

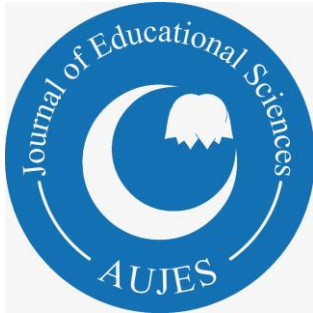
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**Teaching Career Steps in Turkey from  
the Teachers' Perspective**

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## Teaching Career Steps in Turkey from the Teachers' Perspective\*

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine the views of teachers about teaching career steps. The study group of the research which adopts a qualitative case study design consisted of 52 teachers working at various education levels in the 2022-2023 academic year in Türkiye. The research data were collected through a semi-structured interview form and employing interviews, and it was analyzed by content analysis. Depending on the findings, teachers' views on career steps were gathered under the themes of general, exam application conditions, professional studies and education program, and these themes were categorized under positive and negative views. While teachers found career steps positive in terms of continuous learning and professional development in general, they found it negative in terms of separating teachers and disrupting the school climate, exam-related anxiety and stress, and discrediting the postgraduate education. Some of the suggestions developed by the researcher within the scope of the research results are as follows: Continuity in practice should be ensured, the requirement of long working years for the application should be reduced, and the sixteen-year lost service periods of teachers who have not taken the exam since 2006 should be added to the ten-year and twenty-year periods. Provided that the candidacy stage has been completed, master's degree graduates in the field and in educational sciences should be given the title of expert teacher, and doctoral graduate teachers should be regarded as head teacher without a working-year requirement.

**Key words:** Teaching Profession, Teaching Career Steps, Expert Teacher, Head Teacher.

### Introduction

Education has an important mission in the development of a government. Nations with a high level of education can be more successful in achieving advanced development. Teachers are one of the most important actors taking over the duty and responsibilities in achieving educational goals. Despite the rapid developments and innovations in the 21st century, the place and importance of the teaching profession in the education system continues because the teacher is at the center of the educational activities offered to the students. That teachers can give qualified education services depends on their knowledge, skills, and expertise. In a constantly changing and developing world, teachers' keeping their knowledge up-to-date and being aware of developments and innovations and ensuring their professional development depend on the continuity of their professional development. As a matter of fact, all countries in the world are looking for ways and practices to ensure the professional development of teachers, to make the teaching profession as financially and morally attractive as it used to be, and to motivate them. One of these practices is the career system that allows teachers to advance in their careers (Bakan, 2013), and increase the status and reputation of the profession. A satisfactory career offers a person money, status, self-efficacy, and every teacher needs to balance the importance of these in his/her life (Donnelly, 2002). It is a fact that the regulation of the career system in teaching will make significant contributions to the development of teacher quality in the Turkish education system. As well as being a notable source of motivation for teachers who are committed to their profession by eliminating their deficiencies, it will be an important tool that will enable teachers to take responsibility for their own individual development (Gümüseli, 2005).

Career refers to the process of progressing by gaining the necessary competencies from teaching to specialist teaching, from expert teaching to head teacher, continuously rising from the steps in the organizational hierarchy, assuming more responsibility, and developing oneself with the personal and professional experiences, and activities of the individual [Ministry of National Education, Review of Promotion in Teaching Career Steps, 2006]. The pursuit of modernizing the education system, improving the status of teachers, ensuring the

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professional and personal development of teachers, ensuring the necessary reputation for teachers depending on the importance, difficulty, and responsibilities of their duties (Deniz, 2009), increasing the quality of the teaching profession, encouraging teachers to follow new developments related to their profession by directing them to research and examination, increasing the function and efficiency of the teacher in the education system, and preventing occupational burnout (Demir, 2011), providing the right of teachers to move from one level of education or order to another level of education (Vural, 2004), the necessity of having a system of education and promotion that will encourage teachers and administrators to be educated in service (Tekik, 1989) can be expressed as the necessity of implementing career steps.

There is an ongoing search for professional development of teachers and increasing the reputation of the profession in Türkiye too. In order to increase the quality of the teaching profession, which is a specialized profession, studies are carried out by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) in various periods. The issues of making teaching a profession of career has been included in the National Education Councils since the foundation of The Republic. The career steps of teaching were established after making a change in the National Education Basic Law (Law No: 1739, art. 43) having it as, "After the candidacy period, the teaching profession is divided into three career steps as teacher, expert teacher and head teacher." As a matter of fact, the regulation on career steps, which was issued in 2005 and published in the Official Gazette was applied only once after the exam held in 2006 within the scope of the "Regulation on Promotion in Teaching Career Steps". It was applied again as the "Teaching Professional Law" published in the Official Gazette (Date: February 11, 2022, No: 31750) and the "Regulation on Candidate Teacher and Teaching Career Steps" published in the Official Gazette (Date: May 12, 2022, No: 31833) within the scope of the Article 11 of the "Regulation on Candidate Teaching and Teaching Career Steps" (2022), teaching is divided into three career steps after the candidacy period as teacher, expert teacher and head teacher, and those who successfully complete the candidate teaching period within the framework of the provisions of the regulation are assigned to the profession as teachers. According to the Article 12 of the Regulation, the required conditions for those who will apply for the written exam for the titles of expert teacher or head teacher are stated as follows:

#### ARTICLE 12:

1- For teachers who will apply for the written exam for the title of expert teacher, these following requirements are sought:

a) To serve at least ten years in teaching, including candidate teaching, as of the last day of application date for the written exam,

b) To be a teacher currently,

c) Not to have been punished for halting of level progress,

d) To have completed at least 180 hours of Expert Teacher Training Program prepared for the professional development of teachers,

e) To have completed Expert Teacher Professional Development Practices.

