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| Research Article / Araştırma Makalesi |

Examining the Opinions of Expert Teachers on the Application of Teaching Career Stage within the Framework of General Competencies of Teaching Profession

Uzman Öğretmenlerin Öğretmenlik Kariyer Basamağı Uygulamasına İlişkin Görüşlerinin Öğretmenlik Mesleği Genel Yeterlikleri Çerçevesinde İncelenmesi[1]

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Keywords

1. Teaching Career Steps
2. Expert Teaching Career Steps
3. Expert Teaching
4. General Competencies Of The Teaching Profession

Anahtar Kelimeler

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Abstract

Purpose: This research aims to examine the application of the teaching career ladder within the framework of General Competencies for the Teaching Profession; in terms of the quality of the trainings received before the exam, the characteristics measured by the exam and its contribution to professional development, in line with the opinions of expert teachers.

Design/Methodology/Approach: A total of 550 teachers who took the expert teacher exam in Konya Selçuklu district and received the title of expert teacher participated in the research, selected through cluster and criterion sampling for the quantitative phase and maximum diversity sampling for the qualitative phase. In the research designed according to the convergent parallel mixed design, quantitative data were collected with 3 scales developed by the researcher, and qualitative data were collected with a semi-structured interview form. Quantitative data were analyzed with Mann Whitney U, Kruskal Wallis, One-Way ANOVA and Spearman Correlation analyses using the SPSS 25 program; qualitative data were analyzed with NVivo 12 Plus.

Findings: While a significant difference was found between the gender variable and teacher opinions in the quantitative findings, no significant relationship was found between the branch variable and teacher opinions. There was no significant relationship between the exam score and seniority variables and teacher opinions. In the qualitative findings, themes related to the effects of education content, exams and titles were determined.

Highlights: It was concluded that the application of teaching career steps did not meet the expectations on professional competencies and that a more objective, performance-based evaluation system was needed.

Öz

Çalışmanın amacı: Bu araştırma, Öğretmenlik Mesleği Genel Yeterlikleri çerçevesinde öğretmenlik kariyer basamağı uygulamasını; sınav öncesinde alınan eğitimlerin niteliği, yapılan sınavın ölçtüğü özellikler ve mesleki gelişime katkısı bakımından uzman öğretmenlerin görüşleri doğrultusunda incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Materyal ve Yöntem: Araştırmaya Konya Selçuklu ilçesinde uzman öğretmenlik sınavına girerek uzman öğretmen unvanı alan öğretmenler arasından nicel aşama için küme ve ölçüt örnekleme, nitel aşama için maksimum çeşitlilik örneklemesi ile seçilen toplam 550 öğretmen katılmıştır. Yakınsayan paralel karma desene göre tasarlanan araştırmada nicel veriler araştırmacı tarafından geliştirilen 3 ölçekle, nitel veriler ise yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formuyla toplanmıştır. Nicel veriler SPSS 25 programı kullanılarak Mann Whitney U, Kruskal Wallis, Tek Yönlü ANOVA ve Spearman Korelasyon analizleriyle; nitel veriler ise NVivo 12 Plus ile analiz edilmiştir.

Bulgular: Nicel bulgularda cinsiyet değişkeni ile öğretmen görüşleri arasında anlamlı fark bulunurken, branş değişkeni ile bulunamamıştır. Sınav puanı ve kıdem değişkenleri ile öğretmen görüşleri arasında anlamlı ilişki yoktur. Nitel bulgularda eğitim içerikleri, sınav ve unvanın etkilerine ilişkin temalar belirlenmiştir.

Önemli Vurgular: Öğretmenlik kariyer basamakları uygulamasının mesleki yeterlikler üzerine beklentileri karşılamadığı ve daha objektif, performansa dayalı bir değerlendirme sistemine ihtiyaç duyulduğu sonucuna varılmıştır.

[1] This study is derived from Sevgi YENER's master's thesis entitled "Uzman Öğretmenlerin Öğretmenlik Kariyer Basamağı Uygulamasına İlişkin Görüşlerinin Öğretmenlik Mesleği Genel Yeterlikleri Çerçevesinde İncelenmesi," conducted under the supervision of Süleyman Nihat ŞAD.

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INTRODUCTION

In the globalizing world, competition between countries is increasing. In order to combat this competition, countries need qualified human resources. Therefore, the most important task of education systems is to raise individuals equipped with the knowledge and skills appropriate to the needs of the future. The education system of a nation serves two basic purposes: to raise qualified individuals and to instill active citizenship awareness. In line with these purposes, each education system defines the ideal human model and carries out activities in line with human resources policies and the adopted educational philosophy (Karagözoğlu, 2003).

The teaching profession is gaining a different appearance in the transition from industrial society to information society. In the information society, the production of information is now a priority and the production of objects has given way to the production of information (Doğan, 2016). In the information society, teachers should know their students well, respect each student's individuality, have an unprejudiced attitude and democratize the teaching environment. Therefore, teachers need to constantly improve themselves (Üstüner, 2002).

These changes have made it necessary for teachers to continue their professional development. Rapid changes in information and technology cause the knowledge that teachers have to become obsolete quickly, and this situation causes teachers' competencies to be constantly questioned. For this reason, the need for teachers who can keep up with scientific and technological developments is increasing today and in the future. Our country has also focused on the goal of training qualified manpower by adapting to these global conditions and has adopted the goal of determining teacher competencies (MEB, 2017).

Three different teacher competency certificates have been published in Türkiye to date. Studies to determine teacher competencies began in 1998, the first document was published in 2002 and was divided into three main headings: general culture, special field, and teaching-teaching competencies. There are 6 general headings in the new document published in 2006. These headings were announced as “professional development, getting to know the student, teaching and learning process, monitoring and evaluation of learning, school, family and community relations, program and content knowledge” (MEB, 2006). Eleven years later, a new updated competency certificate was published in 2017. In this document, the competencies are grouped under three general headings: professional knowledge, professional skills, attitudes and values (MEB, 2017). The General Competencies for Teaching Profession, which were renewed in our country, reached their final form after a comprehensive work process, taking into account the teacher standards determined in many countries.

The teaching profession is considered a special profession that undertakes the duties of education, training and management of the state. If teachers choose this profession, they continue to teach until they retire. However, this situation can reduce teachers' motivation and negatively affect their professional development. For this reason, the need to create teacher career ladders has arisen. Research shows that the lack of motivation of teachers in developed and developing countries is a significant problem (Crehan, 2016). However, the issue of creating teacher career ladders has caused discussions on whether it benefits the professional development of teachers (Kaplan and Gülcan, 2020).

In light of all these developments in our country, in order to contribute to the professional development of teachers, in 2005, the Ministry of National Education amended Article 43 of the Basic Law on National Education No. 1739, stipulating that the teaching profession would be divided into three career steps after the candidate period: teacher, expert teacher and head teacher. Later, in accordance with this change in the law, the Regulation on Promotion in Teacher Career Steps was accepted by the Ministry of National Education in 2005 and published in the Official Gazette (MEB, 2005). However, the Regulation on Promotion in Teacher Career Steps prepared after this change in the law was taken to court by the union and some groups, and the Regulation on Promotion in Teacher Career Steps was annulled by the decision of the Constitutional Court. For this reason, although the law on career steps was in force, it could not be implemented (Constitutional Court, 2009).

In 2022, the career stage exam was brought to the agenda again within the scope of the Teaching Profession Law. According to Law No. 7354 published in the Official Gazette on February 14, 2022, teachers who have at least ten years of service in teaching and have completed the necessary professional development studies are entitled to take the exam when they complete the 180-hour Expert Teacher Training Program. Similarly, teachers who have completed ten years in Expert teaching have gained the right to take the exam held on November 19, 2023 when they complete the 240-hour Head Teacher Training Program. Those with a master's degree are exempt from the expert teacher exam, and those with a doctorate are exempt from the head teacher exam, but they are required to attend professional development training (MEB, 2022).

The General Competencies for the Teaching Profession, restructured in 2017, and the Career Steps in Teaching Profession implementation, which came into effect in 2022, are significant recent developments in the advancement of the teaching profession. In the literature, only one study has been found under these two topics, which was conducted solely using qualitative methods and focused on teachers' opinions. This research aims to examine the subject in depth through both qualitative and quantitative dimensions, based on teachers' perspectives, and in relation to variables such as gender, branch, exam scores, and seniority. There appears to be a lack of comprehensive studies in the literature that address the relationship between teaching competencies and the career steps implementation, considering these variables together. Especially, evaluating the quality of pre-exam training, the assessment adequacy of the exam, and the contribution of the career title to professional development within the framework of teachers’ views is important for filling this gap in the literature. Accordingly, the research questions developed in this study are directly related to the theoretical background and current practices in the literature.

The main objective of the study is to evaluate the implementation of the teaching career steps based on the views of expert teachers, within the framework of the General Competencies for the Teaching Profession, in terms of the quality of pre-exam training, the features assessed by the exam, and its contribution to professional development.

