

Exploring the Impact of Career Steps and Evaluation Systems on Teacher Professional Development: Teachers' Opinions on Career Step Exams

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Abstract:

Teachers' professional development and educational policies are two phenomena that significantly affect stakeholders in education. Related research has emphasized that these policies are mostly in striking contrast with long-standing perceptions of the status of the profession, values, beliefs, and norms of teachers. This research aims to evaluate teachers' opinions regarding policies, procedures, criteria, effects on teaching professional ethics, and suggestions regarding "The Career Step Exam" implemented by the Ministry of National Education in Türkiye. In this study, teachers' opinions on these exams were obtained by comparing the type and scope of questions, difficulty levels, entry conditions, and regulations for the exams held in 2006 and 2022. The research data consist of the opinions of teachers, expert teachers and head teachers who work in kindergarten, primary, secondary and high schools during the academic year 2022-2023. The study was carried out using the phenomenological pattern, which is a qualitative research method. In this study, the opinions of 85 teachers were taken using semi-structured interview forms to collect qualitative data. Moreover, to obtain the widest possible range of perspectives, the maximum variation sampling method was employed. According to the data obtained from the research, it was concluded that most teachers disapproved of the current examination system and caused discrimination in terms of salary increase and status.

Keywords: Teachers' opinions, status quo, career, professional development, and examinations

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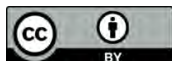
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INTRODUCTION

Education has always been an important phenomenon in human history (Saunders, 1999; Tiberius, 2002). Throughout history, many policies and regulations have been implemented to improve the quality of education (Tiberius, 2002). The ministries of education have been trying to implement original ideas that will increase the quality of education, such as acquiring teaching/learning resources, supporting student-centeredness, providing technological devices, and offering professional development for teachers to improve self-efficacy (Wilson, 2011; Xu & Gulosino, 2006). Education and teachers are considered two inseparable phenomena because the teachers' primary role is to transfer information and guide students to improve the effectiveness of the learning process (Creemers et al., 2012; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2007). Since teachers are the cornerstone of education, they are always receiving increased attention from associated groups and policymakers (Hou et al., 2023; Kennedy, 2008). Authorities and society expect teachers to be knowledgeable, experienced, and competent (Toole & Louis, 2002). Since teachers are considered one of the crucial factors that affect the quality of education, most regulations and policies focus on teachers' professional development (Darling-Hammond, 2012; Creemers et al., 2012). Among the arrangements and activities that contribute to the professional development of teachers, activities such as in-service training, seminars, and courses are conducted, as well as activities aimed at increasing motivation (Kuznetsova, & Yarovaya, 2021). On the other hand, these policies sometimes get a strong and adverse reaction from teachers, especially when teachers' opinions are not taken into consideration, which creates a sense of struggle, disgrace, and demotivation in their careers (Wood, 2007). Hence, this study sets out to investigate the experiences of teachers on career-stage exams, including their general opinions about exam policies, procedures, and the resulting impact on teachers' professional development and ethics.

As a continually evolving system, the notion of education has been a great deal for governments and associated organizations. Therefore, regulations and policies for teachers, indispensable elements of education, are meticulously implemented by the states. Moreover, since teachers are models that impact the lives of students, they are among the people who are constantly observed by society, creating constant pressure on teachers about their experience, knowledge, and competence. There is a common prejudice against novice teachers because parents often prefer their children to be taught by experienced teachers. To minimize these concerns, the Ministry of Education conducts actions regarding teachers' professional development (Lockton & Fargason, 2019).

Therefore, throughout history, various educational reforms and approaches have been developed to improve the teaching profession. In ancient Greece in the 5th century BC, Socrates' teaching methods based on inquiry and discussion helped teachers encourage interactive and critical thinking to develop the teaching profession (George, 2015). In the 17th century, Jean-Jacques Rousseau proposed an education model that supports the natural

development of children in his work "Emile". This approach encouraged teachers to focus on individual student needs (Lu, 2019; Rousseau, 2021). In the 19th century, under the leadership of Wilhelm von Humboldt, a modern research-oriented education model was developed at universities in Germany. This model helped teachers transfer scientific thinking and research skills to students (Albritton, 2006). In the 20th century, John Dewey encouraged teachers to adopt a student-centred approach with his progressive education philosophy. According to Dewey, teachers must provide learning experiences that match students' interests and needs (Cowles, 2020; Dewey, 2012).

The National Education Association, which was established in 1857, is an organization that works to contribute to the professional development of teachers. The association operates to develop teacher training programs, support teacher professional development, and encourage cooperation among teachers (Sleeter, 2011). Reform movements in teacher training programs that began in the United States in the 1960s aimed to provide teachers with more practical experience. These reforms included changes made to increase preservice teachers' classroom practices and to better prepare them for the teaching profession. The normal school movement emerged in the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This movement focused on the professional development of teachers and enabled teachers to receive regular education. Normal schools are schools where pre-service teachers receive training in teaching techniques, teaching materials, and curricula to improve their teaching skills (Gordy, 2016; Ogren, 2003; Ogren, 2005). In recent years, innovative teacher training programs have been developed for the professional development of teachers. The Teach for America Program is designed to accelerate the professional development of teachers. This program enables young adults with tertiary education to work as teachers in low-income schools (Donaldson & Johnson, 2011; Heilig & Jez, 2010). The educational reforms implemented in Finland since the 1980s have placed significant emphasis on the professional development of teachers. Teachers are encouraged to continually improve themselves, collaborate with colleagues, and adopt research-based practices (Aarrevaara et al., 2009; Hardy, et al., 2021; Webb, 2004).

The new education system has resulted in innovations in teacher training and professional development in line with contemporary education principles. Therefore, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, pedagogical formation programs were developed to train teachers. These programs were aimed at increasing the pedagogical knowledge and skills of teacher candidates. In 1924, the Law of National Education laid the foundation for the modern education system in Türkiye (Aslan, 2011). A radical change has been made to the teacher training system in Türkiye. Teachers' schools were transformed into teacher high schools. In addition, the Teachers' School Reform was carried out in 1933 to train professional teachers (Oğuzkan, 1982). In the 1960s, a series of reforms were carried out in education in Türkiye. In this period, teacher training programs were reviewed, and the status and importance of the teaching profession were emphasized (Bilir, 2011; Çelebi & Kazancı, 2021; Kılıç, 2015). The Education Policy Document, adopted in Türkiye in 2005, has been an

important reference point for the professional development of teachers. In the document, subjects such as teacher training, career development, and continuing education were discussed, and the aim was to increase the quality of teachers (Bağci, 2011). National Teacher Standards, developed in 2006 in Türkiye to contribute to the professional development of teachers, are used to determine teachers' qualifications and support their professional development (Şişman, 2009). Moreover, in Türkiye, many programs are organized by various institutions and non-governmental organizations to support professional development. The Ministry of National Education's Professional Development Project (MEGEP) offers professional development materials for teachers (Emirgil, 2009).

The career step reform implemented in 2005 aimed to introduce a new system for advancing and progressing teachers' careers based on performance. The reform established a career steps system for teachers that included different levels based on performance and qualifications. The Career Steps were categorized as the "Teacher," "Expert Teacher" and "Senior Master Teacher" levels. The reform emphasized performance-based evaluation to determine teachers' progression in the career steps system (Güven, 2010). The evaluation criteria considered various factors such as classroom performance, student outcomes, professional development activities, and school community contributions. The reform recognizes the importance of teacher training and professional development to enhance teaching quality. The program encouraged teachers to participate in professional development programs, courses, workshops, and seminars to improve their pedagogical knowledge and skills. The reform introduced differentiated salary scales corresponding to career steps (Çelikten, 2008). Teachers at higher career levels with exemplary performance were eligible for higher salaries and additional benefits (Gündoğdu & Kızıldaş, 2008). The reform aims to promote meritocracy in the education system by rewarding teachers' performances and dedication. Teachers who consistently demonstrated outstanding performance and met specific criteria were able to progress to higher career steps. The reform introduced mentorship programs where experienced teachers supported and guided novice teachers, fostering professional growth and collaboration within the teaching community. Later on, the 2011 career step reform aimed to enhance the quality of education by recognizing and rewarding teachers' performance and encouraging continuous professional development.

The Teacher Performance System, launched in 2014, aims to evaluate and improve the performance of teachers. This system enabled the monitoring and evaluation of teachers' in-class activities, student achievements, teaching methods, and professional contributions. Performance evaluations are an important source of data on teachers' career progression (Çelikten & Özkan, 2018).

Conversely, requirements in most countries differ significantly depending on the industry, profession and, in some instances, region. In both the United States and Europe, career steps are implemented through a structured progression that begins with entry-level positions, allowing individuals to acquire the fundamental skills required for the role. Moreover,

Teachers develop their expertise through training and mentorship, with regular performance reviews guiding their progress. As they demonstrate capabilities, they can move up to mid-level and senior roles, often requiring ongoing education and certifications. Furthermore, career progression pathways for teachers exist in numerous countries. These pathways facilitate the advancement of teachers within the profession. Nevertheless, no single, universally applicable, standardized examination for career advancement has been proposed (Acarbaş & Gözler, 2023; Yücel, 2023).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to evaluate teachers' opinions regarding policy, procedures, criteria, effects on teaching professional ethics, and suggestions regarding "The Career Step Exam" implemented by the Ministry of National Education in Türkiye. This research seeks to understand whether progression through the career step exams significantly contributes to professional development among educators. A comparative analysis between the career steps examinations of 2005 and 2022 is conducted to discern similarities and differences, shedding light on potential advancements and changes in evaluation methodologies over time. Additionally, the study explores the effects of implementing a structured teacher professional step on educators' overall professional growth. Furthermore, it delves into alternative approaches that could be considered for the teaching career stage, offering insights into potential enhancements or modifications to existing systems. Through these inquiries, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of career steps in teacher development. This research is considered important in observing comparative data in the literature and designing future studies. Therefore, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the teachers' opinions about the Career Steps and Examination?
2. What are the similarities and differences between the Career Steps Exam in 2005 and the Career Steps Exam in 2022?
3. What are the effects of establishing a professional teacher's role on the professional development of teachers?
4. What are the possible alternatives for the teaching Career Step?