2- For teachers who will apply for the written exam for the title of head teacher, these following requirements are sought:

a) To have served at least ten years as an expert teacher as of the last day of application date for the written exam,

b) To be an expert teacher currently,

c) Not to have been punished for halting of level progress,

d) To have completed at least 240 hours of Head Teacher Training Program prepared for the professional development of expert teachers,

e) To have completed Head Teacher Professional Development Practices.

3- The staff currently working as the principal, the chief vice-principal and the vice-principal of the educational institution may apply for the promotion in the teaching career steps if they meet the requirements for application of the written exam.

4- Those who have been punished with halting the level progress may apply for the title of expert teacher or head teacher after the punishments are removed from the personal file.

According to the Article 13 of the Regulation on Teaching Career Steps (2022), teachers who have completed their postgraduate education are exempt from the written exam for the title of expert teacher, and

expert teachers who have completed their doctoral education are exempt from the written exam for the title of head teacher. Teachers who have completed their postgraduate education may apply for the title of expert teacher if they meet the requirements of applying for the written exam in line with the first paragraph of the Article 12, and expert teachers who have completed their doctoral education may apply for the title of head teacher if they meet the conditions required for applying for the written exam according to the second paragraph of the Article 12.

According to the Article 15 of the Regulation on Teaching Career Steps (2022), the training program is determined by the decision of the Board of Education and is carried out within the framework of the MoNE In-Service Training Regulation (2022). Teachers who have at least ten years of service as of the last day of the written exam can apply for the Expert Teacher Training Program, and expert teachers having at least ten years of service as of the last day of the written exam can apply for the Head Teacher Training Program.

Within the scope of the "Directive on Professional Development Practices and Training Program of Teaching Career Steps" (2022), professional development studies, which are one of the requirements sought by teachers/expert teachers who will apply for the titles of expert and head teacher, have been determined as three fields of study as "Education, Teaching and Counseling Studies, Participation in Management and Research and Development Studies" in a way that all branch/field teachers working in official and private education institutions affiliated to our Ministry can perform at least one of the tasks in each field. Those who will apply for the title of expert teacher/head teacher among the teachers/expert teachers working in official and private education institutions affiliated to the MoNE must complete one study from at least two of the study areas in order to complete the professional development studies determined as three study areas (MoNE, 2022).

After the training program that started on July 18<sup>th</sup>, 2022, negative criticism has arisen towards the career system on social media platforms, and this situation has led to a lot of speculation and confusion. Therefore, investigating the subject according to the scientific research method and evaluating it in the context of the opinions of teachers who are personally interested, and offering suggestions to policy makers and decision makers reveal the originality and importance of the research. Although there are studies on career steps in the literature (Altunkaynak, 2023; Aydoğan, Leflef & Özcan, 2024; Bakioğlu & Banoğlu, 2013; Boydak-Ozan & Kaya, 2009; Çelikten, 2008; Çobanoğlu & İlkin, 2023; Dağlı, 2007; Deniz, 2009; Gümüşeli 2005; Demir, 2011; Kaplan & Gülcan, 2020; Kocakaya, 2006; Kurt, 2007; Laçın, 2006; Nartgün & Ural, 2007; Özan & Kaya, 2009; Turan & Turan, 2009; Urfalı, 2008; Yang Keo, 2016; Yücel, 2023) the lack of an up-to-date study on the regulation in 2022 makes the research significant. Within this context, it was aimed to determine the opinions of teachers about teaching career steps in this study. In line with this purpose, following research questions are addressed:

- 1- What are the teachers' views about teaching career steps?
- 2- What are their suggestions for teaching career steps practices?

## Method

The study adopts a case study design as a qualitative research methodology. Qualitative research approach is used to obtain in-depth and comprehensive information about a subject (Patton, 2014). Case study is a methodological approach that involves an in-depth examination of a system using multiple data collection to collect systematic information about how a limited system operates (Chmiliar, 2010). This type of investigation tries to richly describe events occurring in their natural conditions using various data collection tools under time and space constraints and they are based on profound basis (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). In this context, the purpose of the study is to investigate the teachers' views on career steps in depth and to obtain information about their perspectives on this issue.

