and 2011, we found an annual number of 10–14 media reports (see Table 2) discussing or warning of a future teacher shortage, originating particularly from representatives of teacher trade unions⁵, presidents of regional school boards⁶, and oppositional politicians⁷. The Ministry of Education regularly responded to these warnings with the assurance that “every lesson will be held”⁸. All vacancies would be filled by the start of the school year—if necessary, by teachers working overtime or by recruiting additional staff through ‘special contracts’⁹. In the ministerial responses, the shortage situation was usually framed as ‘regional’¹⁰, ‘subject-specific’¹¹, and ‘limited in time’¹². The cycle of recurring warnings and problem resolution through ad hoc measures was repeated in the following years. A decreasing number of media reports (see Table 2), however, seems to signal a decline in public interest, even though the signs of an impending shortage were not diminishing¹³.

The situation changed fundamentally in 2020 as a direct effect of the COVID-19 pandemic. That year, not a single article in the electronic archives of the newspapers referred to teacher shortages, and in 2021 there was only one. Policy makers and the media

seemed to focus exclusively on the pandemic and its consequences for schools¹⁴, although the signs of a staff shortage had not diminished at that time¹⁵.

In 2022, the public attention returned to the topic of teacher shortage (as indicated by the sharp rise in the number of media reports in Table 2). From mid-year onwards, intensified by the rising number of pupils from Ukraine, voices increasingly warned of an acute teacher shortage in the coming school year¹⁶. The Ministry of Education initially responded with a reassuring line of argument: Regional and subject-specific gaps that existed for some time had exacerbated in an “unforeseeable” way due to a “retirement wave” and a trend towards part-time employment. However, teaching would continue to be guaranteed in all classes due to overtime work of regular teachers and the deployment of (not fully trained) students¹⁷. Yet the issue did not disappear from public attention, and on 25 October 2022, the Ministry finally launched a package of policy measures, which has been described as the “largest teacher offensive of the Second Republic”¹⁸ and is analysed in detail in Section 3.2.

For 2023 and 2024, Table 2 shows a high number of media entries, which, in addition to comments on the ongoing staff shortage, discuss the appropriateness and effectiveness of the measures taken. The analysis of parliamentary questions and answers from the Ministry of Education roughly reflects the growing attention to teacher shortages that was already apparent in the media analysis (see Table 2). Since 2011, opposition parties have repeatedly asked about trends in teacher employment and measures to combat potential teacher shortages¹⁹. In many cases, the Ministry provided them with extensive data²⁰. On the other hand, ministers (from various parties) repeatedly offered reassuring arguments: shortages are region- and subject-specific and can be “covered by overtime and other measures in accordance with labour law”²¹.

Since 2022, members of parliament (MPs) have been addressing the issue more intensively than before. A sharp increase was shown in 2023 and 2024 in the number of parliamentary questions due to queries about the usefulness and effectiveness of the policy measures.

The relatively detailed ministerial responses allow for a deeper understanding of media messages; however, parliamentary activity fluctuates more strongly than media coverage (see Table 2). This likely reflects shifts in political attention: while teacher shortages remained on the agenda, other issues dominated in certain years, such as migration and schools in 2015/2016 and domestic political conflicts in 2018/2019.

What *reasons for the teacher shortages* were put forward both in the media and in parliamentary questions and answers? This is a key question for assessing the situation in terms of education policy and designing countermeasures.

Strong cohorts of teachers (the so-called baby boomers) retired at a time when the school system was joined by *high birth cohorts of pupils*. This assessment is clearly reflected by statistical figures: “The age distribution of teaching staff . . . shows a surplus of comparatively older teachers in active service . . . : 30% were 55 years or older in the respective school year and will retire in the next ten years . . . In view of the forecast development of rising pupil numbers by 2030 (primary level) and 2040 (secondary level . . .), there is a threat of a teacher shortage in Austria in the long term if it is not possible to recruit more young people for the teaching profession.” (BMBWF, 2021, p. 217). According to calculations by the Ministry, the wave of retirements in secondary schools peaked in 2023, while a reduction in the retirement numbers in primary schools was not expected until the following years²².

This development was complicated by somewhat erratic *retirement options*²³ and by the increasing *influx of students due to migration* since 2015 when families with children—particularly from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq—were fleeing war, persecution, and instability and again in 2022 in the wake of the Ukraine war.

A trend towards increased *part-time employment* was reported in the media and also by the Ministry of Education²⁴ as an additional factor boosting teacher shortage. However, according to the Minister's answer to a parliamentary question, the number of part-time employees had "remained stable"²⁵.

In the public debate it was also argued that the *reform of initial teacher education* (ITE), which came into force in 2015/2016 for the primary and in 2016/2017 for the secondary school teacher education programmes, had ultimately contributed to teacher shortage²⁶. Increasing the minimum training period from 3 to 4 years resulted in the loss of at least one year of graduates (from the former short training programmes at universities for teacher education). As the compulsory Master phase, which was introduced within the same reform, can be studied alongside work, additional losses were to be expected here, but not to the extent of an entire cohort. Furthermore, the assumption was put forward in the media that the ITE reform had reduced the attractiveness of the study programmes and thus led to decreasing numbers of students interested in the profession²⁷. However, this fear does not seem to be coming true: a recent analysis suggests stable access figures in the second and subsequent years after the reform; apparently, teacher education can draw on a relatively robust recruitment pool (Altrichter et al., 2023).

*Unfavourable work conditions*²⁸ and a *poor image of the profession*²⁹ were cited in public debate as further factors that reduced the attractiveness of the teaching profession and thus represent further reasons for teacher shortages. However, from an international comparative perspective, media accounts do not match research findings in this respect. Working conditions may be considered—with the exception of the notorious lack of support staff (Lassnigg, 2022, p. 17)—to be quite favourable in Austria with comparatively high salaries, good pupil-teacher ratios and class sizes, not very strict assessment and feedback procedures, and above-average instructional autonomy (Eurydice, 2021, 2025; OECD, 2025; Lassnigg, 2022). The fact that teacher satisfaction in Austria is among the highest in the 2025 TALIS comparison (OECD, 2025, p. 77) also does not support claims about unfavourable working conditions.