METHOD

This section covers the nature of the study, data collection process, criteria setting process, validity and reliability of measurement findings concerning the coding form, and data analysis.

Study Design

In this study, we utilized a case study approach. A case study is a method that thoroughly explores a specific case, situation, or subject, usually within its real-life context. This

approach can target an individual, group, organization, event, or phenomenon and is frequently applied in fields like social sciences, business, education, and health (Baxter & Jack, 2015).

This study sought to conduct a situation analysis of the circumstances encountered by teachers following the administration of the Career Steps Examination. The objective was to solicit feedback from teachers to facilitate an evaluation of these circumstances (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992). Moreover, a phenomenological research method, which is frequently used in qualitative research, was implemented. Phenomenological research is a qualitative research method based on a philosophical approach called phenomenology. It is a philosophical and phenomenological approach to psychology that focuses on the subjective experiences of individuals or participants to understand how events or experiences (phenomena) are perceived, made sense of, and experienced (Dibley et al., 2020). Additionally, content analysis was used in the study for qualitative data. Content analysis is a research method used to systematically analyze and interpret the content of various forms of communication, such as written texts, audio recordings, videos, and images (Kleinheksel et al., 2020). The context is systematically analyzed by applying a coding scheme to identify and assign relevant codes to different parts of the content. Once the coding was complete, the researcher analyzed the coded data to identify patterns, frequencies, or relationships among categories (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992).

The triangulation strategy is widely used in social sciences as a way to strengthen reliability and validity. According to this strategy, four qualities are required to increase credibility: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Carter et al., 2014). This requires the use of multiple data sources. These sources of data can be from different people, places, times, or methods (Breitmayer et al., 1993; Decrop, 1999; Heale & Forbes, 2013). Accordingly, the present study encompassed the perspectives of educators at diverse educational levels and institutions, including those engaged in kindergarten, primary, secondary, and high school settings.

For the reliability of the data obtained, one or more of the aforementioned qualities must be present (Fusch et al., 2018). To determine the reliability and authenticity of qualitative findings, four types of triangulations are used: Method diversity, diversity of sources, analyst diversity, and theory/perspective diversity' (Carter et al., 2014). In this study, method, source, and analyzer triangulations were used. To increase validity and reliability, the responses provided by the teachers were not modified, nor was the content altered. Furthermore, the information provided by the teachers was strictly confidential to maximize internal reliability. Descriptive techniques such as frequency and percentage were used to obtain personal information in the first part of the form.

Instruments

The questions on the semi-structured interview form were prepared based on other studies in the field. In this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted as a data collection technique. The semi-structured interview is frequently used in the phenomenological research model, which is a qualitative research method. The researcher guided the participants through the research questions while allowing them to freely express their thoughts and experiences (Kallio et al., 2016).

A total of 20 questions were formulated within the scope of the research project. The questions were revised following the recommendations of the expert reviewers, who included four Turkish teachers and two literature teachers, as well as two associate professors, concerning the items, semantic integrity, and grammar. Three questions were excluded on the grounds of their lack of relevance to the subject matter, while four questions were requested to be removed by the experts based on their ambiguity and lack of clarity. Subsequently, the interview questions were pre-applied to teachers at various levels as part of a pilot study that included the participation of 30 teachers. Semi-structured interview questions were prepared through Google Form at the beginning of the spring semester of the 2022-2023 academic year and transferred to electronic media. Semi-structured interview questions were also sent to educational institutions through the Gebze, Kocaeli Directorate of National Education. To obtain the opinions of kindergarten, primary, middle, and high school teachers currently employed in Gebze, the interview forms were distributed to these educators, either by instant text message or in person, with the latter approach being employed to facilitate more candid responses.

Participants

The study group comprises 85 teachers and administrators employed in public schools in the Gebze district of Kocaeli during the 2022-2023 academic year. The research population comprises teachers employed at educational institutions in Gebze, representing a diverse range of socioeconomic backgrounds, age groups, genders and grade levels. A sample size of 85 was identified as appropriate for the study within the population, according to the sample size (Başaran, 2024; Yazıcıoğlu & Erdoğan, 2004).

Participants who engaged in the research but did not undertake the examination or did not meet the prerequisites for doing so were also included. Furthermore, the participants provided feedback regarding their perceptions of the examination and prospective career progression within the subject matter domain. Table 1 presents the demographic information about the participants.

Table 1.*Demographic Characteristics of the Participants*

Variables	Category	f	%
<i>Institution Type</i>	Preschool	4	4.7
	Primary School	26	30.6
	Secondary School	39	45.9
	High School	16	18.8
<i>Gender</i>	Female	35	41.2
	Male	50	58.8
<i>Age</i>	20-24	0	0
	25-30	5	5.9
	31-35	11	12.9
	36-40	15	17.6
	41 years and above	54	63.5
<i>Career Status</i>	Teacher	22	25.9
	Expert	46	54.1
	Headteacher	17	20
<i>Degree of education</i>	Bachelor	70	82.4
	Master	15	17.6
	Doctorate	0	0
<i>Position</i>	Principal	5	5.9
	Vice Principal	9	10.6
	Subject Teacher	44	51.8
	Classroom Teacher	19	22.4
	Preschool Teacher	4	4.7
	School Counselor	4	4.7
<i>Total</i>		85	100

The principle of confidentiality was respected throughout the research. The titles of the participants in the study were "T" for "Teacher", "U" for "Expert" and (H) for "Head Teacher". Abbreviations were used for Principal (P), Vice Principal (VP), "Subject" teacher (S), "Class" teacher (C), School Counselor (SC), and preschool teacher (PS). In addition, the letters (b) for "between" and (a) for "above" were used for age groups. In addition, (F) were used for female participants and (M) for male participants.

Ethical Consideration

Ethical Review Board: Rectorate of Eskisehir Osmangazi University Social Sciences and Humanities Human Research Ethics Committee

Date of Ethics Review Decision: 03.05.2023

Ethics Assessment Document Issue Number: 2023/07

FINDINGS

In this section, the findings obtained from the teachers' opinions are presented within the framework of the sub-objectives of the research.

Upon posing the question, "What is your opinion of the categorization of teaching roles into Teacher, Expert Teacher, and Head Teacher?" to the participants, the responses provided by the teaching professionals are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.

Teachers' Opinions on the Division of Careers into Teacher, Expert Teacher, and Headteacher

Theme/ Sub-theme	Reference Codes	
	f	%
Theme/ Sub-theme	112	100
<i>Injustice</i>	8	7,14
<i>Beneficial/Supportive</i>	32	28,57
<i>Unfavorable</i>	53	47,32
<i>Motivating</i>	4	3,57
<i>Discriminative</i>	15	13,39

Considering Table 2, the teachers' opinions on the division of the teaching profession into teachers, expert teachers, and headteachers are categorized into five themes. These themes are *unfair, beneficial/supportive, unfavourable, motivating, and discriminatory*.

Some of the teacher's views on the division of teaching careers into teacher, expert teacher, and head teacher are as follows:

Teachers' opinions on the theme of "Injustice": *"It is not fair" (F C41H), It is unfair." (MC36-40E), "It is completely unfair" (FCb3640E), "It creates an unfair salary difference between teachers doing the same job." (FS25-30T), "It would be better if it were done to every teacher according to the year of profession, but reflecting salary differences is an unfair practice." (MPa41E).*

Teachers' opinions on the theme of "Beneficial / Supportive": *".... Teacher opinions on the theme of "Useful / Supportive": "It is a good thing" (EVPa41E), "It is an appropriate practice" (MSa41E), "It should be divided, teacher competence should be monitored." (MPa41E), "I support it, I find it positive." (MCA41H) "There should be a career step, but the method should be correct and well-planned", (MVPa41T), "I find the distinction appropriate if there is high-level evaluation for teachers' subjects." (FSb25-30T), "As in every profession, there should be career steps in teaching. Every teacher should update themselves and should not stop working." (FCa41H).*

Teachers' opinions on the theme of "Unfavorable": *"I do not find it appropriate to use the title of Head Teacher other than Atatürk." (FSCb36-40E), "It is an unnecessary chaos, career steps should not be determined by such a meaningless exam." (FSb36-40E), "The teaching profession is a professional group that requires expertise in the field of education. In my opinion, there is no need to divide it into career steps." (FCa41E), "...The head teacher issue is a scandal in itself. Such a title goes against my sacred values. In our profession, which has turned into an arena for political fulfilment, if someone with qualifications such as Head Teacher Atatürk is to be appointed, I am in favour of discussing it in the parliament, not through an exam or length of service, but depending on what it brings us in a vital situation" (MSb25-30T).*

Teachers' opinions on the theme of "Motivating": "As the years of service increase, the teacher gains experience and makes a career." (MCa41E), "It is encouraging for the teacher to improve himself/herself and contribute financially." (MCb36-40E).

Teachers' opinions on the theme of "Discriminative": "It is a very wrong practice. It has caused discrimination among teachers. A teacher's expertise cannot be measured by an exam." (FSCb36-40E), "I believe that it will discriminate against teachers in the eyes of parents and categorize them as qualified teachers and novice teachers." (MVPa41E), "There should be no discrimination." (FSb31-35E), "I find it wrong to discriminate against teachers." (MSa41E), "I do not find it appropriate to categorize teachers as it may lead to comparisons between teachers by parents." (FPSb31-35T), The discrimination is wrong. The teaching profession is a work of heart. You can study this knowledge and become an expert, but that is not the point. The important thing is to connect with the child and touch his/her soul." (FSa41E), "A teacher is an expert in their field." There is no need to discriminate." (MVPb31-35T).