## Participants

The study group of the research consisted of 52 teachers working at various educational levels during the 2022-2023 academic year in Bolu. The participants were reached through online sources. To determine the study group, maximum variation sampling was used. In order to ensure heterogeneity within the sample group and reveal the teachers' opinions at different career levels, teachers' with different gender, education level and seniority levels were selected, and variation was also established by selecting both teachers who would take and exempt from the exam. Of the teachers, 58% were female (n=30), 42% were male (n=22); 58% were undergraduate (n=30), 29% were postgraduate (n=15), and 13% were doctoral (n=7) graduates. 21% of the teachers have 10 years of seniority or less (n=11), 29% of them have 11 to 20 years of seniority (n=15), 27% have 20 to 30 years of seniority (n=14), and 23% have 20-30 years of seniority (n=12). 58% of the participating teachers are the ones who would take the exam (n=30) and 42% of them are exempt from the exam (n=22).

### **Data Instruments Collection and Procedure**

The research data were collected through a semi-structured interview form using the interview method. Semi-structured form is a flexible and powerful tool that allows the researcher to explore the experiences of participants who are able to ask additional questions during the interview (Rabionet, 2011). The interview method allows researchers to investigate situations that cannot be observed by other methods (Wellington & Szczerbinski, 2007). Before the interview form was prepared, the opinions of two experts - in the field of Educational Administration and Inspection and Assessment and Evaluation, were taken and the questions were prepared in this direction. The experts stated in the interview form that general questions would be more appropriate and that questions could be asked during the interview if necessary. After the interview form was prepared, five teachers were interviewed for the piloting, and it was determined that the teachers' answers to the questions were understandable and coincided with the topic of the study. So, the interview form was finalized and implemented. During the interview, teachers were informed with the necessary explanations about the questions. Interviews lasted an average of 23 minutes and 37 seconds. The questions in the interview form are listed below.

- 1- What are your views on teaching career steps?
- 2- What are your suggestions for teaching career steps?

### **Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed using the inductive analysis method, one of the content analysis types. Content analysis provides the opportunity to gather similar data together and analyze them systematically, gather the data around certain themes, and organize and interpret them in a way that the reader can understand (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2015; Mayring, 2000). The data subjected to content analysis is coded, themes are created from the codes and presented afterwards (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). Accordingly, the data recorded during the interview were analyzed in detail in line with the purpose of the research and codes were created. Following the coding process, categories and themes were identified by analyzing the similarities and differences among codes that exhibited meaningful relationships with one another. The teachers' views were presented in direct quotations to support the findings in the results section.

### **Validity and Reliability**

In the qualitative data analysis process, it is important to have an expert opinion on the codes and themes created by the researcher to check the accuracy of the coding (Kabakçı Yurdakul, 2016). The codes, categories and themes created to ensure the reliability of the research were examined by two expert faculty members in the field of Assessment and Evaluation and Educational Administration, and it was checked whether the codes were congruent with the themes. In order to ensure the internal validity, the researcher asked for an expert opinion in the preparation of the interview questions and the form was finalized after the pilot study. The findings are presented directly without a comment. As for the reliability, Miles and Huberman's (1994) [Consensus / (Consensus + Dissensus) X 100] formula was used and the consistency rate of the analyses yielded %94. It can be said that the conducted analyses are reliable since 80% consistency or over is considered sufficient for the consensus. The design, participants, and their demographic characteristics, the preparation process of the data collection tool and the data analysis procedure were explained in detail in the method section and the external validity was tried to be strengthened. The teachers were informed in detail about the study before the interviews. Also, the transferability of the research was increased by including the opinions of the participating teachers as direct quotations. The participants were coded as T1, T2, T3, T52 etc. and ethical principles were complied with.

### **Ethics Approval**

This research was examined ethically at the meeting of Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal University Ethics Committee for Human Research in Social Sciences dated 04.09.2022 and 2022/09 and approved as ethically appropriate with the protocol number 2022/340. The research data were collected in September and October followingly.

### **Findings**

In this section, teachers' views and suggestions for the career steps are presented. Teachers' views on the career steps were gathered under the themes of general views, application conditions for the exams, professional studies, and training program. The related categories and codes are presented respectively. So, general views of the teachers on teaching career steps are given in Table 1'.

Table 1. General views of the teachers on teaching career steps

Theme	Categories	Codes	f	
General Views	Positive	Providing continuous learning and professional development	12	
		Being specific to teachers	7	
		Identifying successful and unsuccessful teachers	4	
		Enabling experienced teachers to be paid more	2	
	Negative		Having no benefits apart from economic growth	37
			Segregating teachers and disrupting the school atmosphere	29
			Being a memorization and exam-based system	26
			Lack of continuity in the exam execution and causing loss of rights	22
			Discrediting the teaching profession	19
			Not making a change in teachers' personal rights, status, authority and responsibilities	17
			The exam causing anxiety and stress	14
			Decreasing teachers' performance	13
			Performing the exam and training program at the wrong time	11
			Discrediting the graduate education, thus, spreading of short-term and paid programs	10
Having a multi-staged application process	5			
The exam's being insufficient to measure the expertise in the classroom	4			
Every teacher being an expert in his/her field already	2			

As shown in Table 1, the teachers' general views on career steps are grouped under positive and negative categories. It emerged that teachers found the regulation of career steps positive in terms of continuous learning and professional development (f=12), being specific to teachers (f=7), determining successful and unsuccessful teachers (f=4), and ensuring that experienced teachers receive more wages (f=2). On the other hand, teachers found it negative in that it does not lead any benefits apart from an increase in income (f=37), it separates teachers and disrupts the school atmosphere (f=29), it is a system based on memorized knowledge and exams (f=26), the lack of continuity in the exam execution and the loss of rights. (f=22). Their views were also negative about the regulation due to its discrediting the teaching profession (f=19), not changing teachers' personal rights, status, authority and responsibilities (f=17), the exam anxiety and stress (f=14), reducing teachers' performance (f= 13), the application of the exam and the curriculum at the wrong time (f=11), the discrediting of graduate education, the opening of short-term and paid programs (f=10), the multi-stage application processes (f=5), the exam lacking of a quality to measure the expertise in the classroom (f=4). Besides, they stated their negative views on this regulation since they thought every teacher was an expert in his/her field already (f=2).