3.2. Policy Measures to Counter Teacher Shortage

Research question (2) asks for the policy measures taken by public authorities to combat teacher shortages. In October 2022, the Ministry published a "package of measures" to counter teacher shortages³⁰ which consists of three main strands of policy measures:

- *Strand 1: Promoting a new image of the profession:* A media campaign totalling €600,000 was intended to clarify the "diverse portfolio of tasks"³¹ of teachers and enhance the image of the profession³². The ultimate goal was to generate interest in the profession through "new, contemporary information and communication formats" and to attract more teacher education students and those "who want to teach in a school as career changer or as a second job" (BMBWF, n.d.c).
- *Strand 2: Reform of initial teacher education:* By shortening the Bachelor's programme from 8 to 6 semesters³³ and emphasising "practice-oriented study content" (BMBWF, n.d.c) ITE was to become more attractive³⁴. In fact, a draft law was presented in January 2024 (BMBWF, 2024)³⁵ and a corresponding legislative package was passed by Parliament with the votes of the governing parties in April 2024³⁶. The implementation of this reform started in 2025/2026 for the primary teaching programme and is expected for 2026/2027 for the secondary level teaching programme³⁷. As a consequence, the impact of this reform cannot yet be fully assessed.
- *Strand 3: Intensive personnel management and recruitment of new target groups:* The third strand of the policy was intended to offer more short-term solutions. In addition to the strategies used so far (such as overtime work and bringing back retired teachers),

“new target groups for the teaching profession” were to be addressed, and personnel management was to be “professionalised” (BMBWF, n.d.c). To this end, the legal provisions for employing non-fully qualified teachers were revised and the application processes were “professionalised” through a new central internet platform.

The three *new target groups* addressed in the Strand 3 policy measures are (1) career changers, (2) special contract teachers and (3) teacher education students. Of these, only career changers are a truly ‘new’ group, while the other groups have in fact been part of previous strategies for combating teacher shortages in Austria and abroad (Puderbach & Gehrmann, 2025). However, there were innovative developments in all three groups, which the analysis clearly shows:

(1) *Career changers*: Attracting career changers is seen as “a central measure . . . to recruit additional teachers”³⁸ by the Ministry of Education. The term ‘Quereinstieg’ (career change) is used in Austria for programmes that enable graduates of a university degree course to qualify as teachers in a corresponding school subject (e.g., graduates of a degree programme in mathematics qualify as mathematics teachers). Individuals from such backgrounds had already been employed on special contracts before 2022³⁹; however, new legal options were now sought to make it easier for career changers in shortage subjects to become teachers⁴⁰. For this reason, an amendment to the Civil Service Law (Dienstrecht, 2022, § 38 (3a)) was passed in 2022⁴¹ which stipulates the following conditions for access to the profession for career changers:

- (i) *Formal requirements*: University graduates from courses of 180 ECTS minimum and with at least three years of professional experience are eligible to apply for a career changer programme.
- (ii) *Certification process*: A certification committee (Dienstrecht, 2022, § 38 (5)) checks the pedagogical aptitude of applicants by means of psychological tests and an interview. It also assesses whether the completed degree programme is appropriate to a teaching subject and the previous professional experience is relevant for teaching (BMBWF, n.d.a). The process of certification for a school subject which is a prerequisite for applying to a school is obviously more straightforward for some applicants than for others: A graduate of a BA programme in mathematics will be ‘certified’ for the school subject maths. However, graduates of non-school subjects are also assigned to a school subject through the certification process. For example, graduates of business studies which make up about a fifth of all persons ‘certified’⁴² are often assigned to the shortage subject of mathematics. ‘Certifications’ for more than one school subject are also issued; however, the processes and reasons for this are unclear.
- (iii) *Salary*: Career changers receive the same salary as ITE graduates from the start of their employment.
- (iv) *Training provisions*: Only when career changers take up a position at a school they receive professional training in a continuing education course (“Hochschullehrgang”, i.e., a non-degree programme) alongside their work (Hochschulgesetz, 2005, §39). They are required to complete a four-semester part-time course offered by universities of teacher education within 8 years after starting work in schools. This course comprises a minimum of 60 ECTS for all applicants⁴³ (and additional 30 ECTS for applicants without a Master’s degree; see PHOÖ, 2022a, 2022b; QSR, 2020, 2021, for content details). As a consequence of e-learning and distance education provisions, up to two thirds of the course requirements may be completed as self-study (BMBWF, n.d.b; PHT, 2023).

(2) *Special contract teachers*: A long-established legal option for reacting flexibly to teacher shortages is so-called ‘special contracts’. These allowed vacancies to be filled “as long as no suitable teachers are available” (BMBWF, 2023b) with individuals for whom

no prior qualifications were defined, with special contracts limited to one year. As long as there was a need, these contracts could be extended for one year at a time.

As part of policy measures, since 2023, special contract teachers are now required to complete a defined number of credits in teacher education (20–90 ECTS depending on pre-qualification and teaching load). Completing these courses now opens up the possibility of permanent employment. Even after passing the prescribed courses, there are salary reductions of 5% to 25% for special contract teachers, depending on their previous qualifications (BMBWF, 2023b, 2023c).

(3) *Teacher education students*: Teacher education students are increasingly employed *before* completing their Bachelor's degree. Formally, this is done through special contracts. While in principle, public authorities and teacher education institutions agree that employment of teacher education students should take place after completing four semesters at the earliest and with a reduced teaching commitment (max. 50%), in practice, these principles are not met in an increasing number of cases due to the pressing teacher shortage (Helm et al., 2025). Regional educational boards prefer this type of early career entry to other groups, such as career changers and special contract teachers, because of their more systematic preparation for the profession.

The strengths and weaknesses of this package of measures and its implications for the further development of the education system warrant more detailed discussion. We will do this in Section 4, after examining the available data in Section 3.3. Before doing so, however, we take a look at those measures that were not explicitly addressed in the ministerial package but are nevertheless important for understanding the overall situation.

Strategies, such as *overtime work*, that were previously implemented to compensate for fluctuating teacher supply, were nonetheless continued. According to figures from the Austrian Court of Auditors (Rechnungshof, 2025a), the number of overtime hours rose by one-fifth in the five years leading up to 2023/2024⁴⁴.

The *re-employment of retired teachers* was frequently mentioned in the media⁴⁵, but remained—even in spite of specially advertised regional programmes—quantitatively insignificant⁴⁶ (see Table 3). If retired teachers returned to service at all, then it was mostly to their previous schools, for a limited time and as a result of special ties, e.g., upon request of their former school leader or colleagues (Resch, 2025).