The views of the teachers who participated in the interview revealed that the majority of the teachers had negative views on the categorization of teachers as teacher, expert, and head teacher. They described this classification as unfair, discriminatory, wrong, and humiliating. Conversely, teachers advocate this categorization and find it beneficial.

Upon being asked, "What are your thoughts on organizing an examination for Career Steps Exams?" the teachers provided the following responses, which are presented in Table 3.

Table 3.

Teachers' Opinions on Conducting Exams for Career Steps

	Reference Codes	
	<i>f</i>	%
<i>Theme/ Sub-theme</i>	104	100
<i>Redundant</i>	65	62,49
<i>Essential</i>	15	14,42
<i>Degrading</i>	8	7,69
<i>Inappropriate</i>	9	8,65
<i>Reliability and Credibility</i>	7	6,73

Considering Table 3, the teachers' opinions on conducting an examination for the Career Step were categorized into five themes. These themes are "Redundant", "Essential", "Degrading", "Inappropriate", "Reliability" and "Credibility."

Some teachers' views on conducting an examination for the Teaching Career Step are as follows:

Teachers' opinions on the theme of "Redundant". "An examination scores should not determine a teacher's career." *If it needs to be measured, there should be an in-class performance*

evaluation and a parent and student evaluation for teachers. One should not have a career by simply memorizing books." (FSCb36-40E): *"The teachers are already acquiring a professional career by passing so many exams. Which profession takes the examination after years? In addition, the exam does not include measurements of a career."* (FSa41E), *"Teachers are currently appointed with the civil service recruitment examination (KPSS) and start to work equipped with general culture and general competence. I do not find an exam right for a career. However, if one wishes, he/she can become an expert by taking a master's degree."* (FSCb36-40E): *"It is completely unnecessary, a time waster and an extravagance."* (FSb31-35T).

Teachers' opinions on the theme of "Essential": *"Examination keeps teachers informed about legislation, regulations, and so on."* There should be an exam." (FCa41H), *"The exam should be held every year."* (MSa41E), *"There must be an examination."* (FCa41E), *"The examination is positive,"* (MVPa41E), *"Positive"* (MPa41H), *"Very good."* (MSa41E), *"It is positive."* (MSa41H), *"Positive."* (FCa41H).

Teachers' opinions on the theme of "Degrading": *"It is a practice that offends the teacher."* (MVP. a41E), *"If a teacher who has been practising his/her profession for many years fails in the exam, it will reflect negatively on the teacher's career in front of the society, such as "Successful Teacher "Failed Teacher".* (MVPa41E), *"Humiliating"* (MSa41T), *"It's stupidly humiliating."* (MSa41T), *"It devalues teachers."* (MSa41T).

Teachers' opinions on the theme of "Appropriate": *"If it needs to be measured, there should be an in-class performance evaluation and parent and student evaluation for teachers. One should not have a career by simply memorizing books."* (FSCb36-40E), *"Each teacher must take the exam in his/her subject."* (MSa41E), *"The questions must be from our subject area"* (FSa41E), *"Written exam is not a suitable test type for the career step exams."* (FSb 36-40E), *"It may be more accurate to look at the competence with a different evaluation system."* (FPSb31-35T), *"It should be fifty per the cent exams and fifty per the cent self-improvement."* (MCA41H).

Teachers' opinions on the theme of "Reliability and Credibility": *"Such a practice is used because of the lack of trust in teachers and in favour of forcing them."* (FSb25-30T), *"The examination is unnecessary in this form."* (FSa41E), *The process should be evaluated. In other words, the activities could have been evaluated impartially."* (FCa41T), *"The poor quality and simple preparation of the questions has made the teaching profession ordinary."* (FCa41E), *"The test may be appropriate if there is a measurement with high reliability and validity."* (FSb25-30T), *"I am sceptical that an easy exam will determine career progression."* (FSb31-35T), *"For the sake of appearance",* (MSb25-30T), *"The last exam does not have any reliability and enslaves teachers only to the exam system. The exams conducted as an output are useless even as a procedure."* (FCb31-35T).

Considering the teachers' opinions on the examination for the Teaching Career Step, it can be seen that teachers evaluate the exam in different ways. Some teachers stated that the examination humiliates them. In addition, it can be seen that the exam does not have

sufficient criteria in terms of evaluating the professional competence of teachers and the reliability of the exam is not sufficient.

When asked, "What are your thoughts regarding the entry requirements for the current Career Steps Exams?" Teachers' responses regarding various factors, such as seniority, educational qualifications, and in-service training, are presented in detail in Table 4.

Table 4.

Teachers' Opinions on the Entrance Requirements for the Current Career Step Exams

	Reference Codes	
	f	%
<i>Theme/ Sub-theme</i>	101	100
<i>Length of Teaching</i>	25	24,75
<i>Seniority</i>	12	11,88
<i>Fairness</i>	9	8,91
<i>Examination</i>	12	11,88
<i>Revision</i>	43	42,57

The teachers' answers about the entrance requirements for the current Career Step exams were generally categorized under five themes. These themes are "Length of Teaching", "Seniority", "Fairness", "Eligibility", "Revision" and "Examination".

Teachers' views on the entrance requirements for the current teaching career step examination are as follows:

Teachers' opinions on the theme of "Length of Teaching": "Years cannot judge a teacher's career." (FSC b 36-40E), "10 years is a very long time to stay an expert." (FSa41E), "The length of the seniority year should be kept shorter" (FCa41E), "10 years for being an expert teaching is reasonable, but waiting for another 10 years after being an expert to become a headteacher is too long. It should be shortened" (MPa41E), "The length of service is meaningless to measure the academic level." (MSb25-30T), "A 10-year experience is unnecessary. Teachers should be able to progress not with the years they work but with the training they receive and their self-development." (FSb31-35T), "I do not find the 10-year term of seniority application correct, but it can be considered according to the educational conditions." (FSb31-35T), "The number of years of seniority may be less. It is also a long time to wait to become a head teacher." (MCb36-40E) Moreover, "10 years is a long time for an exam." (MCa41E).

Teachers' opinions on the theme of "Seniority": "10 years of seniority can be in terms of setting a criterion. In-service training is necessary for teachers to improve themselves and update their knowledge. But these may not be a condition for the exam, but may be necessary for a career step." (MVPa41E) remarked, "It should have been seniority-based." (MSa41T), "An additional 10 years of service may be sufficient. To become a headteacher, it should be enough to work for 20 years." (MSa41E), "5 years is enough for the expertise and 10 years is enough for the head teacher." (MPa41E), "Teachers over 10 years should be experts without examination and teachers over 15 years should be head teachers." (MSa41E).

Teachers' opinions on the theme of "Fairness": *"A teacher who has become an expert has to wait for 10 years to become a head teacher but meanwhile s/he could get her/his retirement."* (FSCb36-40E), *"The conditions are tough"* (MVPa41E), *"Everyone should have equal conditions."* (FSb36-40E), *"I don't find the 10-year requirement fair."* (FSCb36-40E), *It is a serious injustice for teachers with less than 10 years of experience. It is also a serious problem that some are exempted from exams just because they did a master's degree by paying money."* (FSb25-30T), *"It's unfair."* (FSb36-40E), *"The biggest deficiency is that paid teaching and unpaid leave are not included in this process."* (MCb36-40E), *"It is not fair"* (MCa41H).

Teachers' opinions on the theme of "Exam": *"Exams are unnecessary."* (MVPa41E), *"Everyone must take the test, no exceptions."* (MSa41H), *"It would be better if there is no exam or no year requirement."* (MPa41H), *"Requirements for taking the exam are sufficient."* (FPSb31-35T): *"There must be certain conditions without an exam."* (FSb25-30T): *"These conditions should be for career steps, not for examination."* In other words, *those who meet these conditions should be experts without an exam."* (FCa41E), *"I find the time reasonable. But I don't find the exam reasonable."* (FSCb31-35T).

Teachers' opinions on the theme of "Revision": *"There should be in-service training followed by an exam."* (MVPa41E), *"Seniority must be a maximum of 5 years"* (MSa41H), *"The exam should be held every year"*, (MSa41E), *"It should be improved."* (FSa41E), *"There must be criteria, but existing criteria should be revised."* (MCa41H), *"The seniority year should be kept shorter, but in-service training is a must"* (FCa41E), *"If there is to be such a system. The length of time can be reasonable."* (MPa41H) remarked, *"The biggest problem is seniority. Other than that, the conditions meaningful in terms of the teacher's self-development and training."* (FSa41E), *"The criteria are considered inappropriately."* (MPSb36-40E), *"All conditions are incomplete or incorrect. It must be re-planned."* (MVPa41E), *"It should not be a condition, it should depend on situations such as a master's degree etc."* (MCb36-40E), *"There must be certain conditions without an exam."* (FCb25-30T), *"Teaching is learnt in the field, seniority is reasonable, but it could be based on the quality rather than the number of training received."* (FCa41E): *"These conditions should be for career steps, not for examination."* In other words, *those who meet these criteria should be experts without an exam."* (FCa41E), *"There are conditions that have been considered."* I would like these conditions more if they recognized other privileges even if they did not provide financial benefits (degree, rank, service points ...) (MSb25-30T), *"Of course, years of service is important, but incentives should also be given to teachers who are committed to development and change."* (FCb31-35E), *The exam should be linked to objective criteria, for example, teachers who have completed every 10 years should become experts."* (FPSb31-35T).

When the opinions of the teachers about the entrance conditions for the Teacher Career Steps Examination are taken into consideration, it can be seen that teachers generally find the length of the examination entrance period long. In addition, the teachers emphasized that the seniority requirement would be more reasonable than the examination requirement and that the entrance requirements for the examination should be improved.

When the participants were asked the question 'What do you think about the question distribution and content of the Career Step Exams?', the answers given by the teachers are given in Table 5.