Some of the positive and negative general views of the teachers about career steps are presented below as direct quotations:

The teachers' statements below can be given as positive examples towards the regulation.

*"This regulation enables teachers to learn continuously. These learnings also contribute to professional development." (T15) "Professional development, continuous learning and renewal are indispensable for a teacher. Therefore, this regulation can be seen as positive in terms of our learning and professional development" (T38).*

On the other hand, such statements below can be examples for teachers' negative views.

*"As a result of this regulation, we will only have a salary increase. Apart from that, there are no benefits" (T36). "Exam gives me anxiety and stress. What if I don't pass? What do my teachers and friends think? Such questions increase my anxiety and stress" (T43). "The fact that the conditions for application are multi-stage makes it difficult to follow. I heard that there are teachers who miss these stages and become victims." (T20).*

Teachers' views about the requirements for exam application to be an expert and head teacher are given in Table 2.

Table 2. The teachers' views about the requirements for exam application to be an expert and head teacher

Theme	Categories	Codes	f	
Requirements for exam application	Positive	Contributing to renewal and development in the profession	8	
		Exemption of master's and doctoral graduates from exams	7	
		Requirements are fine	5	
	Negative		Academic and in-school studies being a criterion	3
			Having a requirement of 10-year service to become an expert teacher and 10-year service as an expert teacher to be a head teacher	2
			Requirement of working years being too long to become an expert and head	

teacher	28
Non-thesis and non-area master's degree holders being exempted from the exam	13
Existence of unnecessary criteria in professional working conditions	11
Obligation to follow a training program	8

As illustrated in Table 2, teachers' views about the conditions for applying to the expert and head teacher exams are divided into two categories as positive and negative. Accordingly, teachers expressed a positive view in terms of contributing to renewal and development in the profession (f=8), graduate and doctoral graduates being exempt from exams (f=7), fine requirements (f=5), academic and in-school studies being criteria (f=3), 10-year service to become an expert teacher and 10-year service as an expert teacher to become a head teacher (f=2). Teachers expressed negative views about the application requirements in terms of the fact that the minimum service year is too long to become an expert and head teacher (f=28), non-thesis and non-area master's degree holders are exempt from the exam (f=13), there are unnecessary criteria in professional working conditions (f=11), and they have an obligation to follow an education program (f=8).

Some of the positive and negative teachers' views about the requirements for applying for expert and head teacher exams are presented below as direct quotations:

Such statements below can be given as examples for positive teacher views:

*"... I also positively evaluate the fact that MA and PhD graduates do not take exams." (T29), "When the application requirements are considered in terms of year, I think it is correct. I find it appropriate for someone who has a master's degree or doctorate to be exempt from the exam..." (T38), "I think there should be an exam. I also positively evaluate the lack of examinations for graduate and doctoral graduates." (T5), "... I mostly find the application requirements positive in terms of contributing to teachers' self-renewal and professional development because a teacher who primarily tries to fulfill the professional duties stated in the application conditions develops and renews himself/herself professionally." (T14).*

Such statements below can be given examples as negative teacher views:

*"...I do not find it correct to exempt non-field and non-thesis MA graduates. I am in the last semester of my master's degree with thesis, and I cannot be exempt because I cannot finish it." (T47), "I do not understand the obligation to follow the training program. If this practice depends on the teacher's request, it should not be mandatory to follow a training program." (T43), "I think the minimum ten-year of service is a long time. In the application conditions, the ten-year requirement can be reduced." (T16).*

Teachers' views on the professional studies included in the expert and head teacher application requirements are given in Table 3.

Table 3. Teachers' views on the professional studies included in the expert and head teacher application requirements

Theme	Categories	Codes	f
Professional studies	Positive	I find professional studies positive	17
		Having a chance for every teacher to meet the application requirement among professional studies	9
	Negative	Some criteria's being unnecessary	14
		Difficulty in documenting and uploading previous works to the system	7
		Creating a complexity of finding documents to prove professional work	5

As Table 3 shows, teachers' views about professional studies as a requirement for applying to the expert and head teacher exams are divided into two categories as positive and negative. It was shown that, in terms of the application criteria, the teachers found the professional studies to be positive with statements such as just finding it positive (f=17), having a chance for every teacher to meet the application requirement among professional studies (f=9), however, they found the application requirements negative stating that some criteria are unnecessary (f=14), it is difficult to document and upload previous studies to the system (f=7), and that it creates complexity of about finding documents to prove professional studies (f=5).

