Teacher attrition: why do teachers leave the profession? *

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Abstract

Although the teaching profession is generally regarded as being a respected, even "sacred", career in many societies, there is no doubt that it is also highly demanding and challenging. The difficulties involved in teaching are causing a significant number of teachers worldwide to either leave, or consider leaving, the profession. Teachers resigning before reaching retirement, but after having taught for at least one year, is called 'teacher attrition'. These high numbers of resigning teachers is having profound implications, including financial costs, human resource challenges, and disruptions to learning and instruction, making a comprehensive examination of the phenomenon essential. The aim of this study is to contribute to this examination by exploring how teachers who have left and in-service teachers perceive the reasons of teacher attrition. The study also investigates when teacher attrition occurs and leavers' career trajectories after leaving teaching. By employing a phenomenological research design, the study considers 27 leavers and 15 in-service teachers, selected through snowball and maximum variation sampling methods. Data was collected via semi-structured interviews developed by the researchers. Content analysis revealed three primary themes within the reasons of teacher attrition: (a) pre-service education, (b) work-life experiences, and (c) career dissatisfaction and alternative opportunities. Key triggers of attrition included the quality of pre-service education, the lack of mentorship, relationships with administrators and colleagues, excessive workload, the status of the teaching profession, low salaries with insufficient compensation, and alternative job opportunities. The results also indicated that attrition is most prominent in the first three years of teaching, but gradually declines as teachers approach retirement. Furthermore, the results showed that many leavers transition to other careers, both within and outside the education sector, while others exit the workforce entirely.

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Introduction

In the industrial age, the teaching profession was celebrated as a "secure, life-long" career path (Dwyer & Wyn, 2001) upon which teachers were expected to remain until retirement. However, the perception of teaching has changed dramatically during recent decades due to increasing levels of stress and inadequate compensation until, for some, teaching has become perceived as a form of "emotional labor" (Johnson et al., 2005) that is akin to other extremely stressful and challenging care related professions. As a result, significant numbers of teachers have resigned, while many others are considering resignation (Grissmer & Kirby, 1987; Harmsen et al., 2018).

The increasing global rates of teacher attrition, the process of teachers voluntarily leaving the profession (Kelchtermans, 2017) after working in a school for at least a year and before reaching retirement has become a serious concern in recent decades (Den Brok et al., 2017; Ingersoll, 2001). For example, almost 50% of teachers in the United States (Ingersoll, 2003), and around 25% in Belgium and Australia, leave teaching within the first five years (Australian Government Productivity Commission, 2012, as cited in Harmsen et al., 2018). Furthermore, the recent COVID-19 pandemic has increased rates of teacher burnout and reduced career satisfaction, thus exacerbating global attrition rates still further (Bastian & Fuller, 2023; Koerber et al., 2023). Global surveys revealed that 90% of teachers in the United States have experienced burnout at some point in their careers (National Education Association [NEA], 2022a), and that nearly 600,000 teachers left the profession during 2021-2022 during COVID-19 (NEA, 2022b).

Statistics relating to teacher attrition in some areas of the globe are well-documented, but the extent of teacher attrition in Türkiye remains largely unknown due to the limited nature of official national data. While the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) does announce the number of teachers who leave public schools due to retirement, resignation, and miscellaneous reasons, including death or career changes, (according to official data, 1,632 teachers left public schools in 2020; 2,030 in 2021, 1,654 in 2022; and 2,772 in 2023 for reasons other than retirement (MoNE, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024)), these figures only relate to public school teachers. As the figures do not include private school or contracted teachers, it is difficult to determine the full extent of teacher attrition in Türkiye. That said, and despite the lack of comprehensive national data, it is widely acknowledged that there is profound teacher dissatisfaction in Türkiye. A nationwide survey revealed that 70% of teachers would consider leaving the profession if they were to find alternative better paid employment (Eğitim-Sen, 2018). This figure only confirms how teacher attrition is as at least as much a growing risk in Türkiye as it is in other countries. The importance of examining the phenomenon is clearly expressed in an analogy used by Merrow (1999): "The teaching pool keeps losing water because no one is paying attention to the leak". Clearly, it would be a mistake to imagine that, just because there is a lack of national data, the situation is not a cause for concern in Türkiye. Although educational faculties in Türkiye do produce a steady supply of new teachers, persistent teacher shortages in many regions, combined with the loss of experienced teachers due to attrition, are having a negative impact on instructional quality, school stability, students' learning experiences, and learning outcomes, particularly in disadvantaged schools (Ronfeldt et al., 2013).