Table 5.

Teachers' Opinions on the Question Distribution and Subject Content of the Career Step Exams

Theme/ Sub-theme	Reference Codes	
	f	%
Theme/ Sub-theme	88	100
Relevant	30	34,09
Simplicity	22	24,99
Humiliation	6	6,81
Improvement	12	13,63
Appropriateness	20	22,72

The teachers' answers regarding the question distribution and content of the teaching career step examination were generally categorized under five themes. These themes are "Relevant", "Simplicity", "Humiliation", "Improvement" and "Appropriateness".

Some teachers' views on the question distribution and content of the teaching career step examinations are as follows:

Teachers' opinions on the theme of "Relevant": "The questions were not related to the teaching profession." (MVPa41E), "There were subjects that were not very related to the teaching profession" (FSCb36-40E), "Not relevant to my field" (MSa41T), "The topics are not relevant." (MSa41E), "The questions were irrelevant for teaching." (MPSb36-40E), "Out of field questions are unnecessary" (FSa41E), "The questions are not designed to determine a teacher's career." (MSa41H), "It had very little to do with education." (FSb35-30T): "The content was not right." There were too many details. Even the lecturers read from the slide... "(MSa41H), "I don't know because I didn't take the exam, but I concluded that it was irrelevant according to the comments of the friends who took it." (FSa41E). There are many irrelevant questions." (MCA41H), "Some topics have nothing to do with the teaching profession." (MSa41E), "There are content and topics that will not contribute to my field." (MCb36-40E).

Teachers' opinions on the theme of "Simplicity": "The questions were very, very simple" (FSCb36-40E), "It's very simple" (MVPa41E), "The questions were quite simple." (MSa41E): "The exam was easy. We were unnecessarily stressed." (MSa41E), "Easy." (MSa41E), "Very Simple" (FSa41T), "They were very simple and unnecessary questions." (F S. b25-30T), "Prepared without level." (FCa41E), "The exam is too simple" (MCb36-40, E), "It was very simple. You can't specialize in these questions." (MSb36-40E): "Its measurement and discrimination are zero. In other words, a level should be given according to the score. Passing or failing is a very simple matter." (MSb25-30T), "The questions do not serve the purpose of the exam and it is unfair to the teachers who spend their time and energy working for weeks for this." (FSb25-30T), "The questions were rather easy" (MCA41H), "The first exam was very good, the last one was not selective and not developmental." (MCA41H).

Teachers' opinions on the theme of "Humiliation": "Very offensive" (MVPa41E), "Asking these questions to teachers for a career step reduces the value and importance of the profession." (MVPa41E), "It was like a mockery." (FSb25-30T), "It's unbelievably ridiculous" (FSb.36-40E), "However, the Ministry of National Education is implementing the exam to increase the salaries of all teachers." (FCa41H), "Questions to determine whether you have dementia or not." (FCa41T), "It is inconsistent and devalues the teaching profession." (FSb31-40T).

Teachers' opinions on the theme of "Improvement": "Question distribution should be from general culture and field." (MSa41E), "Activities should also be added" (MSa41H), "Fifty per cent should be subject area and fifty per cent should be educational discipline." (MSa41E), "The questions other than the subject area are unnecessary." (FSa41E), "Some subjects need to be changed." (MCa41H), "It is necessary to prepare questions according to the subject area" (MSa41E), "The subjects should be more practical. There should be information to be applied in the classroom. Theoretical details are of no use." (MSa41H), "There may be an exam according to the subject area." (MPSa41E), "If there is to be an exam, there should be the following: Turkish, education, subject, and general culture." (The teacher should follow newspapers, magazines and read books every day)." (MSb36-40T): "There should be no subject area questions" (MPa41H).

Teachers' opinions on the theme of "Appropriateness": "It's not bad." (MVPa41E) and "It's okay." (MSa41E), "Unfavorable" (MSa41E), "Good" (MSa41E) "The content is very detailed. Theoretically, the content is good, but I wonder if an educator can apply it in terms of practice. (FSCb36-40E), "Quite adequate" (MSa41E), "The content was not very appropriate." (MPa41E), "An instructive exam" (MSa41E), The questions are clear and understandable. It is suitable in terms of content, as it addresses a wide audience." (FPSb31-36T) stated, "Teaching is not only a profession of knowledge but also a skill. It is impossible to determine the career steps of teachers with an exam that does not even measure this knowledge." (MVPa41E) Moreover, "There was no problem in the content and distribution." (FCa41E): "Although some of my colleagues do not like it, it is useful for me in some subjects. While studying for the exam, I had an idea about many subjects that I did not know. In short, this exam has added a lot to me. I went back to my student days again." (FSa41E), "The questions and content are insufficient." (MPa41E), "Question distribution and content appear to be a formality." (FSCb31-35T), "It's a made-up test." (MS36-40E): "The exam was unnecessary, but the question distribution was good." (MPa41E), "It's a generalized one." (MSb25-30T).

When the opinions of the teachers about the distribution and content of the career steps exam are reviewed, it is seen that the teachers considered the exam to be too simple. It is also stated that the content of the current examination does not include questions suitable for the teaching profession. In addition, it is expressed that the exam should be improved, and an application should be chosen for practice rather than theory.

When the participants were asked the question 'How do you evaluate the exemption from the Career Step Exams as a result of Master's Degree education?', the answers given by the teachers are given in Table 6.

Table 6.*Teachers' Opinions on Exemption from the Career Steps Exam through Master's Degree Education.*

	Reference Codes	
	<i>f</i>	%
<i>Theme/ Sub-theme</i>	92	100
<i>Motivating</i>	8	8,69
<i>Relevance</i>	12	13,04
<i>Fairness</i>	19	20,65
<i>Supportive</i>	53	57,60

The teachers' opinions on being exempted from the career steps exams through master's degree education were generally categorized under four themes. These themes are "Motivating", "Relevance", "Fairness" and "Supportive."

Some teachers' views on exempting themselves from the career step examination through master's degree education are as follows:

Teachers' opinions on the theme of "Motivating": "It is considered as a reward." (FSCb35-40E): "I see it as positive in terms of encouraging teachers to postgraduate education. However, I believe that it will turn into a profit gate for universities and will lower the importance of postgraduate education." (MVPa41E), "It is positive in terms of encouraging postgraduate studies." (MCa41H), "It is positive in terms of encouragement." (MVPa41T), "It encourages teachers to do a master's degree, which is a step toward improving the quality of education." (FSa41E), "Although it is positive in terms of encouraging teachers to pursue a Master's degree, I do not think it is a valid scale." (FSb25-30T), "Although it is an encouraging decision for me in today's world where a bachelor's degree is equivalent to a high school diploma, I cannot ignore that it creates a new income gate for private and public universities." (MSb25-30T): "It enables teachers to improve themselves instead of taking exams. At least it has opened a door for those who want to improve themselves academically." (FSb31-35T).

Teachers' opinions on the theme of "Relevance": "Master's degree has no connection with teaching" (MSa41T), "The two are different." (FSa41E), "It should be for the teaching profession" (MSa41E), "I do not find it right because of the postgraduate education in unrelated fields." (MCa41H), "If the master's degree is done properly, why not?" (FCa41T), "Master's degree must be with thesis and must be in the field of education" (MPa41E), "The master's degree has nothing to do with it." (MSa41.30-40. E), "I find it right that teachers who have a master's degree in their field should be exempted from the exam" (FPS.31-35T), "Each subject teacher should be exempted if they have a master's degree in their field.", (MC36-40E).

Teachers' opinions on the theme of "Fairness": "Negative, most people did a master's degree in three months" (MVPa41E) "The two are different, most people paid the money and did a master's degree." (MSa41E), "Non-thesis master's degrees must take the exam" (MSa41E) "It led to a paid master's degree. It needs to be taken more seriously." (MSa41E), "Unfair" (MSa41E), "It's a great injustice." (FSb25-30T): "It is unfair. They already take the advantages and privileges of this in the additional course fee." (FSb36-40E), "Not right. Not at all. It should be for the teaching

profession." (MSa41H), "It's not fair" (FSb25-30T), "It is unfavourable, it is unfair for those who do not have the opportunity." (FCa41H), "If we had known about it before, we would have done it. Being an expert didn't change anything." (FSCa41E), "This is also not a very fair practice" (FSb25-30T), "Master's degrees without a thesis were also accepted. They paid the money and became experts in a way." (FSb31-35E), "There should be no exemption in career steps." (MCA41H), "The degree holders have worked for themselves. Those who work for their students should be given priority. I find it wrong" (MPa41H), "Unlawful" (MCA41T).

Teachers' opinions on the theme of "Supportive": "Appropriate" (MVPa41E): "A master's degree in a field related to education may be considered." (FSCb35-40E), "An appropriate application" (MSa41E) "it is suitable." (FSa41T), "It's good" (MSa41T), "It's normal" (MVPa41H), "The career steps exam is not right, but a master's degree should be an option for teachers who want to make a career." (MSCb36-40E), "They should be exempted" (MSa41E), "Master's degree with thesis should be exempt. Non-thesis master's degrees should take the exam." (MSa41E), "That's right" (MPSb36-40E), "This opportunity should be offered to every teacher with or without an exam. It is a serious education with its own rules and should be compulsory and free of charge for every teacher who has completed a certain number of years." (MVPa41E), "It is usual." (FSb31-35E), "A teacher who has completed his/her master's degree should of course be exempted." (FCa41H), "It can be. There is also a serious effort in the master's degree." (MSa41E): "It makes sense, it is fair for those who have a master's degree." (FSa41E), "It makes sense if it is related to their field and subject." (MSCa41E), "It is appropriate." (FSa41E), "It was the right decision" (FPSb25-30T), "If there is necessarily a career step, it is a positive condition for those who have a master's degree to be exempted." (FCa41E).