In line with this main objective, the following research questions are addressed:

1. To what extent do expert teachers think that the training program taken before the teaching career stage exam contributes to the General Competencies of the Teaching Profession?
   1a. Do the opinions of expert teachers differ significantly according to their gender?
   1b. Do the opinions of expert teachers differ significantly according to their branches?
   1c. Is there a significant relationship between expert teachers' opinions and exam scores?
   1d. Is there a significant relationship between the opinions of expert teachers and their seniority?
2. To what extent do expert teachers think the Teaching Career Stage Exam can measure the General Competencies of the Teaching Profession?
   2a. Do the opinions of expert teachers differ significantly according to their gender?
   2b. Do the opinions of expert teachers differ significantly according to their branches?
   2c. Is there a significant relationship between the opinions of expert teachers and exam scores?
   2d. Is there a significant relationship between the opinions of expert teachers and their seniority?
3. To what extent do expert teachers think that receiving the title of expert teacher contributes to the General Competencies of the Teaching Profession?
   3a. Do the opinions of expert teachers differ significantly according to their gender?
   3b. Do the opinions of expert teachers differ significantly according to their branches?
   3c. Is there a significant relationship between the opinions of expert teachers and exam scores?
   3d. Is there a significant relationship between the opinions of expert teachers and their seniority?
4. What are the experiences and opinions of expert teachers regarding the teaching career ladder application?

METHOD/MATERIALS

Research Design

This study, which investigates the teaching career ladder practice reintroduced in 2022 within the framework of the General Competencies for the Teaching Profession last updated in 2017 in our country in terms of the quality of pre-exam training, the competencies assessed by the exam, and its impact on professional development based on the experiences and views of expert teachers, employed the convergent parallel mixed method design, a type of mixed research approach.

In this study, the implementation of the career steps in teaching is considered a multidimensional structure, involving aspects such as the quality of pre-exam training, the competencies assessed through the exam, and its effects on professional development. Therefore, using only a quantitative or only a qualitative method would be insufficient. For this reason, both quantitative data, which reveal numerical trends, and qualitative data, which uncover the reasons behind these trends and the personal experiences of teachers, were evaluated together. According to Creswell and Clark (2018), this approach is particularly useful when the researcher is experienced in both quantitative and qualitative methods, as it is based on the assumption that each data type provides different kinds of information.

The reason for choosing a convergent parallel design is that it allows both types of data to be collected simultaneously and analyzed independently and then interpreted in a complementary manner. In this way, teachers' views on the career steps process were examined holistically, both in the context of general trends among a large participant group and through individual experiences. Parallel mixed sampling methods offer the opportunity to compare or integrate quantitative and qualitative sample types. This approach allows for a comprehensive interpretation by combining numerical data with qualitative insights (Creswell & Clark, 2018).

In this context, the main objective of the study—to reveal the impact of the implementation on professional competencies in both a generalizable and in-depth manner—necessitated the use of a mixed method design. In the research, quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously, analyzed separately, and then integrated in a comparative and complementary way. While the quantitative data revealed teachers' attitudes and perceptions regarding the career steps process, the qualitative data explained the reasons, meanings, and contextual details behind these perceptions. Thus, the findings obtained from different types of data supported each other, providing a more comprehensive evaluation.

Quantitative Stage

Working Group

In the quantitative phase of the study, the study group was selected using cluster sampling and criterion sampling methods. First, schools in the Selçuklu district of Konya were determined by dividing them into clusters according to their grades. In cluster sampling, generally all units within the cluster are included in the sample and diversity is tried to be preserved as much as possible within the clusters. However, when the units within the cluster are very similar to each other, it would be more appropriate to select a sub-sample instead of the entire cluster (Kaya, 2015). For this purpose; Later, using criterion sampling, which is one of the non-random sampling methods, only teachers who passed the teaching career stage exam and were entitled to receive the title of expert teacher were determined within the schools and participants who met this criterion were included in the scope of the study. The sample size was calculated using the formula $n = z^2 \cdot N \cdot p \cdot q / (N \cdot d^2 + z^2 \cdot p \cdot q)$ (Sencan, 1993, as cited in Cındık & Akyüz, 1996). Based on this formula, the sample size was calculated as $n = 1.96^2 \cdot 6095 \cdot 0.50 \cdot 0.50 / (6095 \cdot 0.04^2 + 1.96^2 \cdot 0.50 \cdot 0.50) = 546.435$, which was rounded to 546. A sample size of 546 was accepted, and this number was reached. The number 550 was taken as the upper limit for the sample size, and when this number was reached, the survey was concluded. In the criterion sampling method, situations that meet a set of criteria are examined. The researcher can create the criteria himself or use a previously prepared list of criteria (Marshall and Rossman, 2014). The study group was formed by 550 teachers who were selected from 6095 expert teachers working under the Ministry of National Education in Selçuklu district of Konya province, who participated in the expert teacher training program with the determined sampling methods and qualified to receive expert teacher status by taking the expert teacher career stage exam.

Data Collection Tools

In the quantitative phase of the study, 3 different scales consisting of 5-point Likert-type scale items, each consisting of 11 items, developed by the researchers were used as data collection tools. The scales were developed to examine the opinions of expert teachers on the expert teacher career stage education, exam and title within the framework of the General Competencies of the Teaching Profession. The names of the scales are Expert Teacher Career Stage Education Evaluation Scale, Expert Teacher Career Stage Exam Evaluation Scale, Expert Teacher Title Evaluation Scale. While developing the scales, in order to ensure content validity, expert opinions were received from a philosophy expert faculty member, a measurement and evaluation expert faculty member, a guidance and psychological counseling expert faculty member, a program development expert faculty member and a Turkish language education expert teacher, and the total number of questions was reduced to 33 by making the necessary corrections. The preliminary application of 3 different scales, each consisting of 11 items, was carried out for 250 expert teachers working in different branches in Selçuklu district of Konya province.

In the analysis of the obtained data, Kaiser-Meyer Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity tests were applied to evaluate the suitability of the scales for factor analysis. KMO values were above 0.50 and were accepted as perfect in the range of 0.90–1.00 (Field, 2009). The significance of the Bartlett test also confirms that there are important relationships between the variables in the data set and that it is a suitable structure for factor analysis (Büyüköztürk, 2020, p. 136). As a result of the exploratory factor analysis, it was determined that each scale consisted of a single factor. For the Expert Teacher Career Stage Education Evaluation Scale, the factor loadings ranged between 0.89 and 0.95, and an example item for the scale could be “To what extent did the training program offered before the expert teacher career stage exam contribute to your skills in managing the teaching and learning process?” The factor loadings of the Expert Teacher Career Stage Exam Evaluation Scale range from 0.87 to 0.95, and an example item for this scale can be presented as “To what extent does the expert teacher career stage exam measure your ability to establish effective communication and cooperation with students, colleagues, families and other stakeholders in education?” The factor loadings of the Expert Teacher Title Evaluation Scale range from 0.95 to 0.97, and an example item for this scale can be presented as “To what extent did being an expert teacher contribute to your personal and professional development through self-evaluation?” It was determined that the factors largely explained the total variance in all scales.

According to the results of confirmatory factor analysis conducted with AMOS 22.0, the fit values of the models were found to be consistent with the values given in the table. In addition, the total item correlations of the items were examined and it was seen that the scales were aimed at measuring the contribution of the education, exam and title received before the exam to the General Competencies of the Teaching Profession. Finally, Cronbach Alpha coefficients were calculated in order to determine the reliability of the scales and it was determined that the coefficients were over 0.70. A Cronbach Alpha coefficient over 0.70 is considered sufficient for the reliability of that measurement tool (Büyüköztürk, 2020, p. 183). As a result of the analyzes, it was decided that the scales were applicable to expert teachers, reliable and useful. The data related to the analyzes are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Results of Reliability Analyses of Scales Used in the Study

Scale name	Cronbach Alpha	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO)	Bartlett
Evaluation Scale for Expert Teacher Career Stage Education	0.986	0.964	4754.361
Evaluation Scale for Expert Teaching Career Stage Exam	0.986	0.960	4906.663
Evaluation Scale for Expert Teaching Career Stage Title	0.996	0.967	6136.009

$p<0.001$, N=250

Data Collection And Analysis

In order to collect data in the quantitative phase, the addresses and phone numbers of 227 schools in the Selçuklu district of Konya were obtained from the website of the Ministry of National Education (MEB, 2024). Since 37 of these schools were kindergartens with common principals, they were not contacted again. Of the remaining 190 schools, 122 were contacted by phone during working hours and the research details were shared with the school administrators. With the permission of the administrator, the necessary information and surveys to be forwarded to expert teachers were sent via WhatsApp and/or e-mail. In addition, 26 schools were visited in person and surveys were administered with expert teachers during breaks or free class hours. 42 schools could not be reached due to distance or other communication problems.

In the study, scales were applied to a total of 550 expert teachers and SPSS-25.0 package program was used to analyze the obtained data. Before analyzing the data, it was checked whether the scales showed normal distribution. Normal distribution is a type of distribution that is statistically characterized by a certain mean and standard deviation value (Büyüköztürk et al., 2020, p. 57). As a result of the normality assumptions obtained, One-Way ANOVA was used in the analyzes in cases showing normal distribution, and Mann Whitney U, Kruskal Wallis tests and Spearman Correlation Analysis were used in cases not showing normal distribution.