Efforts to *reduce part-time work* continued. Some regional education boards reported that they were restrictive in granting part-time employment and special leave to their staff⁴⁷. However, it is difficult to assess the success of these efforts, as current data do not account for variations in part-time employment. Moreover, recent policy measures—such as students teaching before graduation and special contracts—may further increase the part-time ratio. From a strategic point of view, it is not surprising that such measures were not explicitly included in the ministerial programme, as part-time work appears to be an important source of recruitment for the teaching profession; countermeasures could therefore reduce its attractiveness (Huber & Lusnig, 2022).

At the level of teacher training, additional opportunities to acquire teaching qualifications through *distance learning* have been introduced, but not in all training institutions⁴⁸.

There is a set of potential measures that have been considered in other countries (SWK, 2023; Puderbach & Gehrmann, 2025; Huber & Lusnig, 2022): increasing the *number of pupils per classroom* or increasing the *minimum number of teaching hours*. This strategy remained virtually invisible in the Austrian debate and is, according to statements by the Ministry⁴⁹, not planned for the future either. Although such measures were previously discussed by politicians⁵⁰, they were never seriously pursued, which may be due to the strong position of trade unions in the Austrian education system (Lassnigg & Vogtenhuber, 2015).

Table 3. Newly employed teachers (Source: [BMBWF, 2025](#)).

	2022/2023						2023/2024						2024/2025					
	APS	%	AHS/ BMHS	%	Total	Total %	APS	%	AHS/ BMHS	%	Total	Total %	APS	%	AHS/ BMHS	%	Total	Total %
(a) TEd graduates	2081	59.51	1416	40.49	3497	55.80	2423	61.37	1525	38.63	3948	50.50	2397	71.34	963	28.66	3360	50.93
(b) 'Career changers'	132	38.48	211	61.52	343	5.50	273	41.81	380	58.19	653	8.40	313	45.76	371	54.24	684	10.37
(c) TEd students	1096	75.80	350	24.20	1446	23.10	1140	77.45	332	22.55	1472	18.80	1114	78.45	306	21.55	1420	21.52
(d) 'Special contracts'	776	79.18	204	20.82	980	15.60	1328	74.86	416	23.45	1774	22.30	857	75.64	276	24.36	1133	17.17
Total	4085	65.19	2181	34.81	6266	100	5164	66.06	2653	33.94	7817	100	4681	70.96	1916	29.04	6597	100
<i>Total (b)–(d) (i.e., not fully qualified teachers)</i>	2004	72.37	765	27.63	2769	44.20	2741	70.30	1128	28.93	3899	49.50	2284	70.56	953	29.44	3237	49.07
Thereof: reactivated retired teachers													41	0.9	21	1.1	62	0.9

3.3. Statistical Data About the Teacher Shortage

Research question (3) aims to clarify the current situation of teacher shortage in Austria and effects of the identified policies from the point of view of statistics and other available indicators.

First, our study aims to determine the current extent of the teacher shortage using the numbers of newly hired teachers and their respective qualification levels as an indicator. The data in Table 3 shows that in the last two school years around half (49.5% in 2023/2024 and 49.1% in 2024/2025) of the vacant positions were filled with staff who were not-fully qualified (i.e., (b) career changers, (c) teacher students before graduation, and (d) special contract teachers). While the proportion of not-fully qualified teachers rose by 5% in 2023/2024 compared to the previous school year, the proportion remained roughly the same in the following school year. The largest groups of not-fully qualified staff were teacher education students before graduation in 2022/2023 and 2024/2025 (23.1% and 21.5% respectively of all newly hired staff), and special contract teachers (22.3%) in 2023/2024. The overall proportion of career changers among newly hired teachers is small; however, it is increasing. Finally, reactivating retired teachers to return to teaching does not appear to be a particularly effective measure for combating teacher shortage.

Second, the analysis focuses on the differences between school types (see Table 3): The higher secondary schools (AHS/BMHS) receive a higher proportion of (a) fully qualified teachers and (b) career changers, while primary schools and practice-oriented lower secondary schools (APS) receive more staff without a degree (c, d). In 2023/2024, for example, the academic schools' share of all new entrants was 33.9%; however, they ultimately employed 38.6% of all fully qualified teacher education graduates and 58.2% of all career changers. This discrepancy may point to an aspect of structural discrimination: More prestigious schools, which cater to pupils with a higher average social status, receive more fully qualified teachers and more staff who have at least a degree in one subject than schools catering to pupils from more disadvantaged backgrounds.

In May 2025, the Austrian Court of Auditors (ACA) published a report on handling the current teacher shortages by the government and regional educational directorates (Rechnungshof, 2025a). Its main queries and recommendations may be summarised as follows: Despite predictions of teacher shortages which were available since 2009, comprehensive and systematic measures were not taken in time (Rechnungshof, 2025a, p. 6). The long-standing strategies of compensating for shortages by means of overtime work (totalling 7000 full-time positions), out-of-field teaching⁵¹ and employing not-fully qualified teachers were not considered to be sustainable and to jeopardise the quality of teaching. The lack of accurate forecast models for the number of graduates from teacher training programmes was criticised as well (Rechnungshof, 2025b).

Against this background, we aimed to find indicators for measuring the effects of the three main policy measures introduced in October 2022 (promoting a new image of the profession, reforming ITE, and intensive personnel management and recruitment of new target groups).

One important indicator for improving the image of the profession and addressing high school students as a new target group is the number of newly enrolled teacher education students. In Table 4 we analyse whether these policies had an effect on student numbers in teacher training programmes. The figures show an increase in absolute numbers in the academic year 2023/2024 (Statistik Austria, 2025a, 2025b; see Table 4). However, in relation to the total number of all Austrian first-year students, the increase is only significant for primary school teacher education students, while the proportion of secondary school teacher education students is in line with or below the long-term average (the figures for the 2024/2025 academic year are provisional and are not included in the interpretation here).

In contrast, the Minister of Education frequently reported a growing interest in teacher education which resulted in +16.5% first-year students in 2023/2024⁵² at press conferences, but did not differentiate the effects for primary and secondary schools.

Table 4. First-year students (Source: [Statistik Austria, 2025a, 2025b](#)).

	n of TEd First-Year Students (Primary)	n of TEd First-Year Students (Secondary)	Total n of First-Year Students in Austria	Share of TEd (Primary) of the Total n of First-Year Students	Share of TEd (Secondary) of the Total n of First-Year Students
2016/2017	1949	5012	60,909	3.20%	8.23%
2017/2018	2032	5570	58,965	3.45%	9.45%
2018/2019	2110	5102	56,781	3.72%	8.99%
2019/2020	2035	4621	53,820	3.78%	8.59%
2020/2021	2070	5024	55,681	3.72%	9.02%
2021/2022	1787	3906	49,462	3.61%	7.90%
2022/2023	1882	3814	49,145	3.83%	7.76%
2023/2024	2400	3969	50,984	4.71%	7.79%
2024/2025 *	1865	3382	42,613	4.38%	7.94%

* Preliminary figures for winter semester 2024/2025.