Considering the opinions of teachers regarding the exemption of Master's Degree holders from the Teaching Career Examination, it is seen that the majority of teachers support this practice. On the other hand, it is emphasized that only those who have a master's degree and thesis in the field of education or their field should be exempted from the examination. However, some teachers have expressed that this has caused an injustice.

When the participants were asked the question 'How do you evaluate the Career Step exams in terms of the prestige and reputation of the teaching profession?', the answers given by the teachers are given in Table 7.

Table 7.
Teachers' Views on Career Steps Exam in Terms of the Prestige and Reputation of the Teaching Profession

Theme/ Sub-theme	Reference Codes	
	f	%
Theme/ Sub-theme	86	100
Discriminative	12	13,95
Supportive	20	23,25
Ineffective	24	27,90
Disrespectful	30	34,88

The teachers' opinions on their career step exams in terms of the prestige and reputation of the teaching profession were generally categorized under four themes. These themes are "Discriminative", "Supportive", "Ineffective" and "Disrespectful."

Some teachers' views on the career step exams in terms of the prestige and reputation of the teaching profession are as follows:

Teachers' opinions on the theme of "Discriminative": *"In the view of parents and students, expert teacher and head teacher discrimination have emerged."* (FSCb35-40E), *"Teachers may undertake a career step after a certain number of years in the profession (eg. 5 years, 8 years, and 10 years). However, discriminating this with an examination will not contribute to the prestige of the teaching profession as a "Good Teacher", or "Successful Teacher."* (MVPa41E), *"It is discrimination."* (FSb36-40T), *"Divide, part, discriminate."* (MSa41T), *"A practice that discriminates against teachers"* (MPSb36-40E), *"Parents discriminate between teachers. Such as this one is an expert, and that one is the head teacher."* (FSb31-40T)

Teachers' opinions on the theme of "Supportive": *"It has a positive effect."* (MVPa41E), *"Positive"*, (MVPa41E), *"Sufficient"* (MSa41H), *"Positive."* (MVPa41H), *"It is favourable"* (MSa41E), *"I feel very good as an expert."* (FSa41E), *"It certainly gives teachers prestige."* (FSa41E), *"It's very good"* (FCa41E), *"If it separates successful teachers, that's good."* (MCb35-40E), *"It is appropriate"* (MPa41E), *"It contributes positively to the prestige of the teacher."* (FSCb31-35T), *"It will be beneficial."* (MSa41E), *"A teacher is a teacher. S/He should always be respected and honoured."* (MCA41H).

Teachers' opinions on the topic of "Ineffective": *"Since it was reflected the society as a salary difference, it had no effect."* (MVPa41E) remarked, *"It has nothing to do with dignity."* (MSa41E), *"It has no effect."* (MSa41E): *"There was no change."* (MSa41E), *"It has much of an effect."* (FSa41E), *"The first factor that determines prestige in society is material status, not career steps."* (MCA41H), *"It's no contribution."* (MSa41H), *"The prestige of the teaching profession does not come from the career steps, but from the teacher's self-education and respect for his/her profession."* (FCa41H), *"It does not affect reputation and dignity."* (MSa41. E), *"it does not contribute much."* (MSCa41E), *"The teaching profession is currently a profession with very little respect in society, so any career exam will help to gain or lose prestige to the profession."* (FSCb35-40E), *"It is disrespectful."* (MVPb31-35T).

Teachers' opinions on the theme of "Disrespectful": *"This exam has lowered the prestige of teaching."* (FSCb35-40), *"An offensive practice in public"* (MSa41E), *"The dignity of the profession has already been abolished and this has been added on top of that."* (FSa41E), *"Since the first day of my professional life, I have tried to live the word "teacher" to the fullest. The exam made me anxious."* (MVPa41E), *"It's discrediting."* (MSa41T), *"It has further destroyed the already dwindling prestige of teaching."* (FSb25-30T), *"It completely damages the reputation of the teacher."* (MSa41E) remarked, *"I felt like an idiot when I took the exam. The fact that they supposedly tested me with such simple questions ended the dignity of the profession."* (FSb36-40E): *"Our reputation was ruined*

in the last examination." Either it shouldn't have been done, or it should have been more serious." (MVPa41H), stating, *"The question distribution and content of the exam was quite inadequate and discrediting."* (FSa41E), *"It will negatively affect the prestige and reputation of the teaching profession."* (FPSb31-35T), *"Humiliating, offensive."* (MCA41H), *"The fact that the career steps are examined has damaged the reputation."* (MSb36-40E): *"Teachers are already devalued. In this way, they are further lowering our dignity."* (MSb36-40E), *"We become a subject of gossip."* (MSb25-30T).

When the participants were asked the question 'How do you evaluate the current Career Step exams in terms of teaching ethical principles (Professionalism, Equality, Solidarity, Justice, etc.)? The answers given by the teachers are given in Table 8.

Table 8.

Teachers' Evaluations of the Current Career Step Exam in Terms of Ethical Principles of Teaching

Theme/ Sub-theme	Reference Codes	
	<i>f</i>	%
	74	100
<i>Solidarity</i>	7	9,45
<i>Professionalism</i>	12	16,21
<i>Equality</i>	20	27,02
<i>Justice</i>	35	47,29

The teachers' answers to the evaluation of the current career step exams in terms of ethical principles of teaching were generally categorized under four themes. These themes are *"Solidarity"*, *"Professionalism"*, *"Equity"* and *"Justice"*.

Some teachers' views on the evaluation of the current career step exams in terms of ethical principles of teaching are as follows:

Teachers' opinions on the theme of *"Solidarity"*: *"Dissociative"* (MVPa41E): *"It can be difficult at school."* (MSa41E), *"Discriminator"* (MPSb36-40E). *It causes hierarchy and grouping among teachers and damages professional solidarity"* (FPSb31-35T), *"It increases discrimination."* (MSb31-35T).

Teachers' opinions on the theme of *"Professionalism"*: *"It's professional and equal and fair."* (FSa41E), *"I find it unprofessional and unfair."* (FSCb31-35E), *"Professionalism"* (MSa41E), *"In a professional manner"* (MSa41E), *"Professionalization"* (FCa41H), *"It can be considered positive for professionalism."* (FCa41H), *"Professionalism and fairness must be ensured."* (MPa41E), who stated, *"The current way of awarding titles is unprofessional."* (FSCb31-35T): *"It may be professional, but it has shortcomings and many items that need to be completed."* (FSb31-35T), *"If we see it as a professional stepping stone, how right is it to provide such financial gains in an economic system?"* In other words, even if only the titles in question were taken, how many teachers would receive that training?" (MSb25-30T) said, *"It has ceased to be a process of justice, solidarity, learning organization, or professional development. On the contrary, it is purely purposive; it does not benefit the teacher or the student."* (FSb31-35T), *"It should be more professional."* (MCA41H).

Teachers' opinions on the theme of "Equity": "As a teacher working in 3/6, I am in favour of hiring new teachers who are dealing with the absurdity of candidacy, who are subjected to all kinds of mobbing, who are ignored, and feel valued." If we all work in the same state, I would like the same hand to pat our heads. It does not provide equality and justice." (MSb25-30T), "The current Teaching Career Step is perceived only as a difference in salary. They are perceived as underpaid teachers and overpaid teachers." (MVPa41E) "There was no equality, unfortunately." (FSb36-40E): "There is never equal work; there are equal working hours. Every teacher's work is different." (MCa41H) said, "It is against equality and justice." (FSb25-30T), "Equality can be achieved if everyone can take the exam every year." (MSa41E), "It is not by ethical principles" (FPSb31-35T), "It is against the principle of equality." (MCa41H), "The labour given in the classroom is the same or even more; but the difference in wages may create a lack of motivation in our young teachers." (FCa41E).

Teachers' opinions on the theme of "Justice": "The restriction of teacher career to salary has led to injustice among teachers." (MVPa41E), "Unjust, shameful, humiliating and degrading." (MSa41T), "It's unfair" (FSa41E), "It is unfair" (MSCb36-40E), "There must be teachers who get sick on the day of the exam and cannot take the exam. It is an exam that cannot be completed. It is an examination held in a limited time interval." (MVPa41E) remarked, "Equality, justice is very debatable. The material conditions in Istanbul and the security conditions of a teacher in Hakkâri are not the same. The fact that vocational teachers and classroom teachers are subjected to the same exam is also debatable." (MCa41T), "How does one explain the fact that one could have been an expert ten years ago, but cannot become a headteacher until ten years later?" (FCa41E), "I do not find it fair and equal to do the same job and receive different titles and salaries." (FCa41E), "Although there is the perception of the same salary for the same job, it is necessary to take into account the experience of those who have reached a certain seniority and give them their right." (MCb36-40E), "It must be right for the career but also should be fair" (FCa41H).

When views on the evaluation of the current career step exams in terms of teaching ethical principles are reviewed, it is seen that teachers did not find an exam related to professionalism. They also stated that it is inadequate in terms of equality and justice. In addition, it creates discrimination among teachers.

When the participants were asked the question "Can you explain the contributions of the Career Steps Exam to the teaching profession?" the answers given by the teachers are given in Table 9.

Table 9.

Teachers' Opinions on the Contributions of the Career Steps Exam to the Teaching Profession

Theme/ Sub-theme	Reference Codes	
	<i>f</i>	%
Theme/ Sub-theme	86	100
Financial benefits	17	19,76
Development	17	19,76
Ineffective	52	60,46

The answers given by teachers' opinions on the contributions of the teaching career step examination to the teaching profession were generally categorized under three themes. These themes are *"Financial"*, *"Development"* and *"Ineffective."*

Some teachers' views on the contributions of the examination of teaching career step examination to the teaching profession are as follows:

Teachers' opinions on the theme of *"Financial"*: *"Salary increase"* (MSa41E), *"Only economic"* (FSb35-40T). *"It has no contribution other than the salary. Because my general observation is that many teachers took the exam for an extra payment."* (FSCb36-40H), *"It has made some economic contribution."* (MPa41E), *"It does not contribute to the teaching apart from financial income."* (MSa41H), *"It is just a little salary increase"* (MSa41T), *"It contributed financially."* (MSa41E), *"Economically, it contributes well."* (MSa41E): *"It does not contribute much, except for the salary difference"* (MVPa41H).