Qualitative Stage

Working Group

The participants of the qualitative phase of the research were determined using the maximum variation sampling method, one of the purposeful sampling approaches. The maximum variation sampling method is used to reveal the main themes covering various differences associated with the event or phenomenon being examined (Erdem and Tutar, 2020). In order to ensure diversity among the expert teachers who were entitled to become expert teachers by taking the career stage exam in the state schools affiliated with the Ministry of National Education in Selçuklu district of Konya province, 30 volunteer expert teachers from different genders, branches, seniority and school levels were selected as participants.

Data Collection Tools

In the qualitative stage of the study, a semi-structured interview form containing five questions was utilized to explore expert teachers' views on the Teaching Career Ladder Application within the context of the General Competencies for the Teaching Profession. The questions were developed with input from a faculty member specializing in curriculum development and finalized through necessary revisions and additions. This interview form was designed to gain an in-depth understanding of expert teachers' perspectives on the career ladder system. It included open-ended questions aimed at assessing teachers' perceptions of the application, its impact on their professional competencies, and the perceived benefits and drawbacks of the process. The items were structured in alignment with the General Competencies for the Teaching Profession and were intended to examine teachers' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values; their experiences throughout the career ladder process; and the perceived effects of the application on the teaching profession.

The interview form was developed in alignment with the research questions to collect data for the qualitative dimension of the study. The questions were designed to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' perspectives on the implementation of the expert teacher career step. During the question development process, a literature review was conducted, and interview form samples from previous qualitative studies on the expert teacher implementation, as well as the framework of the General Competencies for the Teaching Profession, were utilized.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the interview form, the questions were shared with a faculty member specialized in curriculum development and two experienced expert teachers. Based on their feedback and suggestions, certain questions were revised for linguistic clarity and simplicity. In addition, a pilot study was conducted with three expert teachers to test the applicability of the interview form. The final version of the form was created based on the feedback obtained from the pilot application.

In the demographic section of the interview form, which was developed with expert input, seven questions were included to collect information such as the teacher's name, gender, age, level of education, years of professional experience, appointment status to the expert teacher career step, and the school/institution they work at.

Specific attention was given to the usefulness of the training materials provided (e.g., workbooks, video lectures), the application's role in supporting professional growth, and its overall strengths and weaknesses as perceived by the participants. For example, the questions used in the interview form; "Did you find the training materials (workbook, video lessons, etc.) presented within the scope of the Expert Teacher Training Program sufficient and useful?", "Do you think the Teaching Career Ladder application contributed to your professional knowledge, skills, and competencies?", "What are the advantages and disadvantages of this application for the teaching profession?" can be given.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data for the study were gathered through in-person interviews with 30 expert teachers employed at public schools in the Selçuklu district of Konya, all of whom had successfully passed the expert teacher examination and earned the corresponding title. Participation was entirely voluntary, and all individuals signed an informed consent form approved by the Ministry of National

Education prior to the interviews. With participants' permission, the interviews were audio-recorded in quiet settings to ensure clarity and accuracy.

For qualitative data analysis, Nvivo12 Plus program was used to examine the experiences and opinions of expert teachers regarding career ladder applications. NVivo is a program that allows organizing data under codes, establishing relationships between these codes, visualizing and reporting data (Cassell et al., 2005). In order to ensure confidentiality in the research, expert teachers were coded as UÖ1, UÖ2, ... UÖ30. The coding process was carried out using the NVivo 12 software. After transcribing participants' responses verbatim, the written texts were uploaded to the program and coded according to their content. NVivo's tools were utilized for visualizing the codes, conducting frequency analysis, and identifying relationships between themes.

Validity refers to how accurately a scale or research tool measures the feature it aims to measure, independent of other features (Büyüköztürk et al., 2020, p. 121).

Information on the reliability of the research is discussed under the heading of data collection tools. In this section, the issue of validity is particularly emphasized. In the quantitative research, a representative group was selected from a large universe using cluster and criterion sampling methods, thus increasing the level of validity. In the qualitative research, in-depth interviews were conducted with 30 teachers with different experiences and perspectives using the maximum variation sampling method. In order to increase validity in quantitative and qualitative research, various techniques such as data, researcher, method and sample diversity are used (Tutar, 2022). In terms of external validity, while the large and representative sample used in quantitative research increases the generalizability of the findings, the maximum variation sampling method used in qualitative research may limit generalizability. Therefore, it is important to evaluate the findings as valid only in the context in which the research was conducted (Can, 2022).

Findings and Interpretation

In this section, the quantitative and qualitative findings regarding the sub-problems of the research are given. The findings are presented in a sequence in accordance with the determined objectives of the research.

Analysis and Interpretations of Quantitative Data

Quantitative Findings on Teacher Opinions Regarding the Evaluation of Expert Teacher Career Stage Education

In the research, the first sub-problem determined as "To what extent do expert teachers think that the training program taken before the teaching career stage exam contributes to the General Competencies of the Teaching Profession?" was answered. In this section, first of all, descriptive statistics regarding the total scale score and item-based scores received by expert teachers from the Expert Teacher Career Stage Education Evaluation Scale were given. Then, the results regarding the normality assumptions made in order to determine whether the groups were normally distributed or not, and whether this problem differed significantly according to gender and branch variables, whether there was a significant relationship between exam scores and also seniority were determined, and the findings obtained from the quantitative data obtained to answer the problems were reached.

The total scores of the expert teachers participating in the study on the Evaluation Scale for Expert Teacher Career Step Education were calculated as $\bar{X}$=25.96 for the evaluation of the Expert Teacher Career Step Education. When the scores obtained from the scale were examined, it was seen that the minimum and maximum values were between 1 and 5, the standard deviation varied between 1.13 and 1.17, and the average scores were between 2.30 and 2.41. In this direction, it was determined that the participating expert teachers gave a score of "very little contribution" in the evaluation of the Expert Teacher Career Step Education. The teachers stated that the training and video lessons contributed to the knowledge of the legislation at a moderate level but made a very limited contribution to the subjects of field knowledge, teaching planning, creating a learning environment, managing teaching processes, measurement and evaluation, values education, and self-evaluation. In addition, they think that they did not contribute to field education and effective communication skills.

Normality Assumptions and Difference Analysis Findings Regarding the Gender Variable of The Expert Teacher Career Stage Education Evaluation Scale

The normality test results for the gender variable of the Expert Teacher Career Stage Education Evaluation Scale scores used in the research are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of Normality Test of Expert Teacher Career Stage Education Evaluation Scale Scores for Gender Variable

Gender	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk's		
	Statistics	df	p	Statistics	df	p
Woman	.122	264	.000	.949	264	.000
Male	.099	280	.000	.938	280	.000

p<.05

As seen in Table 2, as a result of the analysis, it was seen that the total scores of the Expert Teacher Career Stage Education Evaluation Scale on the gender variable did not show a normal distribution according to the p<.05 value. In order to determine whether the opinions of expert teachers regarding the contribution of the training program taken before the teaching career stage exam to the General Competencies of the Teaching Profession differ significantly according to gender, the Mann-Whitney U Test,

which is a non-parametric test, was used since there were two independent categories and the analysis results are given in Table 3.

Table 3. Mann-Whitney U Test Results on Whether the Evaluation Scores of Expert Teacher Career Stage Education Differ According to the Gender Variable

Gender	N	Average Rank	Total Rank	U	P
Woman	268	254.25	68138	32092	.002*
Male	282	295.40	83387		
Total	550				

*p<.05

According to Table 3, there is a significant difference between male and female participants in terms of the contribution of the training program received before the teaching career stage exam to the general competencies of the teaching profession (U=32092, p<.05). Male participants received higher scores than female participants in terms of the contribution of this training.

Normality Assumptions and Difference Analysis Findings of the Branch Variable of The Expert Teacher Career Stage Education Evaluation Scale

Evaluation Scale for Expert Teacher Career Stage Education the normality test results of the branch variable of the scores were examined and the results are given in Table 4.

Table 1. Normality Test Results of Expert Teacher Career Stage Education Evaluation Scale Scores for Branch Variable

Branch	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk's		
	Statistics	df	p	Statistics	df	p
Basic Education Group	.145	219	.000	.930	219	.000
Numerical Group	.101	114	.007	.947	114	.000
Social Group	.092	71	.200	.946	71	.004
Talent Group	.126	37	.148	.917	37	.009
Occupation Group	.121	17	.200	.943	17	.360
Language Group	.113	89	.007	.922	89	.000

p<.05

When Table 4 is examined, it was determined that the subgroups of the scale applied to measure the contribution of the training provided to expert teachers before the career stage exam to the general competencies of the teaching profession showed a normal distribution and in the analyses of the Expert Teacher Career Stage Training Evaluation Scale to be made at the branch level, one-way analysis of variance (One-Way ANOVA) test was used and the analysis results are given in Table 5.

Table 2. ANOVA Results on Whether the Evaluation of Expert Teacher Career Stage Education Shows Differentiation According to the Branch Variable

Source of Variance	KT	df	KO	f	p.
Intergroup	984,682	5	196,936	1,473	.197
Within groups	72711.356	544	133,661		
Total	73696.038	549			

p<.05

When Table 5 is examined, it is seen that the opinions regarding the contribution of the pre-exam training to the general competencies of the teaching profession are close among all branches as a result of the analysis and no significant difference was found.