Searching for further effects in the group of ‘alternatively qualified’ teaching personnel is difficult as data is not available in an organised and reliable form. Figures circulated in publications and in ministerial responses to parliamentary questions do not always appear consistent, possibly due to different reference dates. We assume that the statistics about the effects of addressing career changers as a new target group published by the Austrian Court of Auditors (ACA) are the most reliable (Table 5). Comparing the various pieces of quantifiable information, it is possible to say: The career-changer model, which was introduced as a pilot project in 2022/2023 and has been in regular operation since 2023/2024⁵³, quickly drew considerable interest from individuals looking to enter teaching as a second career ([BMBWF, 2023a](#)). As a result of advertising in the pilot year, 4,300 individuals submitted their applications by November 2023, while “almost 1,900” successfully completed the certification process, with “more than 25%” being rejected ([BMBWF, 2023a](#)). More recent figures from the ACA indicate even higher rejection rates with more than half of the original applicants being rejected at certification stage (51.6%) (see Table 5). According to the ACA data, 696 career changers⁵⁴ were actually teaching in Austrian schools in 2023/2024. This is only a share of 28.7% of all those who were successfully certified for the profession (see Table 5).

Table 5. Career changers (Source: [Rechnungshof, 2025a, 41](#)).

	n	% of Applications	% of Certifications	% of Teaching
Applications (total since 2023/2024)	5012			
Certifications (total since 2023/2024)	2426	48.8		
Actually teaching (in 2023/2024)	696	13.9	28.7	
Teaching without introductory courses (in 2023/2024)				25.9

Career changers who actually begin teaching seem to remain in the system, at least in the medium term: Only 3% of career changers had either resigned or were not reappointed ([Rechnungshof, 2025a, p. 42](#)). There is no reliable information on the reasons why only a small proportion of those certified actually enter the teaching profession. Possible reasons may be the willingness of schools to accept them (e.g., compared to teacher training students

before graduation), motives and employment interests of those certified (Raggl & Troman, 2008) or specifics of their qualification. In any case, the information on the age structure (three-quarters were between 30 and 49 years old⁵⁵) and on their original fields of study do not necessarily indicate unexpected or inappropriate characteristics of the applicants. Just under one-third of certified career changers have an academic background in science and technology; more than 20% hold degrees in economics or business; and roughly 13% each come from the fields of languages, the humanities, and the arts⁵⁶. However, there is no information about the exact subjects they studied and, even more regrettably, about the school subjects for which the applicants were ultimately ‘certified’. The independent report published by the ACA criticised the large discrepancy between the number of applicants and the number of career changers actually entering teaching and recommends better and faster information on salaries, creditable pre-service periods, and working hours (Rechnungshof, 2025a, p. 43).

Similarly, a number of issues in the process of certification were highlighted: In the school year 2022/2023, a number of applicants who had only completed half of the required professional experience of three years were accepted (Rechnungshof, 2025a, p. 46). In a number of cases, career changers received “certificates for teaching subjects, for which they did not have the relevant or related academic qualifications” (Rechnungshof, 2025a, p. 47). In these and other cases, the ACA criticised that the Austrian Certification Commission for career changers had interpreted legal provisions “very broadly” or had “disregarded” them and ultimately questioned the management structure of the certification process (Rechnungshof, 2025a, p. 48). Finally, the ACA pointed to the high overall costs of €604,300 for the application and certification process for a total of 696 career changers teaching in Austrian schools, and demanded a “cost-effective implementation of the model” (Rechnungshof, 2025a, p. 51).

When the ACA report was published in 2025, it was immediately picked up by the national media⁵⁷. The ACA report was highly welcomed by the teacher trade unions (Kimberger, 2025). The Minister of Education announced that access to the career changer model would be reduced to 500 places per year, with a focus on subject-specific and regional aspects of the teacher shortage. Finally, the quantitative discussion about filling vacancies was broadened to include quality implications of the various measures⁵⁸. On 24 September 2025 the ACA report was on the agenda of a plenary session of the Parliament. Of the 15 speeches, only three MPs referred to the specific contents of the report, while all other speeches were of general nature or addressed two other ACA publications⁵⁹. So, the ACA report is the most detailed and critical report on the Austrian situation but has apparently had limited impact on education policy makers.

4. Summary and Discussion

This paper aims to synthesise and critically discuss various sources of information (newspaper reports, parliamentary questions, ministerial publications and statistical data) in order to better understand the social and institutional context in which the current teacher shortage in Austria has developed, the measures taken by the authorities and the effects observed to date.

4.1. Summary of Main Findings

The first research question examined how the current teacher shortage—as reflected in public perception—has developed. The findings show: After a period in the early 2000s when there were sufficient applicants for teaching positions, since 2010 a teacher shortage gradually developed. The main reason for this is the age structure of teaching staff: an increasing number of retirements coincided with relatively large cohorts of new

pupils entering school (BMBWF, 2021; Lassnigg, 2022). Gaps were filled through ad hoc measures such as overtime and hiring non-fully qualified staff. A ‘quantitative’ line of arguing—the idea that success meant having someone for every class, regardless of their qualifications—took hold in media and political debates.

Research question two aimed at the policy measures introduced by public authorities to tackle teacher shortages. In October 2022, the Minister of Education announced a comprehensive package of measures which included three strands of policies: an image campaign for the teaching profession, a shortening of the existing initial teacher training programmes, and attracting new target groups, and emergency measures such as overtime work and employing teacher students before graduation were continued. Other potential measures, such as improving teachers’ pay and working conditions, reducing class sizes or increasing teaching hours, were not considered.

Both the Austrian Court of Auditors (Rechnungshof, 2025a) and many researchers (Lassnigg, 2022; Bauer, 2023; Gruber, 2023) agree in their assessment: (1) the impending teacher shortage was foreseeable at an early stage (Lassnigg & Nemeth, 1999; OECD, 2003) and, as the media analysis showed, was also discussed publicly. (2) Until 2022, governments (of different political backgrounds) responded with “ad hoc measures” (Lassnigg, 2022, p. 10) rather than long-term, comprehensive strategies. Or in the words of the Austrian Court of Auditors: “Since 2009, the Ministry has been producing demand forecasts that indicated a shortage of teachers from 2018/2019 onwards. [...] However, no comprehensive and systematic measures have been taken.” (Rechnungshof, 2025a, p. 6)

Why did policymakers take so long to address the shortage of teachers? According to Lassnigg’s (2022, p. 7) analysis, other political priorities, namely cost containment, took precedence at first. In addition, political deadlock and the postponement of reforms hampered the ministers’ ability to act. Even later, the attention of politicians and the public seemed to be repeatedly diverted to other priorities, such as migration and the pandemic crisis.