Teachers' opinions on the theme of *"Development"*: *"It's an opportunity for self-updating."*, (MVPa41E), *"Teachers revise and update their knowledge through the exam."* (MSa41H), *"The information is being updated."* (MVPa41H), *"It has contributed to some extent in terms of professional development."* (MPa41E), *"We can understand that the subjects given before the exam have been read and learned by the exam results. The topics should consist of subjects that will take the teacher to the next level."* (MSa41H), *"Every interaction has a contribution. In a short period of one year, I have repeated the gains we made while starting the profession, especially with the master's degree and training CDs. It was the information that we were already familiar with and provided our living. We have sealed our competence with the exam."* (MVPa41E), *"Teachers should be aware of the fact that they have to constantly renew themselves on the subjects such as laws, regulations, legislation, etc. during the preparation phase and that they should embrace the profession wholeheartedly."* (FCa41H), *"Self-development in education and training."* (MSa41E).

Teachers' opinions on the theme of *"Ineffective"*: *"It does not contribute. You cannot have a career by memorizing books and questions."* (FSCb35-40E), *"The career step exams have not contributed to the teaching profession."* (MVPa41E), *"I did not contribute much."* (MSa41E), *"It contributes nothing"* (MSa41E), *"I didn't see any effect."* (MSa41E), *"No contribution so far"* (MSa41E), *"No contribution to the teaching profession"* (MPSa41E), *"Nothing has changed except the title."* (FSb35-40E), *"It does not contribute much."* (MVPa41H), *"It has not contributed at all and it has caused a lot of negative damage."* (MVPa41T), *"It did not contribute anything, it did not have a pushing effect, and it offended teachers to enter for financial gain."* (FCa41T), *"It does not have any contribution. Of course, there should be self-development seminars and training, but the main purpose should not be a career step."* (MCPa41E).

Based on the opinions of the teachers, they stated that the career-step exam does not bring any benefit to the teaching profession. On the other hand, they argue that there is not much

positive aspect except that it only contributes to salary. However, some teachers stated that this situation provides them with the opportunity to improve themselves.

When the teachers were asked 'How do you evaluate the benefits of the Career Steps Exam for teachers (Salary, Promotion, Seniority, Reputation, etc.), the answers given by the teachers are given in Table 10.

Table 10.

Teachers' Evaluation of Benefits of the Career Steps Exams for Teachers

	Reference Codes	
	<i>f</i>	%
<i>Theme/ Sub-theme</i>	84	100
<i>Financial</i>	60	71,42
<i>Seniority</i>	15	17,85
<i>Reputation</i>	9	10,71

Teachers' evaluations of the benefits of the Career Step Exams were generally categorized under three themes. These themes are "*Financial*", "*Seniority*" and "*Reputation*."

Some teachers' views on the contributions of the examination of teaching career step examination to the teaching profession are as follows:

Teachers' opinions on the theme of "*Financial*": "It has brought benefits in terms of salary and seniority, but in this case, it has caused negative situations for our colleagues. For example, while one of our colleagues receives 10,000 lira, another colleague receives 25,000 lira, what is ethical about this?" (FSCb35-40E), "The teacher career steps exam has resulted in a significant difference in terms of salary. But I do not believe that this is fair." (MVPa41E) remarked, "Salary increase is good, but there should be an increase for everyone." (FSb36-40T) said, "It's a small amount of money, but it took more than that." (MSa41T): "The benefit is only material and there is no moral benefit." (FSa41E), "I do not think that there is a benefit other than a small amount of payment reflected in the salary." (FSCb36-40E), "In this way, they have already given the raise that should have been given." (FSb36-40E), "A payment that is reflected in your salary as long as you work." (MCA41H), "There has been only a salary increase, but in other areas, it has created negative effects for the teaching profession." (MVPa41T), "In these economic conditions, it is good to have an extra contribution to salaries." (FCa41E), "Salary return is good. But isn't it a disappointment for colleagues who can't take it? Do the same job but get paid differently!" (SCa41E).

Teachers' opinions on the theme of "*Seniority*": "Seniority promotion is meaningless for those in degree 1, and unfair for doctorates and masters." (MVPa41E), "It has been beneficial in terms of seniority" (FSCb35-40E), and "I consider "one degree" as promotion seniority to be unfair compared to teachers with a master's degree. It would be fair to have "one step". I also consider it unfair that it does not have any effect on a 20-year teacher with a degree of "1/4." (MVPa41E), who stated, "There is no contribution other than seniority and salary." (FSa41E), "The salary could be a little higher,

but the seniority is good.” (FSa41E), “It is unfair to a teacher with less than 10 years of seniority. I don’t think it is fair that both teachers perform the same job, and even the less experienced teacher works more, but they have the right to be experts due to seniority.” (FSb36-40T).

Teachers’ opinions on the theme of “Reputation”: *I don’t think it has much effect in terms of reputation” (MPa41E), “It’s a good feeling to have the teacher taken care of. The happiness of winning is also very honourable.” (MPa41E), “Reputation” (MSa41E), “It’s discriminatory.” Reputation should not be performed in this manner. It should be holistic and inclusive.” (MCa41H), “Its benefits in terms of salary, seniority and transition to a green passport are enormous.” (FSC31-35E), “I find it interesting at the moment. I congratulate my experts and head teachers. I am sincerely happy for them. I hope one day it will be ours too.” (MSb25-30T).*

Evaluating the benefits of the Career Steps Exam, teachers generally noted that it leads to an increase in salary and a higher degree of seniority. On the other hand, some teachers expressed that the benefit of this examination is a change of title.

What are your thoughts about teachers’ postgraduate education in any field other than Educational Sciences or their subject to be exempted from the Career Steps Exams?” the answers given by the teachers are given in Table 11.

Table 11.

Teachers’ Opinions on Having a Postgraduate Education in any Field Other than Educational Sciences and Their Exemption from the Career Steps Exams

	Reference Codes	
	<i>f</i>	%
<i>Theme/ Sub-theme</i>	78	100
<i>Supportive</i>	32	41,02
<i>Opposed</i>	46	58,97

Teachers’ opinions about having a postgraduate education in any field other than Educational Sciences/their field to be exempted from the Career Steps Exams are categorized under two themes. These themes are “Supportive” and “Opposed.”

Teachers’ opinions on the theme of “Supportive”: *“Teachers should have postgraduate education.” (MSa41E), “I agree.” (MPa41E), “I find it good.” (FSb31-35E), “After all, it’s a serious labour. It is appropriate” (MSa41E), “It doesn’t necessarily have to be our field.” (FSa41E), “It makes sense.” (MSCa41E), “I consider it as the best of the bad in such a problematic application.” (MVPa41T), “Of course, I am in favour of exempting those who have a master’s degree in their field or educational sciences from the career steps. After all, this will contribute to the self-improvement of the teacher.” (FSa41E), “Why not, diversity is richness.” (FCa41T), “If s/he became a teacher and made it, that’s fine.” (FSb36-40E): “I find it useful in terms of encouraging teachers to improve themselves.” (FSCb31-35T), “Continued academic progress supports the teacher to be a dynamic individual who is open to learning.” (FSb25-30T).*

Teachers' opinions on the theme of "Opposed": "Teachers must have postgraduate education only in "Educational Sciences and their fields" to be exempted from the Career Step Exams." (MVPa41E), "There is no benefit of postgraduate education outside the field of educational sciences and their field. Therefore, it should not be accepted." (MSa41H), "I do not find it right, it is important what a master's degree aims to serve." (FSCb36-40E), "I am against any subject other than a subject related to the teaching profession. (MPSb36-40E), "What's the relevance?' I mean, this shows how education hangs by the eyelids." (Fb35-40E), "It is an application that has no benefit other than increasing the number of paid and non-thesis master's degrees among teachers; everyone does it just to be done. I do not think there is any academic or professional contribution." (FSb25-30T), "Even the question of accepting a master's degree from a field other than one's own is funny. Does out-of-field support for expertise in your field make sense?" (FSb31-35E), "Expertise means having more knowledge about your field, so I do not find it right to be exempted from postgraduate education in a different field." (FPSb31-35T).

When the opinions of the teachers are analyzed, it is seen that they are against exempting teachers who have a master's degree out of the field or out of educational sciences from the exam. In contrast, they support this practice because a master's degree is designed to enhance the skills of those entering teaching.

When the participants were asked the question "What are the positive/negative aspects of the Career Steps Exams?" the answers given by the teachers are given in Table 12.

Table 12.

Teachers' Opinions on the Positive and Negative Aspects of the Career Step Exams

	Reference Codes	
	f	%
Theme/ Sub-theme	104	100
Discrimination	30	28,84
Fairness	25	24,03
Financial	25	24,03
Competition	12	11,53
Improvement	12	11,53

Teachers' opinions on the positive and negative aspects of the Career Step Exam are categorized under five themes. These themes are "Discrimination", "Fairness", "Financial", "Competition", "and "Improvement."

Some teachers' views on the positive and negative aspects of the teaching career step examinations are as follows:

Teachers' opinions on the theme of "Discrimination": "In terms of parents, it created a classification as "teacher ", "good teacher", "very good teacher". (MVPa41E). "Teachers were categorized as "successful teachers" and "unsuccessful teachers". In the eyes of society, the views of teachers who will/will get low exam scores will/will be negative. The exam did not have a positive

side." (MVPa41E), "It caused segregation and tensions between teachers." (FSCb36-40), "It may cause some divisions among teachers." (MPa41E). "The negative aspect is that this may lead to categorization among teachers." (FSCb35-40T): "It has brought discrimination." (MCa41H) "It is discriminatory." (MCb36-40), "It segregates." (FSb25-30T).