Normality Assumptions and Correlation Analysis Findings for the Exam Score Variable of The Expert Teacher Career Stage Education Evaluation Scale

The normality test results for the exam score variable of the Expert Teacher Career Stage Education Evaluation Scale scores used in the research are given in Table 6.

Table 3. Normality Test Results for Evaluating Expert Teacher Career Stage Education Scale Scores and Exam Score Variable

Variable	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk's		
	Statistics	df	p	Statistics	df	p
Scale Score	.114	550	.000	.937	550	.000
Exam Score	.224	550	.000	.794	550	.000

p<.05

When Table 6 is examined, it is seen that the data regarding the scale score and exam score are normal.It was observed that the data were not distributed and Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient analysis was used in the analyses related to the exam scores variable of the Expert Teacher Career Stage Education Evaluation Scale and the results of the analyses are given in Table 7.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics and Spearman Correlations on Whether There is a Significant Relationship Between Evaluation Scores and Exam Scores for Expert Teacher Career Stage Education

Variable	N	Avg.	SS	Scale Score	Exam Score	p
Scale Score	550	25.96	11.58	-	-.027	.530
Exam Score	550	95.35	4.61	-.027	-	.530

p<.05

When Table 7 is examined, according to Spearman's Correlation Coefficient analysis; a negative and very weak relationship was found between the opinions of the participating expert teachers and the exam scores depending on the education received before the career stage exam ($r_{spearman}$ = -.027, p=.530). Since this value is very close to 0, it can be found that the education received does not directly affect the exam success within the framework of the general competencies of the teaching profession and there is no strong connection between these variables.

Normality Assumptions and Relationship Analysis Findings of the Seniority Variable of The Expert Teacher Career Stage Education Evaluation Scale

The normality test results of the seniority variable of the Expert Teacher Career Stage Education Evaluation Scale scores used in the study are given in Table 8.

Table 5. Results of Normality Test of Seniority Variable of Scale Scores for Evaluating Expert Teacher Career Stage Education

Variable	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk's		
	Statistics	df	p	Statistics	df	p
Scale Score	.114	550	.000	.937	550	.000
Seniority	.074	550	.000	.978	550	.000

p<.05

When Table 8 is examined, it is seen that the data regarding the scale score and seniority are not normally distributed. In this direction, Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient analysis was used in the analysis regarding whether there is a significant relationship between the contribution levels (scores) of the training program taken before the teaching career stage exam to the general competencies of the teaching profession depending on the seniority of the teachers participating in the research and the results of the analyses are summarized in Table 9.

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics and Spearman Correlations on Whether There is a Significant Relationship Between the Evaluation Scores of Expert Teacher Career Stage Education and Their Seniority

Variable	N	Avg.	SS	Scale Score	Seniority	p
Scale Score	550	25.96	11.58	-	.070	.103
Seniority	550	21.17	6.42	.070	-	.103

p<.05

When Table 9 is examined, according to Spearman's Correlation Coefficient analysis; a positive but very weak relationship was found between the opinions of the participating expert teachers and their seniority depending on the training received before the career stage exam ($r_{spearman}$ = .070, p=.103). In addition, this relationship is not considered statistically significant since the p value is greater than 0.05. This situation reveals that there is no significant relationship between the seniority of the expert teachers and the training evaluation scores they receive, and that seniority is not a determining factor in the participation of expert teachers in the training process and the benefit they obtain from this process.

Quantitative Findings on Teachers' Views on Evaluating The Expert Teaching Career Stage Exam

In this section of the research, the answer to the second sub-problem determined as “To what extent do expert teachers think that the Teaching Career Stage Exam can measure the General Competencies of the Teaching Profession?” was sought. In this section, first of all, descriptive statistics regarding the total score and item-based scores of the Expert Teachers from the Expert Teacher Career Stage Exam Evaluation Scale were given. Then, the results regarding the normality assumptions made in order to determine whether the groups were normally distributed and whether this problem differed significantly according to gender and branch variables, whether there was a significant relationship between the exam scores and also their seniority were determined and the findings obtained from the quantitative data obtained to answer the problems were reached.

The total score of the expert teachers participating in the study, obtained from the Expert Teacher Career Stage Exam Evaluation Scale, was calculated as =23.71 for the evaluation of the Expert Teacher Career Stage Exam. When the score ranges of the scale for the Expert Teacher Career Stage Exam evaluation are examined, it is seen that the minimum and maximum values are between 1 and 5, the standard deviation varies between 1.07 and 1.12, and the average scores are between 1.98 and 2.24. In this direction, it was determined that the participating expert teachers gave a score at the level of "definitely does not measure"

in the evaluation of the Expert Teacher Career Stage Exam.$\bar{X}$Teachers stated that the exam did not adequately evaluate field knowledge, field education, knowledge of legislation and pedagogical competencies. They also stated that national, moral and universal values, effective communication and cooperation skills and competencies that support personal and professional development were definitely not evaluated by the exam. It is thought that only the skills of creating a learning environment and measurement-evaluation are measured very little.

Normality Assumptions and Difference Analysis Findings Regarding the Gender Variable of The Expert Teacher Career Stage Exam Evaluation Scale

The normality test results for the gender variable of the Expert Teaching Career Stage Exam Evaluation Scale scores, which is the second scale used in the study, are given in Table 10.

Table 7. Results of Normality Test of Expert Teaching Career Stage Exam Evaluation Scale Scores for Gender Variable

Gender	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk's		
	Statistics	df	p	Statistics	df	p
Woman	.139	264	.000	.912	264	.000
Male	.124	280	.000	.916	280	.000

p<.05

As seen in Table 10, as a result of the analyses, it was determined that the total scores of the Expert Teacher Career Stage Exam Evaluation Scale did not show a normal distribution on the gender variable, since p<.05. Whether there was a significant difference in the levels (scores) of the teaching career stage exam measuring general competencies of the teaching profession depending on the gender of the teachers participating in the research was examined with the Mann-Whitney U Test, one of the non-parametric tests, and the results are summarized in Table 11.

Table 8. Mann-Whitney U Test Results on Whether the Evaluation of the Expert Teaching Career Stage Exam Differs According to the Gender Variable

Gender	N	Average Rank	Total Rank	U	P
Woman	268	260.37	69779	33733	.028*
Male	282	289.88	81746		
Total	550				

*p<.05

According to the Mann-Whitney U test results, since the p value is .028 (p < .05), there is a statistically significant difference in the opinions of male and female teachers regarding the level of measuring the general competencies of the teaching profession in the career ladder exam. The mean rank of male teachers (289.88) is higher than that of female teachers (260.37), which shows that male teachers evaluate the exam more positively and that gender is a factor in the perception of the exam.

Normality Assumptions and Difference Analysis Findings of The Branch Variable of The Expert Teacher Career Stage Exam Evaluation Scale

Evaluation Scale for Expert Teaching Career Stage Exam the normality test results of the branch variable of the scores were examined and the results are given in Table 12.

Table 9. Results of Normality Test of Expert Teaching Career Stage Exam Evaluation Scale Scores for Branch Variable

Branch	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk's		
	Statistics	df	p	Statistics	df	p
Basic Education Group	.153	219	.000	.911	219	.000
Numerical Group	.158	114	.000	.889	114	.000
Social Group	.120	71	.013	.919	71	.000
Talent Group	.161	37	.017	.898	37	.003
Occupation Group	.192	17	.095	.880	17	.032
Language Group	.120	89	.003	.919	89	.000

p<.05

When Table 12 is examined, Shapiro-Wilk's test was evaluated for groups smaller than 50, and Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was evaluated for groups larger than 50, and it was seen that the groups did not show a normal distribution according to the results obtained (p<.05). Since there were more than three groups in the branch variable analysis of the Expert Teacher Career Stage

Exam Evaluation Scale, assuming that they were not normally distributed, the Kruskal Wallis-H test, one of the non-parametric tests, was used and the results are given in Table 13.

Table 10. Kruskal Wallis-H Test Results on Whether the Evaluation of the Expert Teaching Career Stage Exam Differs According to the Branch Variable

Branch	N	Average Rank	df	X^2	p
Basic Education Group	219	285.93	5	11	.102
Numerical Group	122	242.05			
Social Group	63	289.18			
Talent Group	40	290.76			
Occupation Group	17	230.71			
Language Group	89	287.70			

p<.05

According to Table 13, according to the Kruskal-Wallis H test results, there is no statistically significant difference between the evaluation scores of the Expert Teacher Career Stage Exam and the branch groups (p>.05). This shows that the exam evaluations of the teachers are similar according to their branches and the branch variable is not a determining factor.

Normality Assumptions and Correlation Analysis Findings Regarding the Exam Score Variable of The Expert Teacher Career Stage Exam Evaluation Scale

In this section, normality tests were performed for the exam score variable of the Expert Teacher Career Stage Exam Evaluation Scale scores used in the research and the results are given in Table 14.

Table 11. Results of the Normality Test of the Expert Teaching Career Stage Exam Evaluation Scale Scores for the Exam Score Variable

Variable	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk's		
	Statistics	df	p	Statistics	df	p
Scale Score	.134	550	.000	.914	550	.000
Exam Score	.224	550	.000	.794	550	.000

p<.05

When Table 14 is examined, it is determined that the data regarding the scale score and exam score do not show a normal distribution. For this reason, Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient analysis was preferred in the analyses regarding the exam scores variable of the Expert Teaching Career Stage Exam Evaluation Scale. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 15.