Some of the positive and negative teachers' views on the application requirements are presented below as direct quotations:

These statements below are some positive teacher views:

*"I find professional studies positive Professional studies are necessary for every teacher to fulfill his/her profession and to ensure his/her personal and professional development." (T42), "I find it positive in terms of encouraging teachers to work professionally." (T20).*

The statements below are the teachers' negative views:

".....There was a complete confusion in documenting and uploading our previous works to the system. In addition, there were difficulties in proving some of the studies." (T6), "I did many studies, but some of them remained in my old school. How do I document them? This is very difficult." (T51).

Teachers' views on the training program applied to take the expert and head teacher exam are given in Table 4.

Table 4. Teachers' views on the training program applied to take the expert and head teacher exam

Theme	Categories	Codes	f
Training Program	Positive	Refreshing our knowledge	5
		Presentation of current approaches	2
	Negative	The way the training program is presented is monotonous	3
		The content of the training program is very detailed and academic	2
		Program duration is too long, watching time is short	2
		Unnecessary information	2
		Not contributing to professional development	2
		The training program's not contributing to in-class teaching practices	1
		Failure to support the training program with real-life or educational sample	
		Failure to provide practical suggestions for implementation	1
		Obligation to watch the training program	1
		Providing the same trainings to teachers in all branches and levels	1
		Inclusion of non-area information in the program	1
		Insufficient training program	1
		Being prepared in a hurry	9
		Having us be seated in front of the screen for a long time	7
		Being boring	7
		Having too many theoretical expressions	5
Fitting the training program and exam schedule into a short period of time	4		
Leading to loss of time	2		
Having an abstract and complex training program mod	2		

As demonstrated in Table 4, teachers' views about training program as a prerequisite of applying to the expert and head teacher exams are divided into two categories as positive and negative. While the teachers expressed positive views about the training program in terms of its refreshing the knowledge (f=5) and presenting current approaches (f=2), their views were negative due to the monotonous style of presentation (f=32), detailed and academic content of the training (f=28), long duration of program with a limited time for watching (f=24), unnecessary information (f=21), not contributing to professional development (f=20), not contributing to in-class teaching practices (f=18), the content not being supported by real-life or educational sample practices (f=16), not providing practical suggestions (f=16), the obligation to watch the training (f=14), giving the same trainings to teachers in all branches and levels (f=13), non-area information (f=11), insufficient training program (f=10), being prepared in a hurry (f=9), being seated in front of the screen for a long time (f=7), being boring (f=7), having too many theoretical expressions (f=5), fitting the training and the exam calendar into a short period of time (f=4), leading to loss of time (f=2), having an abstract and complex training program module (f=2).

Some of the positive and negative teachers' views about the training program are presented below as direct quotations:

These statements are positive teachers' views on the related construct:

"The topics in the training program enabled me to remember my knowledge and learn up-to-date information. I find them positive because some subjects provide current education approaches." (T22), "I had the opportunity to refresh myself with the training program. Because it's been many years since I graduated as I am a senior now. Although I attended professional trainings, I could not reach such detailed and comprehensive information." (T18).

On the other hand, following statements are examples of negative views of the teachers on this issue:

"The training program is very detailed and academic, and there is a lot of information unrelated to the field. I found it uniform, boring, and tiring." (T10), "The training program should not be common to all branches. The program is very comprehensive, tightly packed with intense detail." (T32), "There are too many unnecessary details. There is a lot of detail on some issues. I think that these are not necessary in this era when it is so easy to access information." (T2), "I think that the program does not contribute to my professional development since it does not include sample practices that can contribute to the educational activities of teachers in the classroom." (T49).



Teachers' suggestions for regulation of teaching career steps are given in Table 5.

Table 5. Teachers' suggestions for regulation of teaching career steps

Theme	Categories	Codes	f		
Suggestions	General Suggestions	Carrying out a career regulation according to seniority without an exam	41		
		Conducting the exam every year	36		
		Combining horizontal and vertical careers, including promotion	33		
		Contributing to teachers' personal rights, status, level, stage and additional indicators in addition to the salary increase	32		
		Granting to be an expert teacher to the MA graduates and head teacher to the PhD graduates in their field or educational sciences without minimum working-year requirement provided that the candidacy stage has been completed	29		
		Elimination of the loss of rights of the teachers who, in this process, cannot take the exam that has not been done for a long time	25		
		Removing the exemption of postgraduate education that are not field-related or in educational sciences	23		
		Creating a system in which all studies are scored and evaluated by dividing training, exam, professional studies, activities and achievement certificates into certain percentages	17		
		Teachers who meet criteria such as academic studies (books, articles, etc.), projects, and success in sports and artistic fields can become specialists and head teachers without requiring years	11		
		Extending the salary increase brought by the regulation to retirement as well	6		
		Being a scoring-based system by scoring the teachers' studies	3		
		Training Program		Updating the content and presentation of the program	28
				Preparation of programs specific to the different branches	24
				Extension of the implementation period of the program	19
Including the trainings that teachers really need and giving the teachers opportunity to choose among these trainings	16				
Evaluating the program at regular intervals after each time and averaging all evaluation scores	11				
Making the program face-to-face	9				
Giving some sample questions at the end of each topic in the program	4				
Professional Studies		Having a system based on increasing the level of meeting the professional working criteria	6		
		Making the implementation based on professional studies	2		
		Expansion of professional working criteria	1		
Application Requirements		Reducing the duration of service in expert and head teacher application requirements	14		