In the third research question, we examined statistical indicators to assess the current teacher shortage and the impact of measures taken so far. In Section 3.3, we showed that in recent school years, the demand for teaching personnel was mainly met by students who had not yet completed their training and staff with special contracts.

The study did not clearly reveal success factors of the “package of measures” introduced in 2022 to combat the shortage of teachers: Comprehensive studies and evaluations are still pending; it will also be necessary to assess not only the short-term effects of individual interventions, but also their medium-term and side effects at other levels of the system. At least we were able to discuss indicators of the impact of the policy measures in Section 3.3. Possibly as a result of the image campaign for the teaching profession, the proportion of students enrolled in primary school teacher education programmes has increased. However, the same does not apply to secondary school teaching.

The newly introduced career path for career changers is slowly increasing its share of new entrants and attracting strong interest, as shown by high application and certification numbers. However, the number who actually enter teaching is much lower, raising questions about the process’s suitability and cost-effectiveness (Rechnungshof, 2025a).

Since non-fully qualified teachers (both career changers and special contract teachers) were offered permanent employment—probably as an ‘incentive’ in the specific shortage situation—after completing a relatively narrow training programme within eight years, it can be assumed that they will remain in the system. For this reason, reliable projections would be desirable to clarify the cumulative effect of the increased number of teacher education students and the additional non-fully qualified staff on future employment opportunities for teachers.

4.2. Critical Discussion

We believe it is essential to analyse the possible implications of the teacher shortages, particularly the long-term effects and side effects on individuals, the teaching profession, and the education system. In the following paragraphs, we will discuss some of these issues that may be significant for the further development of education and that should be addressed in future empirical studies.

Quantitative and quality aspects of teacher shortages: According to our findings in Section 3.1, media and political attention on the teacher shortages focused mainly on whether enough staff could be recruited for the upcoming school year to ensure that no class would be left without a teacher. The topic was thus framed as a quantitative problem, with its qualitative aspects falling out of focus. As a consequence, the fact that an increasing number of classes were taught by staff with relatively weak educational qualifications was not discussed for a long time (Gruber, 2023), surprisingly not even by parent and teacher representatives. While teacher trade unions were critical about career changers as “unqualified lateral entrants” in earlier years (e.g., 2010⁶⁰), public statements pointing in this direction have decreased in recent years⁶¹. This may be an example of the lack of interest in professional policy issues compared to collective bargaining issues in Austrian teacher unions (Lassnigg & Vogtenhuber, 2015). Critical voices regarding the quality of the countermeasures⁶² appear in the media only after the publication of the Austrian Court of Auditors’ unsettling report (Rechnungshof, 2025a). Quality of education does not only require qualified teachers, but also appropriate working conditions, e.g., time for collegial support, mentoring, parental involvement, and school development, and a reduction in the amount of overtime work. By framing teacher shortages solely in quantitative terms, we risk neglecting the fact that schools also need institutional development—something that demands time and commitment from school leaders and teachers alike.

Certification and training of career changers: While the arrangements for career changers seem appropriate for a graduate of a mathematics degree programme, who wishes to teach mathematics⁶³, there are cases that are far from close to this ideal type, particularly if the subjects of origin do not appear in the canon of school subjects, e.g., economics and business studies. Career changers with this subject represent the second largest group with 21.4% of all applicants⁶⁴ and they are often certified for teaching mathematics. Graduates of economics will usually have fair mathematical qualifications, which may not necessarily be true for business administration graduates majoring in human resource management. Such cases raise the question of whether the certification received is a valid indication of basic academic qualification in a subject. This applies even more to cases where certification is awarded for more than one subject. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that training for career changers, even for those ‘certified’ for more than one school subject, only contains teaching methodology for a single subject.

Clearly, the certification process is an emergency measure that cannot be expected to be satisfactory in all respects. The mentioned examples raise doubts about the validity and fairness of the current design of the process. In particular, the certification for school subjects and the recognition of previous professional experience should be addressed in line with the Austrian Court of Auditors’ criticism (Rechnungshof, 2025a, p. 45). From the perspective of applicants’ professional qualifications, we believe the following points should be added: (i) Since the applicants’ previous studies differ from school subjects, it is problematic to completely omit subject-specific learning units from career change training. Flexible modules that address subject-specific needs could remedy this situation. (ii) From the perspective of teaching quality, it is highly problematic that certification can be awarded for several subjects, but training units in subject-specific didactics are only offered for one subject. (iii) Finally, it seems reasonable to evaluate the screening procedure of applicants.

Out-of-field teaching: For the Ministry, career changers are a major instrument to combat out-of-field teaching⁶⁵. The extent of out-of-field teaching in Austria is above the EU-average; it is more common in schools with pupils with low socio-economic status and in middle schools rather than in higher secondary schools (Koschmieder & Unterköfler-Klatzer, 2025, p. 87). Therefore, reducing out-of-field teaching is certainly a worthwhile goal. Particularly in cases where career changers are certified for a subject with few weekly lessons (e.g., arts, history, vocational orientation), it is unlikely that all available weekly lessons in the subject will be taken away from the staff already working in a school and allocated to a new entrant. Rather, especially in middle schools, a certain amount of out-of-field teaching is expected of new entrants. Additionally, the Austrian Court of Auditors' data suggests that students who start teaching before graduation are often assigned to out-of-field teaching tasks (Rechnungshof, 2025a, p. 77). These considerations suggest that career changers and students will often end up in out-of-field teaching unless appropriate safeguards are put in place.

Impact on the teacher education system: Austrian teacher education has contained praxis phases in schools for a long time. Presumably for this reason, Austria has not seen any of the fierce debates on the introduction of *school-based teacher training models* that can be observed in other countries (Crook, 1995; Gore & Mitchell, 1992; Townsend, 1994; Mutton et al., 2024). However, one may question whether the rapid creation of a career changer pathway into the teaching profession—offering certification for a school subject combined with a short training programme—has not yet led to the emergence of a parallel system of teacher education. Such an alternative system seems to rely largely on self-study and practical school experience—a model in which one can only hope that schools themselves will assume training responsibilities through mentoring, collegial collaboration, and the targeted release of staff for further professional development.