Table12. Descriptive Statistics and Spearman Correlations on Whether There is a Significant Relationship Between Expert Teaching Career Stage Exam Evaluation Scores and Exam Scores

Variable	N	Avg.	SS	Scale Score	Exam Score	p
Scale Score	550	23.71	11.14	-	-.089	.038*
Exam Score	550	95.35	4.61	-.089	-	.038*

*p<.05

According to the data presented in Table 15, there is a negative correlation between scale scores and exam scores ($r_{spearman}$ = -.089, p=.038). This shows that there is a weak but statistically significant relationship between scale scores and exam scores. However, the low correlation coefficient shows that this relationship is weak and its reflection on practice and therefore professional competencies may be limited.

Normality Assumptions and Relationship Analysis Findings of The Seniority Variable of The Expert Teacher Career Stage Exam Evaluation Scale

The results of the normality tests performed on the Expert Teacher Career Stage Exam Evaluation Scale scores used in the study according to the seniority variable are given in Table 16. The results obtained show whether the distribution of scale scores at the seniority level is in accordance with the normality assumptions.

Table 13. Results of Normality Test of Seniority Variable of Evaluation Scale Scores of Expert Teaching Career Stage Exam

Variable	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk's		
	Statistics	df	p	Statistics	df	p
Scale Score	.134	550	.000	.914	550	.000
Seniority	.074	550	.000	.978	550	.000

p<.05

When Table 16 is examined, it is seen that the data regarding scale score and seniority do not show a normal distribution. Therefore, Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient analysis was used to examine whether there is a significant relationship between the contribution levels of the teaching career stage exam to the general competencies of the teaching profession according to the seniority of the teachers participating in the research. The results of these analyses are summarized in Table 17.

Table 14. Descriptive Statistics and Spearman Correlations on Whether There is a Significant Relationship Between Expert Teacher Career Stage Exam Evaluation Scores and Seniority

Variable	N	Avg.	SS	Scale Score	Seniority	p
Scale Score	550	23.71	11.14	-	.075	.078
Seniority	550	21.17	6.42	.075	-	.078

p<.05

According to the data presented in Table 17, there is a very weak positive correlation between the scale score and seniority ($r_{spearman}$ = .075, p=.078). However, this relationship is not statistically significant (p>.05). This shows that although the scale scores tend to increase as the seniority of the teachers increases, this increase is not at a significant level. In other words, there is no strong relationship between the seniority of the teachers and the scale scores they receive.

Quantitative Findings on Teachers' Opinions Regarding the Evaluation of The Title of Expert Teacher

In the research, an answer was sought to the third problem determined as “To what extent do expert teachers think that receiving the title of expert teacher contributes to the General Competencies of the Teaching Profession?” First of all, descriptive statistics were given regarding the total score and item-based scores of expert teachers from the Expert Teacher Title Evaluation Scale. Then, the results regarding the normality assumptions made in order to determine whether the groups were normally distributed or not, and whether this problem differed significantly according to gender and branch variables, whether there was a significant relationship between exam scores and also seniority were determined, and the findings obtained from the quantitative data obtained to answer the problems were reached.

The total scores of the expert teachers participating in the study on the Expert Teacher Title Evaluation Scale were calculated as $\bar{X}$ =22.4 for the evaluation of the career step title. When the score ranges of the scale for the evaluation of the career step title were examined, it was determined that the minimum and maximum values were between 1 and 5, the standard deviation varied between 1.07 and 1.13, and the average scores were between 1.86 and 2.11. Accordingly, it was observed that the participating expert teachers gave a score of “did not contribute at all” to all items regarding the evaluation of the expert teacher title. The findings show that the expert teacher title did not provide the expected contribution in developing the professional competencies of teachers and that teachers did not benefit sufficiently from this title.

Normality Assumptions and Difference Analysis Findings Regarding the Gender Variable of The Expert Teacher Title Evaluation Scale

The normality test results for the gender variable of the Expert Teacher Title Evaluation Scale scores used thirdly in the study are given in Table 18.

Table15. Normality Test Results of Expert Teacher Title Evaluation Scale Scores for Gender Variable

Gender	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk's		
	Statistics	df	p	Statistics	df	p
Woman	.163	264	.000	.869	264	.000
Male	.162	280	.000	.881	280	.000

p<.05

When Table 18 is examined, it is concluded that the groups do not show a normal distribution because the total scores of the Expert Teacher Title Evaluation Scale are p<.05. For this reason, the Mann-Whitney U Test, which is one of the non-parametric tests, was used in the analyses of the Expert Teacher Title Evaluation Scale regarding the gender variable, and the results of this analysis are given in Table 19.

Table 16. Mann-Whitney U Test Results on Whether the Evaluation of the Expert Teacher Title Differs According to the Gender Variable

Gender	N	Average Rank	Total Rank	U	P
Woman	268	261.33	70036	33990	.039*
Male	282	288.97	81489		
Total	550				

*p<.05

When Table 19 is examined, there is a significant difference between male and female expert teachers regarding the contribution of receiving the title of expert teacher to the general competencies of the teaching profession according to gender (U=33990, p<.05). This difference is in the direction of male participants. It is seen that the mean rank of male participants regarding the contribution of receiving the title of expert teacher to the general competencies of the teaching profession is higher than that of female participants.

Normality Assumptions and Difference Analysis Findings of The Branch Variable of The Expert Teacher Title Evaluation Scale

Normality test results of the Expert Teaching Title Evaluation Scale scores, which is the third scale used in the study, for the branch variable are given in Table 20.

Table 17. *Results of Normality Test of Expert Teacher Title Evaluation Scale Scores on Branch Variable*

Branch	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk's		
	Statistics	df	p	Statistics	df	p
Basic Education Group	.175	219	.000	.873	219	.000
Numerical Group	.180	114	.000	.850	114	.000
Social Group	.160	71	.000	.874	71	.000
Talent Group	.165	37	.012	.875	37	.001
Occupation Group	.183	17	.135	.902	17	.072
Language Group	.176	89	.000	.855	89	.000

p<.05

When Table 20 is examined, Shapiro-Wilk's test was evaluated for groups smaller than 50, and Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was evaluated for groups larger than 50, and it was seen that the groups did not show a normal distribution according to the results obtained (p<.05). Based on this result, Kruskal Wallis-H test, one of the non-parametric tests, was used in the analyses of the Expert Teacher Title Evaluation Scale's branch variable, and the results of the test are given in Table 21.

Table 18. Results of Kruskal Wallis-H Test on Whether the Evaluation of Expert Teacher Title Differs According to the Branch Variable

Branch	N	Average Rank	df	X^2	p
Basic Education Group	219	284.29	5	12.84	.225
Numerical Group	122	248.05			
Social Group	63	292.57			
Talent Group	40	305.19			
Occupation Group	17	275.47			
Language Group	89	266.10			

p<.05

According to the data in Table 21, the results of the Kruskal Wallis-H test conducted between the branch groups show that there is no statistically significant difference between the branches in the evaluation of the Expert teacher title (p>.05). The results obtained reveal that the evaluations of the teachers regarding the Expert teacher title do not differ according to their branches.

Normality Assumptions and Correlation Analysis Findings Regarding the Exam Score Variable of The Expert Teacher Title Evaluation Scale

Normality tests were performed for the exam score variable of the Expert Teacher Title Evaluation Scale scores used in the research and the results are given in Table 22.

Table 19. Normality Test Results of the Expert Teacher Title Evaluation Scale Scores for the Exam Score Variable

Variable	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk's		
	Statistics	df	p	Statistics	df	p
Scale Score	.161	550	.000	.871	550	.000
Exam Score	.224	550	.000	.794	550	.000

p<.05

When Table 22 is examined, it is determined that the data regarding the scale score and exam scores do not show a normal distribution. Considering this situation, Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient analysis was used in the analyses regarding the exam scores variable of the Expert Teaching Career Stage Exam Evaluation Scale and the results of the analysis are presented in Table 23.

Table 20. Descriptive Statistics and Spearman Correlations on Whether There is a Significant Relationship Between Expert Teacher Title Evaluation Scores and Seniority

Variable	N	Avg.	SS	Scale Score	Exam Score	p
Scale Score	550	22.4	11.51	-	.059	.169
Exam Score	550	95.35	4.61	.059	-	.169

p<.05

According to the data presented in Table 23, it was examined whether there was a significant relationship between the Expert Teacher Title Evaluation Scores and the exam scores. The results show that there is a very weak positive correlation between the scale score and the exam score ($r_{spearman}$ = .059, p=.169). However, this correlation coefficient is not statistically significant (p> 0.05). This indicates that there is no significant relationship between the scale score and the exam score.

Normality Assumptions and Correlation Analysis Findings of The Seniority Variable of The Expert Teacher Title Evaluation Scale

The results of the normality tests performed on the Expert Teacher Title Evaluation Scale scores used in the study according to the seniority variable are given in Table 24.