As shown in Table 5, the suggestions of teachers for the implementation of teaching career steps are collected in the categories of general suggestions, training program, professional studies and application requirements. Teachers' views under the general suggestions category are as follows: carrying out a career regulation according to seniority without an exam (f=41), conducting the exam every year (f=36), combining horizontal and vertical careers, including promotion (f=33), contributing to teachers' personal rights, status, level, degree and additional indicators in addition to salary increase (f=32), granting to be an expert teacher to the MA graduates and head teacher to the PhD graduates in their field or educational sciences without minimum working-year requirement provided that the candidacy stage has been completed (f=29), elimination of the loss of rights of the teachers who, in this process, cannot take the exam that has not been done for a long time (f=25), removing the exemption of postgraduate education that are not field-related or in educational sciences (f=23), creating a system in which all studies are scored and evaluated by dividing training, exam, professional studies, activities and achievement certificates into certain percentages (f=17), teachers who meet criteria such as academic studies (books, articles, etc.), projects, and success in sports and artistic fields can become specialists and head teachers without requiring years (f=11), extending the salary increase brought by the regulation to retirement as well (f=6), being a scoring-based system by scoring the teachers' studies (f=3).

Some of the general views of teachers about career steps are presented below as direct quotations:

"There are colleagues who have master's and doctorate degrees. These people have completed their education by going through difficult processes. Especially teachers who have completed their postgraduate education in the field of education should be ensured to be expert and head teachers without the requirement of a year."

(T40), "The career steps exam has not been held for a long time. During this period, many of colleagues, including myself, waited for the exam to be held. However, since the exam was not held, that period caused the loss of rights. For this reason, these periods should be taken into consideration and the loss of rights should be eliminated." (T23), "The exam should be held every year, when the exam is not held every year, this causes loss of rights." (T1).

Teachers' suggestions for the training program are as follows; updating the content and presentation of the program (f=28), preparation of programs specific to the different branches (f=24), extension of the implementation period of the program (f=19), including the trainings that teachers really need and giving the teachers opportunity to choose among these trainings (f=16), evaluating the program at regular intervals after each time and averaging all evaluation scores (f=11), making the program face-to-face (f=9), giving some sample questions at the end of each topic in the program (f=4).

Some of the teachers' views about the training program for teaching career steps are presented below as direct quotations:

*"The teacher should be able to follow the subjects they need among the subjects in the training program and should not be obliged to follow all subjects." (T49), "If this system is to be continued, a completely different content should be chosen. That content should be guiding so that teachers can renew and improve themselves with the 'necessary' information that will broaden their horizons, feel equipped, and produce quality ideas. In short, the content of the program should be updated." (T19), "It would be better if the training is held face-to-face. because watching video tutorials prevents us from asking questions." (T22).*

It was found out that teachers' suggestions for professional studies were as follows: having a system based on increasing the level of meeting the professional working criteria (f=6), making the implementation based on professional studies (f=2), expanding the professional work criteria (f=1). Besides, their suggestions for application requirements were as follows: reducing the service time, which is an application requirement for expert and head teacher (f=14).

*Some of the teachers' views about the professional studies and application requirements for teaching career steps are presented below as direct quotations:*

*"Instead of an exam-based system, it would be better to increase the number of fulfillment of professional work in the application requirements. Because professional studies consist of activities that expertise the teacher." (T46), "Having a system based on professional studies will enable teachers to work more diligently." (T37).*

## **Conclusion, Discussion and Recommendations**

This section includes the study findings, discussion, comments and suggestions about the results pertaining to findings within the scope of the literature.

According to the findings, teachers' views on career steps were grouped under the themes of general opinions, exam application requirements, professional studies and training program. Teachers' general views on career steps are both positive and negative. Teachers think positively about the regulation of career steps in terms of continuous learning and professional development, being specific to teachers, determining successful and unsuccessful teachers, and ensuring that experienced teachers receive more salary. It is a significant finding that teachers think in positive way about the regulation in terms of learning and professional development. Because, despite many negativities, teachers' thinking positively about the practice in terms of ensuring their professional development and learning can be considered as an opportunity to ensure their professional development. Thus, it will be easier to increase the professional qualifications of teachers and the quality of education, provide quality teaching services to students, achieve success in the regulation, and contribute to the development of teachers. As a matter of fact, Demir (2011) Kaplan and Gülcan (2020), Turan Cımbız and Küçüker (2015) reached results that support this research.