The employment of career changers and teachers on special contracts are two understandable reactions to a current emergency situation. Providing qualification measures for these groups is certainly necessary. The current strategy of granting entitlement to permanent employment in the teaching profession via extraordinary studies (university courses) without making further qualification measures mandatory creates a parallel structure to regular teacher training, undermines the quality standards of the still young teacher education reform, creates a new group of significantly less qualified teachers and can thus signal a trend towards de-professionalisation. Furthermore, alternative pathways into the profession which are not integrated into the regular teacher education system are a dead end for those who wish to undertake additional credit-bearing studies, for example, to acquire qualifications for a second teaching subject.

A new type of modular degree programme may offer an alternative. In the short term, such a modular programme would provide the skills required directly for entering classroom teaching, while in the longer term, it would supplement these basic qualifications in relation to individual and site-related needs as well as to the criteria of professional teacher education by modules of professional development. In this way, career changers and special contract teachers could be offered an easier entry into a teacher training programme that is flexibly organised and accounts for professional experience but ultimately leads to a full degree and meets the qualification criteria that apply to regular ITE programmes.

Challenges on school level and equity implications: Particularly strong repercussions are to be expected at the level of individual schools. In the current situation of teacher shortages, the decentralisation of teacher recruitment (i.e., a result of the 'autonomy legislation' in 2017; BMBWF, 2017) means that individual school leaders must make efforts to attract applications for vacant positions and to stage a meaningful recruitment process. If non-fully qualified personnel are hired, new and increased tasks may arise in terms of training and

supporting new colleagues. Their integration in heterogeneous teams and work coordination may also present new challenges that have not yet been thoroughly investigated (Baar & Mladenovska, 2023; Jutzi et al., 2025).

The individual skills of the school leaders, but also regional and school structure-specific characteristics, will make a difference here and can increase structural inequalities between schools in terms of their ability to recruit well-trained teachers. We know from other studies (Mayr et al., 2021; Müller et al., 2021; Altrichter et al., 2024) that teacher education students disproportionately prefer higher secondary schools to middle schools as a workplace. Therefore, it may be expected that the overall number of applicants (both fully qualified and career changers/special contract teachers) will be higher in higher secondary schools, which, as a consequence, will have a better chance of satisfying their staffing needs and of attracting more highly qualified applicants than in middle schools (see Table 3).

Individual pressure and issues of professionalism: The rectors of the university colleges of teacher education and teacher trainers have warned against placing *too great a burden on students* who are non-fully qualified and teach alongside their studies. If students teach too many hours (more than 10 lessons per week according to SWK, 2023) and too early (“before the end of the fourth semester”) in parallel to their training, there is a great risk that they will “not get much out of their studies” and “will not graduate because they burn out”⁶⁶. Preliminary reports seem to reflect the results on premature student teaching in other countries (e.g., Scheidig & Holmeier, 2022; Bäuerlein et al., 2018). According to a non-representative study by Porsch et al. (2025b; n = 1.635 students; see also Rechnungshof, 2025a, p. 77), about a quarter of all Bachelor teacher education students taught in 2022/2023, mostly in primary and middle schools. On average, these student teachers work 16 teaching hours per week, which with preparation and follow-up tasks amounts to 33 work hours per week. Many of these students are also employed in out-of-field teaching (Prenzel et al., 2021, p. 44). In some subjects (e.g., sports, German as a second language, computer science, technical crafts, and art education), more than half of the students are not qualified for these subjects. Progress in their degree programmes suffers from the teaching load. Students who already teach only take half as many exams as other students; they need 2.5 additional semesters compared to students who do not work in parallel and one additional semester compared to students with part-time jobs in other professions. Although early entrants feel better prepared for challenging situations at school, they enjoy their studies less and also have inflated expectations of their own competences (Porsch et al., 2025b).

Apart from the burden this situation places on individual students, there may be repercussions for the teaching profession as a whole. The beginning of a career is considered a vulnerable period that plays a key role in developing professional skills and identity (Keller-Schneider et al., 2019), during which guidance and support are crucial for productive coping (Porsch et al., 2025b). While students who start teaching early do find additional learning opportunities, these opportunities mostly remain without guidance and support (Scheidig & Holmeier, 2022)—unsurprisingly, given the often precarious staffing situation in the schools that take them on. This places them in an environment that has been considered, since Lortie (2002), to be characteristic of the formation of a weak, non-collegial professional identity. Additionally, it has also been found to be associated with problems regarding teacher retention: Only half of the early entrants in the study of Porsch et al. (2025b) assume to be working as a teacher until retirement, and a tenth expect to stay in this field for a maximum of five years. Finally, students with a part-time teaching job are more likely to be dissatisfied with their studies due to competing time commitments (Porsch et al., 2025b). This puts pressure on the teacher training system to change, which cannot be met simply by reducing the quantitative requirements. Rather, the in-school training

situation, which school leaders increasingly perceive as a challenge (Soukup-Altrichter & Altrichter, 2026), must be actively supported, equipped with appropriate resources and explicitly incorporated into the framework of teacher training programmes.

4.3. Limitations and Outlook on Future Research

This paper aimed to provide a fair overview of the recent emergence of teacher shortages in Austria, the policy measures implemented, and the related debates. It is intended to help other researchers find orientation within education policy and research on teacher shortages. As always, such an undertaking involves a number of limitations and leaves a number of questions unanswered. For instance, a more comprehensive inclusion of different types of media would have been desirable. Equally, we would like to learn more about the effects of the various policy measures taken; early studies on this issue often work with opportunity samples (Helm et al., 2025; PHAT, 2025), and more comprehensive studies are only in progress or planning stage.

As a consequence, several questions remain that require further research, some of which we have highlighted in our critical discussion. Empirical studies on attitudes, competences, and performance of non-fully qualified teachers are under way. Similarly, the impact of these new staff members on school quality and student learning should be examined. As noted above, structural inequalities between school locations and types warrant deeper investigation. No less interesting are the possible effects of staff diversification on cooperation among colleagues and the work of head teachers. Eventually, the influence of alternative pathways into the profession, on educational and employment standards, and on teacher education requires close attention.