Table 21. Results of Normality Test of Seniority Variable for Evaluation Scale Scores of Expert Teacher Title

Variable	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk's		
	Statistics	df	p	Statistics	df	p
Scale Score	.161	550	,000	.871	550	.000
Seniority	.074	550	,000	.978	550	.000

p<.05

When looking at the table, it is seen that the data regarding the scale score and seniority do not show a normal distribution, therefore, Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient analysis was used to understand whether there is a significant relationship between the contribution levels of the teaching title to the general competencies of the teaching profession according to the seniority of the teachers participating in the research. The analysis results are summarized in Table 25.

Table 22. Descriptive Statistics and Spearman Correlations on Whether There is a Significant Relationship Between Expert Teacher Title Evaluation Scores and Seniority

Variable	N	Avg.	SS	Scale Score	Seniority	p
Scale Score	550	22.4	11.51	-	.059	.169
Seniority	550	21.17	6.42	.059	-	.169

p<.05

According to the data given in Table 25, there is a very weak positive correlation between the scale score and seniority ($r_{spearman}$ = .059, p=.169). However, this relationship was not found to be statistically significant (p>.05). This shows that as the seniority of the teachers increases, the scale scores increase, but this increase is not at a significant level. In other words, there is no significant relationship between the seniority of the teachers and the scale scores.

Analysis and Interpretations of Qualitative Data

Findings Obtained from Qualitative Data Regarding General Thoughts About Teaching Career Ladder Application

In order to find an answer to the question *"What are the experiences and opinions of expert teachers regarding the teaching career ladder application?"* in the qualitative research phase, the general opinions of expert teachers participating in the research regarding the teaching career ladder application were divided into 4 main themes. A total of 14 different sub-themes were reached

from these 4 main themes. The frequency and participant distributions of the themes and sub-themes reached regarding these opinions are given in Table 26.

Table 23. Findings Regarding General Thoughts on the Application of Teaching Career Step

Theme	Child Theme	f	Participants
Positive Thoughts	Personal Development and professional skill increase	3	UÖ4, UÖ6, UÖ14
	Innovative learning opportunities	2	UÖ6, UÖ16
	Career development and planning	3	UÖ7, UÖ11, UÖ25
Negative Thoughts	The futility of the exam	10	UÖ3, UÖ8, UÖ13, UÖ15, UÖ21, UÖ22, UÖ23, UÖ25, UÖ27, UÖ29
	Content and structure of the exam	5	UÖ9, UÖ10, UÖ16, UÖ17, UÖ27
	Financial concerns	2	UÖ2, UÖ5
	Incompatibility with the nature of the teaching profession	6	UÖ1, UÖ18, UÖ20, UÖ26, UÖ28, UÖ30
Advantages of the teaching career stage	Pecuniary advantage	13	UÖ1, UÖ2, UÖ5, UÖ7, UÖ11, UÖ13, UÖ17, UÖ19, UÖ23, UÖ25, UÖ26, UÖ27, UÖ29
	Professional Development, Knowledge and Skill Acquisition	12	UÖ1, UÖ6, UÖ8, UÖ9, UÖ10, UÖ14, UÖ15, UÖ16, UÖ18, UÖ22, UÖ29, UÖ30
	Increased Motivation and Interest	5	UÖ6, UÖ8, UÖ15, UÖ16, UÖ30
	Professional Prestige	2	UÖ4, UÖ20
Disadvantages of the teaching career stage	Inequality and Discrimination	9	UÖ1, UÖ2, UÖ6, UÖ8, UÖ12, UÖ17,UÖ21,UÖ27,UÖ29
	Stress and Loss of Self-Esteem	2	UÖ12, UÖ21
	Concerns about Material Inequality and Loss of Rights	7	UÖ1, UÖ2, UÖ3, UÖ6, UÖ17, UÖ27, UÖ29
	Waste of Time	2	UÖ23, UÖ24
	Status Differences	7	UÖ2, UÖ7, UÖ8, UÖ12, UÖ17, UÖ21, UÖ27

As seen in Table 26, opinions on the teaching career ladder application indicate more than one factor. In Table 26, within the scope of the findings regarding the General Thoughts on the Teaching Career Ladder Application, the sub-themes, frequencies and participant codes regarding the main theme of *"Positive Thoughts"* are seen. When the codes are examined, it is seen that this main theme is divided into three sub-themes as *"Personal Development and Increase in Professional Skills"* (f: 3), *"Innovative Learning Opportunities"* (f: 2) and *"Career Development and Planning"* (f: 3).

Personal development and increased professional skills

The view that teachers need to develop themselves professionally and that this practice increases personal and professional skills is gathered under this sub-theme. Some of the teachers thought that there should be more effective, long-term trainings to be motivated and to complete the deficiencies, and that this training should be supported with practical applications, and they found the practice useful and stated that the practice allowed them to complete the deficiencies in certain areas [10%].

UÖ4: *"I think there could have been more effective training instead of these, that's my opinion. When we say more effective training, for example, we took a first aid seminar, none of us objected because we needed it in our daily lives."*

UÖ14: *"I think it would be healthier if it were spread over a longer-term program, and I personally think it would be more appropriate if it were supported by practical applications rather than remaining theoretical."*

Innovative learning opportunities

It has been suggested that the exam system of the application motivates teachers, encourages continuous learning and that the educational content is of high quality. It has also been stated that exams are a source of motivation for teachers, but teachers who rely on their experience can neglect learning over time, therefore exams play an important role in keeping the continuous learning process alive [6.67%].

UÖ6*: "Well, I realized that exams are a very good thing to motivate teachers. You know, normally... We left it too long, right? Yes. I can't say that I'm not open to learning, but... After that, you really stop learning by relying on experience."*

Career development and planning

It was stated that it is important for teachers to have a certain career stage in their professional lives, but that it is not right to evaluate this process only with an exam. It was emphasized that the application of career stages is necessary, but the appointment of teachers to these stages should be based on seniority, that is, the years spent in the profession, rather than an exam. It was also stated that experience and working hours should be taken as basis in appointments [10%].

UÖ11: *"So, being an expert teacher is already based on experience. You become an expert teacher, that is, as the years go by, you develop in terms of your command, classroom management, teacher-student relationship, parent relationship, etc. That's why career steps can be fixed to the year, not to the exam."*

UÖ25: *"I think there should be a career ladder. But it seems more appropriate to do this in relation to the duration of teachers' employment rather than the exam."*

"Negative Thoughts" When the sub-themes, frequencies and participant codes related to the main theme are examined, it is seen that this main theme is divided into four sub-themes: *"Unnecessity of the exam"* (f: 10), *"Content and structure of the exam"* (f: 5), *"Financial concerns"* (f: 2) and *"Incompatibility with the nature of the teaching profession"* (f: 6).

In the research, when the participants were asked about their thoughts on the teaching career ladder application, some teachers responded negatively to the question that there were some injustices during the exam process, there were stressful aspects, the exam content was inadequate and inappropriate, while some teachers argued that professional knowledge and skills cannot be measured by exams and that this form of evaluation was not an approach suitable for the nature of teaching.

The futility of the exam

Some teachers argue that the teaching profession is inherently specialized and therefore there is no need for an additional exam. They find it unnecessary to determine career ladders based on exams and state that this practice creates a hierarchical distinction among teachers. However, some teachers stated that the transition to career ladders should be carried out systematically and fairly, that exams are unnecessary and create additional stress and burden on teachers [33.3%].

UÖ13: *"I don't think it's appropriate to evaluate these with an exam. I mean, as a teacher who has worked for 20 years, I think I have sufficient command of these. I passed the exam successfully without much difficulty in the questions that came up. I mean, the training I took, the courses I took, the exam I took afterwards didn't affect me that much, they didn't affect me extra. There weren't any subjects that helped me develop, let me say that."*

UÖ15: *"I don't think it's a necessary exam. Frankly, teachers are a bit stressed and burdened. It was a stressful process for us, since it was our first time taking the exam, there were teachers who were stressed. I was a bit more relaxed, though. But I think there was a burden on the other side."*

Content and structure of the exam

Criticisms have been voiced that the exam has various deficiencies in terms of measurement and evaluation and that it is not directly related to education. Teachers state that the exam questions do not truly measure professional competence and that some topics are unnecessary. In addition, it has been suggested that this exam is not suitable for teachers with a certain level of experience, is inadequate in terms of measuring professional skills and does not provide development in field knowledge [16.6%].

UÖ9: *"It has nothing to do with my field. They provided general training in terms of teaching, but it did not include anything related to my field."*

UÖ27: *"I think this study was rushed. Its content should have been much more comprehensive. It should have been handled on a branch basis."*

Financial concerns

Some teachers stated that the main purpose of the exam for career steps is to gain financial gain and that the majority of teachers are involved in this process with economic expectations. In addition, it was stated that teachers participate in the exam in order to improve their living standards due to financial concerns and that this practice is carried out to provide economic support to teachers. In this context, evaluations were also encountered that the exam is used as a tool [6.6%].

UÖ2: *"Most of the teachers who took the exam actually got involved in this process because of financial concerns. Because we all do the same job, no one does anything different. But there were those who wanted to make a difference economically by taking the exam."*

Incompatibility with the nature of the teaching profession

Some of the participants stated that the teaching profession is essentially a process based on knowledge and experience and that the examination system is not compatible with the nature of this profession. It was emphasized that competence is gained over time, and therefore the exam is inadequate in measuring professional development. In addition, opinions were expressed that the teaching profession requires expertise by nature, that it is not right to create hierarchical distinctions among teachers, and that the exam is an element that damages the reputation of the profession. In this context, it was stated that teaching is a profession based on competence and experience, and therefore it cannot be measured by exams, and that this practice is against the nature of the teaching profession [20%].