Teachers' opinions on the theme of "Fairness": "The salary increase is unfair." (FSb36-40T), "Inequality" (MSb36-40E), "There is no positive side. Injustice" (MSa41E), "Different salaries for the same job is unfair" (MSa41E), "It is against the principle of equal pay for equal work." (MSa41E), "The fact that we are paid different salaries despite doing the same job may cause miscommunication between teachers. However, it is necessary to respect all teachers who have spent years preparing for and taking exams. " (FCa41H), "Different titles and salaries in the school environment are not healthy." (MSCa41E), "The exam held in 2022 hurt issues such as justice, merit, labour peace, and society's view of the teaching profession."

Teachers' opinions on the theme of "Financial": "The salary increase is favourable." (MSa41E), stating, "It was good economically." (MSa41E), "It is favourable in terms of salary." (MSa41E), "Of course, it has contributed financially." (MPa41E): "In my opinion, there was no contribution other than salary, nothing changed in our lives, we are still the same teacher." (FSa41E), "It has a positive effect on salary." (MSa41E).

Teachers' opinions on the theme of "Competition": "It's all divide and conquer." (MSa41T), "It caused negativity among teachers." (FSa41E), "It caused segregation and tensions between teachers." (FSCb36-40E), "It creates tension by grouping teachers." (FCa41T), "The fact that we receive different salaries may cause communication breakdowns between teachers." (FCa41H), "While it contributes to teachers in terms of social status and economy, it harms professional solidarity by causing competition among teachers." (FPSb31-35T).

Teachers' opinions on the theme of "Improvement": "It has a positive effect, not so bad for morale and motivation." (MVPa41E), "Positive in terms of evaluation." (MVPa41E), "It created synergy and refreshed knowledge." (MVPa41E), "It is useful." (MSa41E): "As regards promotion, seniority, money, and expertise, I feel better, but the training before the exam is too long. There was exam stress; it would be better if it was online." (MSa41E), "The positive aspect is that it refreshes the knowledge." (FPSb31-35T).

Considering the opinions of teachers on the positive and negative aspects of the Career Step Exams, teachers expressed that there is a positive increase in salary, but they indicated that this situation causes discrimination and injustice among teachers. On the other hand, some teachers state that this situation enables them to improve themselves.

When the participants were asked the question, "Could you evaluate the examination exams held in 2006 and 2022 regarding the Career Steps Exam?" (Those who took the exams held in 2006 and 2022 or those who saw the exam questions should answer)". The answers given by the teachers are given in Table 13.

Table 13.

Teachers' Evaluations of the Exam Held in 2006 and the Exam Held in 2022 Regarding the Career Steps of Teaching (Those who took the exam in 2006 and 2022 or those who saw the exam questions)

	Reference Codes	
	<i>f</i>	%
Theme/ Sub-theme	34	100
<i>Similarity</i>	2	5,88
<i>Difference</i>	15	44,11
<i>Scale of Difficulty</i>	17	49,99

Teachers' opinions on the 2006 and 2022 exams regarding the career steps of teaching are categorized under three themes. These themes are "Similarity", "Difference" and "Scale of Difficulty."

Some of the teachers' views on the examination exams held in 2006 and 2022 regarding the career steps of teaching are as follows:

Teachers' opinions on the theme of "Similarity": "Both exams were the same. Of course, for those who study." (MSa41H), "We took the first exam by preparing; we succeeded and became expert teachers." We completed our In-Service Training for this exam, studied, and prepared the test books. In this year's exam, all the teachers who prepared and understood what they read were successful." (FCa41H)

Teachers' opinions on the theme of "Difference": "The 2006 exam was more detailed and selective; however, the 2022 exam was professionally hurtful and devaluing in front of the public by classifying teachers according to careers with very simple questions." (MVPa41E), "I took both. The 2006 one was more serious and professional." (MVPa41H). "I could not take the 2006 exam. I know the questions are more difficult than the exam held in 2022. I was curious and looked at the questions. (FSa41E): "The exam in 2006 was very difficult, this year's exam was very simple and could have been more comprehensive." (FCa41H) said, "The 2006 exam was more advanced. There were questions of all kinds." (FCa41H), "The 2006 exam was conducted with an emphasis on educational science." On the other hand, the exam held in 2022 is completely weak in terms of reliability and validity." (FSb31-35T): "The 2006 examination was a more comprehensive examination." The exam for 2022 consisted of easier questions." (MCPa41H), "The exam held in 2006 was the real exam, and the exam held in 2022 was the salary contribution exam which was for show." (MCPa41H), "The subjects were very different. In the 2nd exam, there were questions about more related occupational subjects. (MSa41H).

Teachers' opinions on the theme of "Scale of Difficulty": "The 2006 exam was more difficult than 2022." (MVPa41H) said, "I couldn't take the 2006 exam. The 2022 exam questions were very easy." (MPa41E), "2006 was very difficult, 2022 was very easy, but it can't be the benchmark." (MSa41H), "The 2022 exam is a much easier exam." (MVPa41T), "The exam in 2022 was very easy." (FCa41E), "The 2006 exam was very difficult and this year's exam was very simple." (MCPa41H), "The exam in 2006 was difficult. The current exam was very easy." (FCa41H)

When the opinions of the teachers about the exam held in 2006 and the exam held in 2022 are analyzed, it can be seen that the majority of the teachers found the exam in 2006 more inclusive and difficult, while the exam in 2022 was easier and simpler than expected.

When the participants were asked the question, “Is it possible to pursue teaching career paths through an area other than the standard examination?” Could you elaborate on this matter? the answers given by the teachers are given in Table 14.

Table 14.

Teachers’ Opinions on Alternative Systems Other than the Career Step Exams

	Reference Codes	
	f	%
Theme/ Sub-theme	66	100
In-Service Training	8	12,12
Postgraduate	10	15,15
Performance Evaluation	16	24,24
Length of service	30	45,45

Teachers’ opinions about alternative systems other than exams for the career steps are categorized under four themes. These themes were “*In-Service Training*”, “*Postgraduate*”, “*Performance Evaluation*” and “*Length of service*.”

Some of the teachers’ views on alternative systems other than exams regarding the career step exams are as follows:

Teachers’ opinions on the theme of “*In-Service Training*”: “*There are many alternatives. For example, inclusive and proper in-service training according to seniority.*” (MSa41E): “*It can be a course. In-service courses. It would be more efficient and more permanent.*” (MVPa41H), “*I am in favour of supporting in-service training.*” (FSa41E), “*Seminars can be organized, or training can be given, to contribute to professional development.*” Certificates can be given as a result of these.” (FSb25-30T).

Teachers’ opinions on the theme of “*Postgraduate*”: “*It may be an alternative to do a master’s degree or doctorate etc. in the field.*” (MVPa41E), “*Master’s degree*” (MSa41E), “*I am in favour of supporting postgraduate education and in-service training that support it.*” (FSa41E), “*Postgraduate education is a good alternative or for those who cannot do it; it can be evaluated not according to years (that is, not as those who fill 10 years), but according to the product or attitudes and approaches to the student. However, it is an absurd practice to differentiate them as career steps and that every teacher should set out on this path through certain training, exams and experiences.*” (FSb25-30T), “*Master’s degree holders should be promoted in the career steps.*” (MCb36-40E).

Teachers’ opinions on the theme of “*Performance Evaluation*”: “*...In addition to these, professional studies can be carried out in terms of the use of current technology and educational*

teaching materials that can contribute to the profession and in-school administrator observations can be added." (MVPa41E), *"Performance evaluation can be done by administration-teacher-parent-student."* (FSCb35-40E), *"It can be an interview at most"* (FSb36-40T), *"The head of the institution should be able to make an assessment."* (MVPa41E), *"It would be much better to have a training background only for the teacher."* (FSa41E), *"The opinion of the school principal and head teachers may be consulted."* (MVPa41E), *"It can be the activities of teachers in the classroom and educational activities at school."* (MSa41H).

Teachers' opinions on the theme of "Length of service": *"It can be evaluated as professional years. 10 years Expert Teacher, 20 years Head Teacher."* (MVPa41E), *"It could have been determined as the duration of the profession. For example, 5 years, 8 years, 10 years, 15 years, 20 years, etc."* (MVPa41E), *"Years of seniority should be taken as a basis,"* (MSa41E), *"A teacher who has worked for 10 years should be an expert teacher and a teacher who has worked for 20 years should be a head teacher."* (MSa41E), *"If expert teacher titles are given to those who work in the Southeast for 5 or 10 years or a certain period, there may be a chance to keep the teachers there for a long time."* (MCPa41H), *"There should be no exams. A person who has served 25 years is already a head teacher."* (MVPb31-35T), *"After 5 and 10 years, every teacher has a certain amount of experience. Expertise comes with experience, not with a simple exam."* (FSa41T).

Considering teachers' suggestions for an alternative system other than the career step exams, the majority of the suggestions are based on seniority years. In addition, there are suggestions for in-service training and performance.

DISCUSSION

The teaching profession has been an important phenomenon throughout history because it plays a significant role in the education of individuals and society. Since countries are aware of this importance, they have tried and continue to work on the development of the teaching profession through different strategies and reforms. In Türkiye, different reforms have been implemented for the teaching profession. The teaching career step exam, which is one of these reforms, has an impact on all teachers. Therefore, this research took the opinions of teachers about current practices.

Teachers' views on the division of the teaching profession into "Teacher", "Expert Teacher" and "Head Teacher" were generally negative. Teachers stated that this distinction had effects such as injustice, inequality, and humiliation for teachers. Considering the answers given by the teachers to the issue of organizing an exam for the career step exams, it can be seen that the teachers disapproved of the exam. Teachers have emphasized that the examination is not a suitable tool to measure the knowledge that teachers have acquired over the years. In addition, teachers stated that the examination shook their self-confidence and was low in terms of validity and reliability. Furthermore, research on the subject has demonstrated that teachers' evaluations exhibit similar fundamental characteristics. (Çobanoğlu & İlkin, 2023; Pınar & Akgül, 2023).