Currently, the issue of teacher shortages is primarily discussed as an empirical phenomenon, yet a stronger theoretical perspective is needed in future research. This could involve drawing on frameworks such as professionalisation or sociological theories. From a structural functionalist perspective, teacher shortages may be seen as a dysfunction of the educational system, indicating its inability to fulfil its core functions. In systems theory, shortages might be framed as communication problems and counter measures tend to increase system complexity—for example, by enabling alternative entry routes into the profession. From an organisational sociologist perspective, it is important to examine how schools adapt to shortages: Do they lead to organisational changes such as increased workload, new roles, altered school leadership strategies, impacts on collegiality, burnout, or staff attrition? Furthermore, educational governance theories may help us understand the processes of power, authority, and decision-making in the political and administrative measures surrounding teacher shortages. Who are the policymakers behind past and current reforms and campaigns? What other types of actors can gain influence on systems struggling with shortage constellations?

Understanding and addressing teacher shortages is not only vital for sustaining the quality and quantity of education in schools but also represents a critical field for future research that must integrate empirical evidence, theoretical insight, and policy solutions.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

ACA	Austrian Court of Auditors
AHS	Allgemeinbildende Höhere Schulen (i.e., academic secondary schools)
APS	Allgemeinbildende Pflichtschulen (compulsory schools; i.e., primary and lower secondary schools)
BMHS	Berufsbildende Mittlere und Höhere Schulen (i.e., intermediate and upper vocational secondary schools)
BMBWF	Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Forschung (i.e., Austrian Ministry for Education and Research)
ITE	Initial teacher education

Notes

- ¹ This applies to teachers of non-vocational subjects in BMHS.
- ² Der Standard and Die Presse are Austrian quality newspapers with national reach. Der Standard was the first German-language newspaper to establish a website and an electronic archive (<https://www.derstandard.at/> (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- ³ <https://www.derstandard.at/story/1282978699238/mangel-oesterreich-gehen-die-lehrer-aus> (accessed on 12 February 2026); all quotation from sources in German were translated by the authors.
- ⁴ <https://www.derstandard.at/story/1282978699238/mangel-oesterreich-gehen-die-lehrer-aus> (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- ⁵ <https://www.derstandard.at/story/1271378056370/lehrervertreter-gegen-unqualifizierte-quereinsteiger> (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- ⁶ <https://www.derstandard.at/story/1282978699238/mangel-oesterreich-gehen-die-lehrer-aus> (accessed on 12 February 2026); <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000063411754/noe-startet-mit-200-000-schuelern-ins-neue-schuljahr> (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- ⁷ <https://www.derstandard.at/story/1277338127618/interview-unsitte-die-schulentwicklung-noch-immer-massiv-hemmt> (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- ⁸ <https://www.diepresse.com/594604/schmied-jede-unterrichtsstunde-wird-gehalten> (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- ⁹ <https://www.derstandard.at/story/1295570674753/lehrer-engpass-wird-laut-schmied-zwei-jahre-dauern> (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- ¹⁰ <https://www.diepresse.com/534864/in-oesterreich-droht-lehrermangel> (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- ¹¹ E.g., <https://www.derstandard.at/story/1297215951999/ueberalterung-bei-lehrer-laempels-kollegen-droht-eine-luecke> (accessed on 12 February 2026); <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000107667228/neues-schuljahr-in-manchen-faechern-und-regionen-fehlen-lehrer> (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- ¹² <https://www.derstandard.at/story/1295570674753/lehrer-engpass-wird-laut-schmied-zwei-jahre-dauern> (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- ¹³ <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000073883593/neue-warnung-vor-lehrermangel-schon-laengst-realitaet> (accessed on 12 February 2026); <https://www.diepresse.com/5237034/gewerkschaft-warnt-erneut-vor-lehrermangel> (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- ¹⁴ <https://www.diepresse.com/5885380/immer-mehr-lehrer-sind-in-quarantaene-die-lage-spitzt-sich-zu> (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- ¹⁵ <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000073883593/neue-warnung-vor-lehrermangel-schon-laengst-realitaet> (accessed on 12 February 2026); <https://www.diepresse.com/5602315/schule-mehr-studenten-als-lueckenfueller> (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- ¹⁶ <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000136770049/lehrermangel-verschaerft-sich-in-einigen-faechern-und-regionen> (accessed on 12 February 2026).

- 17 <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000138746458/ueberstunden-und-studenten-sollen-gegenlehrermangel-helfen> (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- 18 <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000140283735/besseres-image-und-viel-recruiting-sollen-lehrermangel-beheben> (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- 19 https://www.parlament.gv.at/dokument/XXIV/AB/7581/imfname_213538.pdf (accessed on 12 February 2026); https://www.parlament.gv.at/dokument/XXIV/AB/8500/imfname_226550.pdf (accessed on 12 February 2026); https://www.parlament.gv.at/dokument/XXIV/AB/12382/imfname_276586.pdf (accessed on 12 February 2026); https://www.parlament.gv.at/dokument/XXIV/AB/15341/imfname_329403.pdf (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- 20 E.g., https://www.parlament.gv.at/dokument/XXVI/AB/2583/imfname_740580.pdf (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- 21 https://www.parlament.gv.at/dokument/XXIV/AB/7581/imfname_213538.pdf (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- 22 <https://www.derstandard.at/story/3000000183036/pensionierungswelle-bei-lehrern-am-hoehepunkt> (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- 23 <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000021284412/fast-drei-viertel-der-lehrer-waehlten-hacklerregelung> (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- 24 <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000138746458/ueberstunden-und-studenten-sollen-gegenlehrermangel-helfen> (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- 25 https://www.parlament.gv.at/dokument/XXVII/AB/12614/imfname_1502702.pdf (accessed on 12 February 2026); https://www.parlament.gv.at/dokument/XXVII/AB/16251/imfname_1603842.pdf (accessed on 12 February 2026); <https://science.apa.at/power-search/1567065117847595071> (accessed on 12 February 2026); according to the Court of Auditors (*Rechnungshof*, 2025b), 39.5% of the teaching force worked part-time in 2023/2024.
- 26 <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000136770049/lehrermangel-verschaerft-sich-in-einigen-fachern-und-regionen> (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- 27 <https://www.derstandard.at/story/3000000188827/gr252nes-nein-zur-verk252rzung-des-lehramtsstudiums-sorgt-f252r-kritik> (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- 28 <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000142500727/hoher-anteil-an-teilzeitarbeit-bei-jungen-lehrerinnen-und-lehrern> (accessed on 12 February 2026); <https://www.derstandard.at/story/3000000187210/gewerkschaftsvorsitzender-zu-lehrermangel-arbeitsumfeld-muss-attraktiver-werden> (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- 29 <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000140283735/besseres-image-und-viel-recruiting-sollen-lehrermangel-beheben> (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- 30 <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000140283735/besseres-image-und-viel-recruiting-sollen-lehrermangel-beheben> (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- 31 <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000140283735/besseres-image-und-viel-recruiting-sollen-lehrermangel-beheben> (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- 32 <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000139967726/laender-fordern-mehr-massnahmen-gegen-lehrermangel> (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- 33 <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000140283735/besseres-image-und-viel-recruiting-sollen-lehrermangel-beheben> (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- 34 <https://www.derstandard.at/story/3000000188854/kuerzeres-lehramtsstudium-laut-polaschek-wahrscheinlich-erst-ab-2026> (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- 35 <https://www.derstandard.at/story/3000000188483/gruene-gegen-polascheks-plan-zur-verkuerzung-des-lehramtsstudiums> (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- 36 https://www.parlament.gv.at/aktuelles/pk/jahr_2024/pk0381 (accessed on 12 February 2026); Hochschulgesetz (2005).
- 37 <https://www.derstandard.at/story/3000000188854/kuerzeres-lehramtsstudium-laut-polaschek-wahrscheinlich-erst-ab-2026> (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- 38 https://www.parlament.gv.at/dokument/XXVII/AB/10951/imfname_1464122.pdf (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- 39 <https://www.derstandard.at/story/1376534449176/schmied-zum-lehrermangel-wir-bekommen-das-hin> (accessed on 12 February 2026); <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000050505534/wien-bereitet-sich-auf-lehrermangel-vor> (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- 40 <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000063906956/pensionierungswelle-bei-lehrern-steht-unmittelbar-bevor> (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- 41 <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000137008017/schulen-quereinsteiger-sollen-lehrkraeftemangel-abfedern> (accessed on 12 February 2026); for curricula see Hochschulgesetz (2005, §39 (3a) and §42 (14)).
- 42 https://www.parlament.gv.at/dokument/XXVII/AB/15155/imfname_1582019.pdf (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- 43 Formally, the curriculum comprises 120 EC, because 60 EC are additionally credited for the prior professional practice.