UÖ1: *"I think it is unnecessary and wrong to implement it. Teaching is already a profession that requires expertise. I do not think it is right to categorize teachers with class distinctions such as expert teachers and head teachers."*

UÖ30*: "Now, let me put it this way, teaching is a profession of love. It is not a profession that you can just look at the paper or you can stereotype by saying, I don't know, there has to be this or that competence. First of all, you have to love teaching. Second, I have learned this for myself in my life as a teacher. We will not do to our students what we would not want to happen to our own children. Therefore, it cannot be measured by exams."*

"Advantages of the Teaching Career Stage" When the sub-themes, frequencies and participant codes related to the main theme are examined, it is seen that this main theme is divided into four sub-themes: *"Material Advantage"* (f: 13), *"Professional Development, Acquisition of Knowledge and Skills"* (f: 12), *"Increase in Motivation and Interest"* (f: 5) and *"Professional Prestige"* (f: 2).

Pecuniary advantage

A large portion of teachers state that one of the most important advantages of the career ladder application is financial gain. This situation, which is seen as an economic improvement, is especially prominent for teachers who have been in the profession for many years. However, some teachers state that the application does not provide them with any significant contribution other than this advantage [43%].

UÖ5: *"There are financial advantages. I don't think it's very important for many others, for someone like me who has been in my profession for 25 years and is approaching retirement."*

UÖ25: *"It didn't provide much of an advantage, I mean there wasn't anything like that, I mean it didn't provide any advantage other than the financial advantage."*

Professional development, knowledge and skills acquisition

Some teachers state that the training provided during the career stage supports professional development, contributes to refreshing existing knowledge and following current developments. In this direction, it is stated that the training improves the professional competence of teachers by increasing their knowledge and skills [40%].

UÖ10: *"I mean, it would be a lie if I said it didn't provide any advantage. Visuality is very important. In some subjects, especially in terms of measurement and evaluation in training, social interaction and communication, some videos were very good. I also think it was beneficial."*

Increased motivation and interest

Some teachers stated that the career ladder process motivated them academically and professionally and contributed to their acquisition of new information during the exam process. This situation increased the interest and commitment of teachers to their profession and allowed them to enter a more conscious learning process. There are also participants who think that the career ladder process increases motivation and professional commitment [16.6%].

UÖ15: *"So it motivated us a little bit during that process. During that process, there was little effort in terms of working. We gained new information."*

Professional prestige

Some teachers stated that the titles obtained within the scope of career steps increase the social status and professional reputation of teachers. It is stated that the titles of expert teacher and head teacher in particular provide trust and respect in the eyes of parents and students. In this context, there are also participants who believe that the titles obtained through the application of teaching career steps provide prestige, trust and respect [6.6%].

UÖ20: *"It has more financial benefits but also provides a little more prestige both in society and in front of students and parents, and since we can say I am an expert or a head teacher, it creates a slightly different perspective in the parents, students or society."*

"Disadvantages of the Teaching Career Stage" When the subthemes, frequencies and participant codes related to the main theme are examined, it is seen that this main theme is divided into five subthemes as *"Inequality and Discrimination"* (f: 9), *"Stress and Loss of Self-esteem"* (f: 2), *"Material Inequality and Concern about Loss of Rights"* (f: 7), *"Waste of Time"* (f: 2) and *"Status Differences"* (f: 7). The statements of the teachers reveal that the career ladder application undermines equality in education, causes separation among teachers and may negatively affect professional motivation and self-esteem.

Inequality and discrimination

Some teachers think that the career ladder practice leads to inequality and discrimination among their colleagues. It has been stated that differences in title cause a status-based separation among teachers, that some teachers feel professionally inadequate, and that this situation damages professional solidarity. The opinion that practice is against the principle of equality in education,

creates a hierarchical structure among teachers, and causes a perception of professional inadequacy in teachers who do not have the title of expert or head teacher is prominent [30%].

UÖ1 :*"I think it is a practice that is contrary to the principle of equality in education. The right to take the exam was given to teachers with a certain number of years of seniority, and this led to discrimination among teachers. My colleagues, especially those who could not take the expert teacher exam, considered this an injustice."*

UÖ12:*"There were unpleasant situations among teachers. We heard statements like, 'You are the expert, I am the head teacher.' This discrimination created a negative atmosphere among teachers."*

Stress and loss of self-esteem

Some teachers stated that the career ladder process was a stressful experience and that the exam preparation process negatively affected their self-esteem. Teachers stated that they believed that this process was not a fair method of measuring professional competence and that therefore the exam became a source of stress. It is the opinion that the career ladder application causes anxiety and loss of self-esteem among teachers, that it can create a perception of professional inadequacy in teachers who do not have the title of expert or head teacher, and that the exam process creates great pressure on teachers [6.67%]. It was stated that this stress is reflected not only in professional life but also in the daily lives of teachers.

UÖ21:*"We experienced great stress throughout the exam process and we carried this stress into our homes. We felt that we were not given the value we deserved as teachers. Seeing discrimination in the eyes of a parent such as 'He is a head teacher, she is not an expert' made us feel worthless."*

Concerns about material inequality and loss of rights

Some teachers stated that the career ladder application led to financial inequalities and that certain groups, especially retired teachers, suffered a loss of rights. The view that providing teachers with financial advantages based on exams is unethical and that this situation disrupts the economic balance among colleagues is prominent. When the evaluations regarding the sub-theme of financial inequality and loss of rights are examined, it is seen that the career ladder application increases income differences among teachers and that providing additional payments through exams is not considered fair. In particular, the fact that retired teachers cannot benefit from these rights is not considered an objective practice, and it is argued that making title and salary increases conditional on exams is unethical and that these rights should be granted based on seniority [23.3%].

UÖ17*: "There was no need for the state to organize an exam to provide a salary increase to teachers. It would have been more appropriate to give it without an exam. Creating discrimination between teachers in terms of both economic and status by subjecting them to an exam does not seem ethical to me."*

UÖ27: *"This process has been a great disadvantage for our retired colleagues. They cannot even benefit from their right to compensation. I think this situation should be corrected retroactively."*

Waste of time

Some teachers stated that the preparation process for the career ladder exam creates a significant burden in terms of time. It was stated that while teachers should focus on their primary responsibilities, which are education and teaching processes, the time spent on exam preparation increases their workload. In this context, there are prominent views that the exam preparation process causes restrictions in teachers' professional and personal lives and causes them to move away from the basic duties of the teaching profession due to their intense work tempo [6.67%].

UÖ23: *"We spent a lot of time preparing for the exam. During this period, we experienced restrictions both in school and in our private lives. We had to take time to study, and this made it difficult for us to focus on our main responsibilities as teachers."*

Status differences

It has been stated that status differences based on career steps damage professional unity among teachers. It has been stated that separating teachers who apply the same curriculum and teach similar courses with different titles has negative effects on cooperation and integrity in the educational environment. In addition, opinions have been expressed that status differences based on title do not comply with the principles of professional solidarity and equality. Teachers think that the economic and status-based differences caused by the titles of expert teacher and head teacher weaken professional unity and negatively affect unity and solidarity in education [23.3%].

UÖ7 : *"Expressions such as 'head teacher', 'expert teacher' etc. can cause divisions in the staffroom. We didn't have such a situation in our school, but we have heard of such divisions in other schools."*

UÖ8: *"I am against discrimination or othering people in any field or subject. In the end, everyone, be it a expert teacher, a head teacher or a regular teacher, takes the same class, teaches the same subject and applies to the same curriculum. In other words, I do not think it is right to single out teachers with an exam. A different solution can be developed."*

Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

According to the findings obtained from the first sub-problem of the quantitative part of the study, the trainings and video lessons received before the exams made very little contribution to professional competencies. In the evaluation made according to gender difference, it was found that the perception level of male participants was higher than that of female participants; this finding is consistent with the research of Tosun and Yengin Sarpkaya (2014). When the branch differences were examined, it was determined that expert teachers had similar views on the contribution of pre-exam trainings to professional competencies and

that branch was not an important factor. In addition, no significant relationship was found between exam scores and trainings, and it was concluded that seniority did not have an effect on participation or benefiting from the training process.

The findings obtained from the second sub-problem of the quantitative part of the study revealed that expert teachers thought that the career ladder exam was inadequate in measuring professional competencies. Male teachers evaluated the exam more positively than female teachers, but no significant difference was found between branches. It was determined that the exam did not sufficiently take into account the professional competencies and branch differences of teachers and therefore was inadequate in correctly evaluating teacher performance. It was concluded that the relationship between the scale and exam scores was weak, and therefore its effect on professional development and competencies was limited. In addition, it was determined that seniority did not play a decisive role in professional experience and educational benefits.