According to findings of the current study, it is remarkable and important to consider that teachers think that the regulation of career steps separates teachers, disrupts the school atmosphere, discredits the teaching profession and postgraduate education due to the short-term paid graduate programs, creates stress, and reduces teachers' performance. Such a regulation is expected to increase the reputation of the teaching profession, the importance of postgraduate education, the teachers' willingness of work and performance, improve their status, take more responsibility and develop themselves. However, it leads to negative results instead, which makes it necessary to take urgent actions and revise the existing regulation. In this respect, teachers must be able to fulfill their duties and responsibilities in a positive and peaceful school climate in cooperation to have a successful education system. It could be very difficult for teachers working in a negative atmosphere to provide qualified education. The quality of teachers' relationships with each other is effective in

creating a peaceful and positive atmosphere in the school. The quality of these relationships in creating a positive school environment also contributes to create a positive learning and teaching environment (Şişman & Turan, 2004). Peaceful and positive school atmosphere positively increases student success, maximizes the morale, and ensures a positive working learning condition (Wei, 2003). A negative environment, on the other hand, could lead to students' alienation, teachers' indifference to each other and their students, the school principal's resistance to change, authoritarian management style and lack of communication with teachers (Ellis, 1988). For this reason, it will have positive effects on the teachers' performance to avoid all kinds of practices that may negatively affect the school atmosphere or revise them by eliminating their deficiencies. Moreover, it could be stated that it will be very difficult for teachers to fulfill their duties under the stress and anxiety caused by career practice as constant anxiety can negatively affect teachers' performance by causing stress. Obviously, teachers with low performance will negatively affect student success.

The discrediting of postgraduate education by the regulation of career steps is against the purpose of the application. In this sense, for the application to be more useful, it is necessary to take the necessary measures to ensure that teachers have postgraduate education in educational sciences or field-related area. In this respect, as the postgraduate education provides an exemption from the exam, many teachers have turned to non-thesis master's degree in the field, and even distant short-term postgraduate education programs have started to be opened for a certain fee. Therefore, this situation has led to a damage to the reputation of postgraduate education, which includes long-term course and thesis period. In the literature, there are studies that support the results of this research (Demir, 2011; Gümüşeli, 2005; Çelikten, 2008; Akgündüz, 2022; Urfalı, 2008; Özan & Kaya, 2009; Kaplan & Gülcan, 2020; Ural, 2011; Bakioğlu & Banoğlu, 2013; Nartgün & Ural, 2007).

The findings show that the teachers are open to learning and professional development regarding their evaluations of the application requirements as contributing to professional renewal and development. The teachers view positively that academic and in-school studies are included in the application requirements, so this will contribute them to work more diligently. Educational activities are complete in that they include not only the class level but also the school. Therefore, the teachers' positive views will ensure both the increase of their individual effort and their participation in school activities, and this will increase their productivity of the school-wide activities and projects.

The findings have also revealed that except for technical problems such as finding the documents and uploading documents to the system, teachers view it positively to include their professional studies as required by the application criteria. Professional development is the most important variable determining teacher quality (Hamdan & Lai, 2015). It will be important for teachers to organize and implement professional studies in a planned and systematic way since professional development is a long process which includes systematically planned opportunities and experiences (Guskey, 2000; Wells, 2014) to improve their teaching techniques, expand knowledge of the field, and take responsibility for educating students in line with the needs of the future society in the light of the latest information (Hoque, Alam & Abdullah, 2011). As a matter of fact, it can be said that the most important factor in the progress and promotion of societies to the level of development is the presence of qualified teachers since it is very important for teachers to provide quality education.

Teachers find the training program positive in terms of updating their knowledge and presenting up-to-date approaches; however, they find it negative because the training program is presented in a monotonous way, the content is very detailed and academic, the program duration is very long and the watching time is short. Giving the same trainings to teachers in all branches and levels, there is unnecessary information, it does not contribute to professional development, and the education program does not contribute to the teaching practices in the classroom. In the career steps regulation, the basis of which is to ensure the professional development of teachers, the training program should be watched and listened to by the teachers with enthusiasm. It is expected that the training that teachers listen and follow with enthusiasm will contribute more to teachers. In the 21st century, when technological opportunities are increasing rapidly, the preparation of educational programs in a way that will attract the teachers' attention and increase their motivation rather than uniformity, and the participation of teachers in the program with web 2.0 tools and the opportunity for two-way communication will facilitate to achieve the program objectives.

According to findings, teachers' suggestions for the regulation of teaching career steps are grouped under general suggestions, professional studies and application requirements. Thanks to the career steps system, teachers are offered the opportunity to advance in their professions based on their success, productivity and performance (Çakıroğlu, 2006, as cited in, Gündoğdu & Kızıldaş, 2008). In this context, teachers' suggestions should be taken into consideration, which is very important for the success of the application. For example, the continuity in the career steps exam will prevent the loss of rights and increase the teachers' interest in professional development studies. Teachers will take up graduate education, and their productivity and performance will increase in project, sports and art activities. In addition, the evaluation of various factors within the scope of graduate education-such as examinations, professional studies, participation in activities, and