There are multiple and serious repercussions to teacher attrition, including financial costs and disruptions to the school and to learning in general. It is estimated in the United States that it costs an estimated $20,000 to replace every teacher that voluntarily leaves before retirement (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). In addition to financial costs, there are the inevitable human costs of teacher attrition in terms of the time and resources that was allocated to teachers during pre-service education and in-service training going to waste (Manuel, 2003). Teacher attrition also is an unavoidable cause of disruption to students' learning (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Kini & Podolsky, 2016) with students becoming "more likely to be taught by inexperienced and ineffective teachers" (Miller & Chait, 2008, p. 10). This is particularly the case in economically disadvantaged areas (Ronfeldt et al., 2013). Other important factors include high attrition rates harming collaboration among teachers (Guinn, 2004) and disrupting the stability (Ronfeldt et al., 2013) and culture of the school (Kelchtermans, 2017).

There are several frameworks/models in the literature, which provide valuable insights into the complex array of influences on teacher attrition. For example, Chapman's (1983) "social learning theory", based on "social learning theory" and Krumboltz's (1979) "career decision-making theory", outlines factors which impact whether teachers decide to remain the profession or not, including "educational preparation, initial teaching experiences, and professional integration". Another study by Clandinin et al. (2015) distinguished the factors that influence teacher attrition in terms of the individual and contextual dimensions. Some of the individual factors identified in the study include burnout, resilience, and demographic features, while contextual factors include elements such as salary, professional development opportunities, and collaboration among colleagues. Studies by Glazer (2018), as well as Vagi and Pivovarova (2016), categorized previous research based on theoretical approaches and highlighted organizational theories that focus on the fit between educators and their workplaces, rational choice theories that emphasize individual decision-making, and self-efficacy theories that underscore feelings of competence. Finally, Mason and Poyatos Matas (2015) suggest a more theoretically informed framework and presented a new model, which incorporated elements of "human capital, social capital, structural capital, and positive psychological capital theories" (p.58).

The research available, which explore the reasons of teacher attrition, predominantly focus on individual influences (e.g. initial motivation to teach, beliefs about self-efficacy and teacher training background) and contextual influences (e.g. school environment, leadership and support, financial incentives and organizational culture). In this context, such studies highlight the critical role of pre-service education (Ingersoll et al., 2014); namely, the effectiveness of teaching practicum, the availability and quality of courses related to teaching methods, pedagogical knowledge during pre-service education, the route to entering the profession; whether by earning a degree from a faculty of education or through alternative certification programs (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019).

Another important determinant highlighted by the available research is the quality of teaching experience, particularly during the first few years of a teacher's career. Numerous studies emphasize that the lack of support and mentoring that teachers receive from colleagues and administrators has a crucial influence on attrition (e.g. Brown, 2001; Freedman & Appleman, 2009; Zhang & Zeller, 2016), and that difficulties regarding classroom management and the lower self-efficacy beliefs of teachers can also impact attrition (Lindqvist & Nordänger, 2016; Mason, 2017).

Available research studies also emphasize the pivotal role of working conditions. These are related to multiple factors such as negative organizational culture, strained relationships with other teachers and school administrators (Grayson & Alvarez, 2008), insufficient salaries (e.g. Hahs-Vaughn & Scherff, 2008; Johnson & Kardos, 2008; Solomonson et al., 2018), and excessive workload (e.g. Schaefer et al., 2012; Solomonson et al., 2018; Welch et al., 2017), all of which were identified as major contributors to teacher attrition. Other significant influencers of attrition include societal perception of the teaching profession and its overall status, (e.g. Schleicher, 2019a; Welch et al., 2017), and the availability of alternative career options. (With, 2017).