Additionally, the study has revealed that educators believe the prerequisites for the current teaching career step examination should be reorganized. In particular, it is argued that the duration of examination should be regulated in a manner that does not disadvantage teachers. Conversely, some teachers argued that the conditions were appropriate. It was found that similar results were achieved in the field (Demir, 2011; Gülmez, 2022; Pinar & Akgül, 2023).

Teachers' opinions on the distribution and content of the questions in the teaching career step examinations generally indicated that the content validity of the questions was low. In addition, the study stated that it did not contain questions related to teaching. Moreover, it was stated that the questions were easier than normal; therefore, they were not sufficient in terms of validity and reliability. Teachers state that questions should be organized in a field-specific manner to cover the teaching profession. These studies yielded comparable outcomes (Bakioğlu & Banoğlu, 2013; Özdemir et al., 2022).

The opinions of teachers regarding the exemption from the teaching career step examination as a result of master's degree education vary. While the majority of teachers find it positive that master's degrees in the field of education or their field grant exemption from the examination, some of them state that it is unfair to give this privilege to those who have a master's degree. On the other hand, it is seen that there are teachers who argue that master's degree holders, regardless of their field, should be exempted from the examination to improve themselves (. It was observed that teachers with master's degrees especially found this practice positive. It has been stated that postgraduate education can be a criterion to achieve this because it is a challenging process. On the other hand, some teachers have emphasized that this practice will have negative consequences. For example, there was concern that there would be an increase in the number of master's programs paid for and conducted in private universities. In particular, the view that those who have a master's degree without a thesis should not be exempted is predominant. Teachers' evaluations of the career step exams in terms of the prestige and reputation of the teaching profession are mostly unfavourable. Teachers believe that examinations humiliate and offend the teaching profession in front of the public. There is also a concern that it will lead to the selection of teachers as "teacher", "expert" and "head teacher" by parents and students. Studies conducted on the subject revealed that teachers' evaluations of the Career Steps Exams (Alabaş et al., 2012; Çelikten, 2008; Gündoğdu & Kızıldaş, 2008; Kaplan & Gülcan, 2020; Yağiz & Bozkurt, 2022)

Teachers stated that the exam did not contribute to anything other than salary; on the contrary, it damaged their reputation. On the other hand, it is seen that there are teachers who emphasize that the teaching profession is already at a low level in terms of reputation; therefore, the current exam has no effect. Although the majority of teachers are against the exam, some teachers stated that this practice is beneficial in terms of reputation. Teachers criticized the current Career Step Exams in terms of ethical principles of teaching and

expressed similar opinions that the current practice was against ethical values. Teachers emphasized that the current practice is discriminatory against teachers and that it is not in line with the principles of equality, justice, and fairness. They stated that doing the same job and receiving different salaries causes teachers to be unfair. It was noted that this situation negatively affects teachers' motivation. Teachers believe that the contribution of the career step exams to the teaching profession is generally an additional payment reflected in salary. It is also seen that there are teachers who argue that this practice causes more harm than its contribution. On the other hand, it was observed that some teachers found the practice useful because it allowed them to update their knowledge (Aksan et al., 2023; Demir, 2011; İnadı & Gılıç, 2020; Kaplan & Gülden, 2023; Pinar & Akgül, 2023; Tarakçı, 2023).

Teachers' evaluations of the benefits of the teaching career step exams were similar to responses given regarding the contributions. Teachers stated that the contribution reflected in salary is especially meaningful. However, there are opinions that degree contributions are very good, especially in terms of enabling them to obtain a green passport. However, it is emphasized that those who are at the last stage of degree progression are unfairly treated. On the other hand, a majority of teachers argue that this practice does not bring any benefits in terms of reputation. Teachers' opinions on the exemption from the Career Step Exams in cases of postgraduate education showed some differences. Most teachers stated that to be exempted from the examination, teachers should only pursue postgraduate education in the field of education or their field. Some teachers have argued that postgraduate education is not related to the Career Step Exams. Therefore, there should not be any exemption (Arslan & Taş, 2023; Çobanoğlu & İlkin, 2023; Genç & Balyer, 2023; İbrahim & Dikbaş, 2023; Özdemir et al., 2022).

The opinions expressed on the positive or negative aspects of the Career Step Exams are generally more focused on the negative side. Teachers were concerned that the current career system would categorize teachers as "successful teachers" and "unsuccessful teachers". Moreover, teachers have concerns that society will view teachers with low exam scores negatively. In addition, one of the most negative aspects is material and moral discrimination among teachers. On the other hand, most teachers stated that their financial contribution was a positive outcome. Moreover, some teachers stated that the current practice has positive aspects in terms of the development and updating of knowledge. In general, teachers gave similar answers about the exams held in 2006 and the exam held in 2022 regarding the career step exams. In the 2006 examination, the teachers who attained the status of experts obtained the status of head teacher in the examination in 2022. Therefore, most opinions on the differences and similarities between the two examinations come from individuals with the title of headteacher. Teachers generally reported that the exam in 2022 was less comprehensive and easier than that in 2006. Teachers have stated that it would be more appropriate for the teaching profession to reorganize the scope of the

current examination and to include field-oriented questions (Bakioğlu & Banoğlu, 2013; Kaplan & Gülcan, 2020; Tosun & Sarpkaya, 2014).

Teachers' suggestions for alternative applications other than examinations for the career step exams were generally centred on years of seniority. Teachers stated that it would be fairer and more credible to consider seniority years other than exams. In addition, professional training, the successful work of the teacher within the school, the training received at the point of self-development, the pursuit of postgraduate studies, and the support given to social responsibility projects, etc., can be evaluated as alternatives (Buyruk, 2014; Göksoy et al., 2014; Şirin et al., 2010).

CONCLUSION

The teaching career step examination in Türkiye has revealed deep-seated concerns among educators regarding its fairness, effectiveness, and impact on the teaching profession. The research shows that many teachers perceive the division into "Teacher," "Expert Teacher," and "Head Teacher" as a source of inequality and humiliation, rather than a genuine reflection of professional expertise. This stratification has led to a sense of injustice within the teaching profession, where educators feel that their years of experience and dedication are not adequately recognized or valued. Many view the examination as an obstacle that undermines confidence and diminishes professional identity, rather than a tool for professional development. Moreover, the validity and relevance of the exam have been questioned, with teachers arguing that it fails to accurately measure the skills and knowledge that are crucial for effective teaching. The content of examinations, as reported by educators, often lacks alignment with the practical realities of the teaching profession and does not sufficiently address subject-specific expertise. This mismatch not only devalues the examination as a measure of competency but also contributes to a broader sense of disillusionment among teachers who feel that their professional growth is being hindered rather than supported by the current system. Additionally, the potential for moral and material discrimination based on examination results further exacerbates the issue, raising concerns about the impact on teachers' reputations and public perception.

Given these significant concerns, the current approach to career advancement within the teaching profession in Türkiye requires a thorough re-evaluation. Teachers propose that alternative methods, such as considering years of seniority, professional achievements, and contributions to the educational community, could provide a more equitable and motivating framework. Shifting the focus from a singular examination to a more holistic assessment of a teacher's career, policymakers can support the professional development of educators while preserving the dignity and integrity of the teaching profession. This reformed approach could foster a more inclusive and supportive environment that recognizes the diverse talents and contributions of all teachers.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

One significant limitation of this study is the potential bias in the responses of the teachers who participated. Given the nature of the career step exams examination, teachers who have had negative experiences or disagreed with the structure and content of the examination may have been more motivated to express their dissatisfaction. This could result in a skewed representation of opinions, in which the voices of those who may have found some merit in the exam are underrepresented. Another limitation is the geographical and demographic scope of the study.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that policymakers consider revising the teaching career step examination to address the concerns raised by educators. One approach would be to develop a more comprehensive evaluation system that incorporates multiple measures of teacher performance, including classroom observations, peer reviews, and contributions to professional development. This would provide a more balanced assessment of a teacher's abilities and reduce reliance on a single examination. Additionally, exam content should be reviewed to ensure it is aligned with the practical and theoretical knowledge required for effective teaching, with a focus on subject-specific expertise.

Furthermore, alternatives to the current examination should be explored, such as considering years of seniority, professional achievements, and ongoing education as part of the criteria for career advancement. Providing opportunities for teachers to engage in continuous professional development, with recognition for their efforts, could also enhance motivation and ensure that teachers are continually updating their skills. Finally, efforts should be made to involve teachers in the reform process, allowing them to provide input and feedback on proposed changes and ensuring that any revisions are grounded in the realities of the teaching profession and are supported by those who will be most affected by them.

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Data Availability Declaration

Data Availability Upon Formal Request:

While the primary datasets utilized in this study are not publicly accessible due to certain constraints, they are available to researchers upon a formal request. The authors have emphasized maintaining the integrity of the data and its analytical rigor. To access the datasets or seek further clarifications, kindly reach out to the corresponding author. Our aim is to foster collaborative academic efforts while upholding the highest standards of research integrity.

Author Contributions

All authors, Semra Kıranlı GÜNGÖR and Güler SHAIKH contributed equally to this work. They collaboratively handled the conceptualization, methodology design, data acquisition, and analysis. Each author played a significant role in drafting and revising the manuscript, ensuring its intellectual depth and coherence. All authors have thoroughly reviewed, provided critical feedback, and approved the final version of the manuscript. They jointly take responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the research.

Author(s)' statements on ethics and conflict of interest

Ethics statement: We hereby declare that research/publication ethics and citing principles have been considered in all the stages of the study. We take full responsibility for the content of the paper in case of dispute.

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