certifications-will enhance teachers' professional qualifications. As a matter of fact, these results are in the same line with the stated findings in the literature. Kaplan and Gülcan (2020) stated that other performance criteria should be used apart from the exam to rise in the career steps. Also, Bakioğlu and Banoğlu (2013) expressed that performance evaluation methods that can be applied outside the exam should be brought to the agenda as soon as possible. In a similar vein, it could be postulated that the correct management of career planning and processes and utilizing a contemporary and multifaceted approach including the promotion in profession and horizontal career will emerge positive and important results in many respects. Received by the teacher, etc. will enable teachers to operate in many areas and to develop professionally. In fact, career is also socially important because it enables interaction and integration with many people and gives individuals a status in society in addition to the income that meet the physiological needs of individuals. Career which has an important place in psychological job satisfaction and the development of personality also offers the individual the opportunity to attain more prestige (Sağ, 2004). As a matter of fact, Akçay (2005) proposed a career system of horizontal quality and emphasized that the teaching profession system is structured under the influence of the traditional career understanding, thus, feeling the effect of the contemporary career approach late. He also indicated that there are fewer high positions in teaching, so this situation makes the career system less dynamic, and that the lack of horizontal career opportunities causes the profession to be influenced by the main teaching understanding in the profession. In this sense, considering that there are fewer vertical career opportunities in the teaching profession, it can be said that it would be correct to apply a multifaceted career approach that includes promotion in duty and horizontal career. In this regard, Kaplan and Gülcan (2020) stated that experts and head teachers could be given priority in the transition to school directorate, inspectorate and branch directorate. In addition, Erdoğan (1999) emphasized that career should be handled with a new understanding beyond being an organizational phenomenon, and that career is a phenomenon that is largely shaped by the responsibility of the individual but supported by the organization (as cited in, Ural, 2011). Therefore, a multifaceted career approach which is important for the individual to try to learn with self-enthusiasm for rapid adaptation to changing conditions, that provides the opportunity to be more motivated by protecting personal ideals and principles (Hall, 2004), and that involves the individual development by relying more on their relationships and experiences (Deniz, 2009) stands out. In a multifaceted career approach, the goal is psychological satisfaction, which includes the feeling of success and self-confidence that comes with the fulfillment of goals in life. Psychological satisfaction gives the individual more movement and autonomy. In the literature, there are studies that support the results of this research (Bakioğlu & Banoğlu, 2013; Demir, 2011; Kocakaya, 2006; Dağlı, 2007; Boydak-Ozan & Kaya, 2009; Aydın, 2007; Ural, 2007).

Considering the teachers' suggestions for the education program in the research; the career steps regulation should be reviewed with the participation of all stakeholders, and it could be put forward that the application method and the training program will become more feasible with the improvements to be made in the context of professional studies and application requirements. The leading problem of teachers in developed and developing countries has emerged as lack of motivation (Crehan, 2016). According to their own success and work, the teacher can be motivated to learn and improve himself/herself by reaching the next career step (Kaplan & Gülcan, 2020). The creation of teacher career steps will help to recruit high-performing individuals and train excellent teachers by supporting and rewarding the teacher's continuous professional and leadership development through different roles and responsibilities. Teaching career steps will transform schools into professional work organizations, building the infrastructure to support a stronger and ever-evolving teaching profession, which over time will ensure a strong profession, high levels of student success, as well as a shift towards high-performing and equitable school systems across the country (Yang Keo, 2016), thus, increasing the motivation of teachers. Therefore, the regulation of career steps could be revised and made more feasible, making it an important force in increasing the teachers' motivation. There are also researches in the literature that offer suggestions for the teachers' career development (Tümekaya, 1996; Uçan, 2001; Alkan, 2000; Ural, 2011).

To conclude, the economic benefit of the career system, teachers expect it to contribute to personal rights, status, additional courses, grade and level progression, and additional indicators. Despite the negativities, the regulation of career steps is a very important action in terms of the professionalism of the teaching, increasing its reputation and ensuring the professional development of teachers. In this sense, the career steps regulation should be revised without losing time. A long-term system should be established in which all processes that will contribute to the professional development of teachers are evaluated rationally and the results of these evaluations should be directed for the teachers' support and development.

In line with the study findings, the following recommendations have been developed:

- 1- A system including comprehensive evaluation should be established in which all studies are scored and postgraduate education, examination, professional studies, activities, audit results and success certificates are evaluated by dividing them into certain percentages.

2- The salary increases and personal rights brought by the application should also be extended to the retirement. A contemporary, multifaceted career system including promotion in the profession and horizontal career should be implemented in addition to salary increase.

3- Reducing the requirements of ten years of work to become an expert teacher and head teacher after expert teacher will motivate teachers more.

4- These periods should be added to the ten-year and twenty-year periods to compensate for the loss of rights and sixteen years of service of teachers who have not been able to take the exam which has not been held since 2006.

5- In addition to the common topics that concern all teachers, teachers could have special training content for their own field. The content of the training program could be redesigned to contribute to teachers' in-class activities. In addition to theoretical knowledge, examples of classroom practice including innovative and integrated approaches should also be included.

6- Continuity should be ensured by holding the exam every year.

7- It can be ensured that those who have obtained a master's degree in their field and in educational sciences, provided that their candidacy is approved, can be appointed to the position of expert teacher without the necessity of having spent a number of years in the role. Furthermore, those who have completed a PhD can be appointed to the position of head teacher.

## Limitations

The results of the research are limited to the questions in the semi-structured interview form prepared within the scope of the research and the opinions of the 52 teachers in the study group on these questions.

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