- 44 <https://www.derstandard.at/story/3000000271162/rechnungshof-kritisiert-mangelhafte-gewinnung-neuer-lehrkraefte?ref=article> (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- 45 <https://www.derstandard.at/story/1376534368788/lehremangel-studenten-und-pensionisten-helfen> (accessed on 12 February 2026); <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000136770049/lehremangel-verschaerft-sich-in-einigen-fachern-und-regionen> (accessed on 12 February 2026); <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000099458665/lehremangel-wenig-bewegung-bei-sondervertraegen> (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- 46 https://www.parlament.gv.at/dokument/XXVII/AB/10951/imfname_1464122.pdf (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- 47 <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000107667228/neues-schuljahr-in-manchen-fachern-und-regionen-fehlen-lehrer> (accessed on 12 February 2026); <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000136929807/lehrraefte-mangel-in-oesterreich-spitzt-sich-weiter-zu> (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- 48 <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000137900170/rektoren-der-paedagogischen-hochschulen-warnen-davor-studierende-zu-verheizen> (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- 49 https://www.parlament.gv.at/dokument/XXVII/AB/10951/imfname_1464122.pdf (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- 50 <https://www.derstandard.at/story/1282273372314/mehrarbeit-gewerkschaft-warnt-faymann-vor-lehrerarbeit-debatte> (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- 51 In the 2023/2024 school year, a total of 35% of subjects at lower secondary schools (Mittelschule) in the province of Upper Austria and 46% in Tyrol were taught by teachers who are not qualified in the subject (Rechnungshof, 2025b).
- 52 <https://www.derstandard.at/story/3000000193615/andrang-bei-lehramtsstudium-ist-gestiegen> (accessed on 12 February 2026); <https://www.derstandard.at/story/3000000226260/polaschek-offene-lehrerstellen-werden-in-den-meisten-schulen-gut-abgedeckt> (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- 53 https://www.parlament.gv.at/dokument/XXVII/AB/18588/imfname_1653853.pdf (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- 54 Note that this figure differs from the ministerial data (BMBWF, 2025) used in Table 3.
- 55 https://www.parlament.gv.at/dokument/XXVII/AB/15155/imfname_1582019.pdf (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- 56 https://www.parlament.gv.at/dokument/XXVII/AB/15155/imfname_1582019.pdf (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- 57 <https://www.derstandard.at/story/3000000271162/rechnungshof-kritisiert-mangelhafte-gewinnung-neuer-lehrkraefte?ref=article> (accessed on 12 February 2026); <https://www.diepresse.com/19717073/lehremangel-rechnungshof-fordert-weniger-teilzeit-mehr-quereinsteiger-und-bessere-prognosen> (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- 58 https://www.parlament.gv.at/aktuelles/pk/jahr_2025/pk0760 (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- 59 <https://www.parlament.gv.at/gegenstand/XXVIII/I/191?selectedStage=105> (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- 60 <https://www.derstandard.at/story/1271378056370/lehrervertreter-gegen-unqualifizierte-quereinsteiger> (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- 61 <https://www.derstandard.at/story/3000000187210/gewerkschaftsvorsitzender-zu-lehremangel-arbeitsumfeld-muss-attraektiver-werden> (accessed on 12 February 2026); <https://www.derstandard.at/story/3000000181074/wie-ernst-wird-es-mit-dem-lehremangel-im-herbst> (accessed on 12 February 2026). The chairman of the teachers' union, for example, described the career changer model in very moderate terms as an "important addition", but said that "nothing beats fully trained educators" (Kimberger, 2025, p. 4).
- 62 <https://www.derstandard.at/story/3000000271172/der-verschlafene-personalmangel-schule-darf-kein-experimentierfeld-sein?ref=article> (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- 63 It can be assumed that this model applies to a good proportion of applicants from the 'group of natural sciences and technology studies' (30.6% of applicants for 'career change') and the 'group of language studies' (12.9% of applicants; https://www.parlament.gv.at/dokument/XXVII/AB/15155/imfname_1582019.pdf (accessed on 12 February 2026), p. 13).
- 64 https://www.parlament.gv.at/dokument/XXVII/AB/15155/imfname_1582019.pdf (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- 65 https://www.parlament.gv.at/dokument/XXVII/AB/15155/imfname_1582019.pdf (accessed on 12 February 2026).
- 66 <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000137900170/rektoren-der-paedagogischen-hochschulen-warnen-davor-studierende-zu-verheizen> (accessed on 12 February 2026).

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