The findings obtained from the third sub-problem of the quantitative part of the study reveal that the title of expert teacher does not provide the expected contribution to the professional competencies of teachers. Participants generally evaluated the career stage exam as “It did not contribute at all”, and it was revealed that the title was ineffective on critical competencies such as field knowledge, educational planning, creating a learning environment and measurement-evaluation. In terms of gender, male teachers thought that the title contributed more to their professional competencies, while female teachers were found to have more negative perceptions. No significant difference was found between branches, and it was observed that teachers in different branches approached the title of expert teacher in a similar way.

There is no significant relationship between the expert teacher title evaluation scale scores and exam scores, which reveals that exam scores do not have a significant effect on teachers' title evaluations. No significant relationship was found between teachers' seniority and scale scores, and it was concluded that as teachers gain professional experience, this experience does not make a significant contribution to the competencies measured by the scale, and the effect of seniority on the development of teachers' professional competencies is limited.

In general, it was concluded that the training, exam and title received within the scope of the expert teacher career ladder application did not provide the expected contribution to the professional competence of teachers, that gender was effective in the perceptions regarding the effects of the career ladder, but the branch was not decisive. These findings reveal that the expert teacher career ladder application should be re-evaluated and that alternative methods that will contribute more to the professional development of teachers should be developed. These results are consistent with the findings of Bakioğlu and Banoğlu (2013) and Çın (2014); they support the suggestions that the title is ineffective, functionality should be increased and in-service training should be emphasized.

As a result of the analyses made in the fourth sub-problem of the qualitative part of the research, the main themes were shaped around the titles of “positive thoughts”, “negative thoughts”, “advantages”, “disadvantages” in order to examine the experiences and opinions of expert teachers regarding the teaching career stage application regarding the first sub-problem of the study.

When the positive opinions of teachers are examined, it is seen that the career ladder application contributes to personal development and professional skill increase. In the research conducted by Pınar and Dönel Akgül (2023), teachers generally have a positive opinion that career ladders will contribute to professional development and increase motivation. The result obtained and this result in the literature are consistent with each other. Teachers stated that this application offers innovative learning opportunities and has a positive effect on career development and planning. In particular, it was emphasized that exams create a source of motivation for teachers and keep the continuous learning process alive. However, teachers stated that the application should be supported with more effective, practical and daily life usable training. A similar result was seen in the study titled “Teacher Competencies in Türkiye” by Tuğluk and Kürtmen (2018) in the literature. In the study, it was concluded that considering the competencies with a broader perspective and supporting them with examples could contribute to the professional development of teachers.

When negative opinions are examined, it is seen that teachers criticize the exam as unnecessary and not compatible with the nature of the teaching profession. It has been stated that the exam creates unnecessary stress on teachers and causes injustice. In the research conducted by Çobanoğlu and İlkin (2023), it was concluded that teachers generally think that career steps and the exam related to these steps are unnecessary. This finding is quite consistent with the result. In addition, the content and structure of the exam are inadequate, it should be measured with the experiences of teachers and the opinion that professional knowledge and skills cannot be evaluated with the exam is dominant. When we look at the literature, there are many studies that are consistent with this finding. In the studies of Avcı and Kayıran (2023) and Kurt (2007), it was stated that teachers participate in the exam due to financial concerns and this situation negatively affects professional motivation. Finally, it was shared that the teaching profession requires expertise in itself, class distinctions are not correct and the exam is against the nature of the teaching profession.

According to the research results, the majority of teachers stated that the career ladder application provided financial gain and brought economic relief. In the research of Bakırcı, Özkan and Özdemir (2023), the participants also expressed positive views that the law provided economic benefits. In addition, there are also views that this application increased professional knowledge and skills, refreshed existing information and contributed to obtaining up-to-date information. Positive feedback was obtained that the career ladder application increased teachers' motivation and interest in the profession, and also gained prestige in the society,

parents and students. These results are consistent with the finding in Webb's (2016) research that increasing teacher quality contributed to teachers being self-confident and talented, increasing their reputation and increasing the quality of education. From the findings regarding the teaching career ladder application, it was seen that financial advantages and professional development elements were prominent, while factors such as motivation, increased interest and prestige had a more limited effect. In particular, material advantages that provide economic relief constitute the center of teachers' positive views on career ladder implementation.

When the results regarding disadvantages are examined, some teachers stated that the career ladder application contradicts the principle of equality in education and creates discrimination and professional division among teachers. In addition, there are also views stating that this application causes stress and loss of self-esteem and negatively affects the perception of professional competence among teachers who do not have the title of expert or head teacher. Some teachers argued that the application creates financial inequalities and that it is unethical to make extra payments through exams. The fact that retired teachers cannot benefit from these rights and that titles are given through exams is found to be contrary to the principle of equality among teachers. This situation has led to criticism that teachers' expectations of equality in economic and professional terms are not met. It has also been noted that the time teachers spend during the exam preparation process causes them to drift away from their professional duties and that this process causes restrictions both in school and in their private lives. In addition, it has been stated that status differences based on titles contradict the principles of professional solidarity and equality. Teachers think that despite attending the same curriculum and courses, title differences negatively affect unity and solidarity in education. Quantitative data revealed that the training received by teachers prior to the expert teacher exam had a low impact on their professional competencies. Similarly, qualitative data supported this finding, showing that teachers considered the training to be theory-heavy, disconnected from practice, and unrelated to professional application. These findings align with the convergent parallel design of the mixed-method approach, indicating that both types of data point to similar results.

While the quantitative data indicated that the exam was insufficient in measuring competencies, the qualitative data showed that teachers perceived the exam as "excluding experience and pedagogical skills" and "focused on rote memorization." At this point, the data converged.

Quantitative findings suggested that the title had a limited impact on professional competencies, whereas qualitative data revealed that the title provided prestige among teachers but was inadequate in terms of pedagogical development. This presents a structure in which both types of data not only support but also complement each other.

These results show that the teaching career ladder application provides positive contributions to the professional development and motivation of teachers, but the exam-centered structure of the application should be reconsidered. Opinions frequently emphasize that title assignments should be supported by longer-term and practical training, taking into account the experience and professional seniority of teachers. Although the career ladder application provides various advantages to teachers both financially and professionally, it also leads to significant disadvantages such as inequality, discrimination and stress. These findings show that the application should be re-evaluated by developing a system that observes the principles of justice and equality. Such an approach can increase teachers' professional satisfaction and make the application more acceptable. Berry and Eckert (2012) stated in their research that current policies do not sufficiently reflect the real conditions in retaining effective teachers and that teacher incentive policies should be developed in a holistic way to support a more effective teaching model. This finding is parallel to the results obtained regarding the career ladder application. A holistic approach is needed that supports the professional development of teachers while also taking into account their psychosocial and economic needs.

Based on the findings of this study, which utilized convergent parallel mixed methods design combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches, participants' critical perspectives on the objective assessment of the teaching career steps and their impact on competency and professional growth have led to recommendations for improving and expanding the current evaluation and development framework.

The teaching career ladder system should be restructured in a way that is objective and motivating and contributes to the professional development of teachers. First of all, the removal of the teaching career ladder exam and the adoption of an appointment system based on seniority and experience will allow teachers' long-term experiences to be better evaluated. In addition, teachers' participation in field-specific training and seminars can be encouraged, and their professional development can be supported more effectively.

Reducing the salary differences between teachers and adopting a more equitable compensation policy will increase teachers' professional satisfaction. In this context, objective and reliable evaluation criteria should be established in the process of advancing to career levels, and a system based not only on teachers' exam success but also on their professional knowledge and performance should be developed. Seminars and training programs should be made more field-oriented and content appropriate to teachers' real needs should be presented.

Creating psychological and professional support mechanisms that will help teachers cope with exam stress and professional pressures will both increase the quality of education and increase teachers' motivation. In addition, reflecting the privileges gained during the teaching career, such as titles, salary increases and status, to teachers' post-retirement processes will increase the attractiveness of the profession in the long term.

It is also of great importance to develop a reliable evaluation system for expert teaching. The fact that this system is based on objective criteria will strengthen the perception of justice among teachers and will make career advancement more meaningful. In addition, the effects of education policies on teacher motivation and quality of education should be examined comprehensively, and the consequences of career advancement on teachers' stress levels and job satisfaction should be investigated.

Finally, studies should be conducted on how educational technologies contribute to the career development of teachers and the effects of continuous professional development programs on career stages should be evaluated. Such studies will help to create more conscious and effective policies for the professional development of teachers.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The researchers have no personal or financial conflicts of interest with other individuals or institutions related to the research.

Statements of publication ethics

In this study, all ethical rules specified in the Directive on Scientific Research and Publication Ethics of Higher Education Institutions were followed. No unethical behavior under the heading 'Actions Contrary to Scientific Research and Publication Ethics' in the Directive has been applied.

Examples of author contribution statements

The research design and theoretical foundation were primarily developed by Author 1, working closely under the supervision of Author 2. Throughout the entire research process, Author 2 offered ongoing guidance, constructive critiques, and substantive revisions. Both authors jointly analyzed the results and collaborated in drafting the discussion and conclusion sections of the manuscript.

Researchers' contribution rate

The researchers equally shared responsibilities in the design, conduct, and writing of this study.

Ethics Committee Approval Information

Ethical permission was obtained for the research from the Inonu University Ethics Commission with the letter dated 14.12.2023 and numbered E.383618.

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