In terms of demographics, previous studies indicate mixed findings regarding gender (e.g. Borman & Maritza Dowling, 2008; Guarino et al., 2006; Wushishi & Baba, 2016) and civil status (e.g. Borman & Maritza Dowling, 2008; Schaefer et al., 2012). However, they underscore that younger teachers are more likely to quit the profession compared to their older counterparts (Ingersoll, 2001). Literature also indicates that teachers with lower self-efficacy beliefs and reduced self-confidence are more prone to leaving as they have more difficulties coping with professional difficulties (Mason, 2017).

Regarding the timing of attrition, the literature consistently indicates that the most teachers exit the profession within the first five years of their careers. Numerous studies argue that the attrition rate is the highest early in the career, and that it decreases mid-career, only to increase again toward retirement (e.g., Glazer, 2018; Hancock & Scherff, 2010; Solomonson et al., 2018). Huberman (1989) suggested that examining teachers' professional lives can provide insights regarding their experiences. *The Professional Life Cycles of Teachers* (Huberman, 1989) framework provides teachers, researchers, administrators and policymakers with important data regarding why certain teachers' experiences lead to attrition. Huberman (1989) suggests that teachers may go through several phases during their career, such as "survival/discovery", "stabilization", "experimentation/reassessment", "serenity/conservatism", and "disengagement". He argues that although these phases are descriptive and common, different teachers may experience them at different times, or there might be certain phases where they do not experience them at all. Huberman's (1989) framework of these critical phrases not only provides significant insights regarding why teachers chose to exit the profession, but also enables the determination of targeted interventions and support to potentially reduce attrition.

In regards to the subsequent career paths of leavers, although a limited number of studies have been conducted, findings reveal diverse trajectories; while many leavers continue to work within the educational sector (e.g. librarian, university instructor), others prefer to leave the sector entirely (e.g. manager, sales, service sector) (Mawhinney & Rinke, 2018). Furthermore, some studies also found these leavers are more satisfied in their new careers (Goldring et al., 2014; Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2014), and that there was no incentive that would make them return to the profession (Buchanan, 2012).

The literature review of teacher attrition located few studies conducted in Türkiye. While the majority of studies focus on teachers' job satisfaction, burnout, challenges, or intention to leave, there are only a limited number of studies, which have specifically investigated teacher attrition. One such was a recent study by Çakır et al. (2024), which examined the reasons behind attrition among private school teachers in Türkiye. The researchers interviewed nine teachers who have left, or intended to leave, and found that the main reasons for attrition among the private school teachers surveyed were a heavy workload and low income. Another study by Keçeci and Keskinkılıç Kara (2023), which focuses on the influences of teacher attrition, found that three main factors were contributing to attrition: "economic reasons" (e.g. insufficient salary, delayed salary payments, lack of compensation), "personal and environmental reasons" (e.g. lack of personal and family time, intense stress, childcare responsibilities), and "organizational reasons" (e.g. collegial relationships, job insecurity, negative attitude of administrators, and excessive bureaucratic tasks). A further study conducted with English language teachers in Türkiye similarly found that alternative job opportunities, unfavorable working conditions, insufficient salary, and inadequate administrative support, were all significant contributors to attrition (Yastıbaş et al., 2022).

An examination of the previous studies indicates that the perspectives of teachers who have left the profession are underrepresented in the literature. This is because they are no longer part of the school system and their whereabouts are often unknown (Karsenti & Collin, 2013; Mawhinney & Rinke, 2018). Investigating such perspectives and experiences is crucial as it can offer valuable insights into the phenomenon of teacher attrition and provide researchers, professionals, and policymakers with a more comprehensive understanding of various dimensions of the teaching profession.

With full consideration of all of the above, the aim of this study was to explore teacher attrition and answer the following research questions:

1. Why do teachers leave the profession before their retirement, as perceived by the leavers themselves, and in-service teachers?

2. Based on Huberman's (1989) classification of the professional life cycle of teachers, in which phase do teachers most frequently leave the profession?

3. What are leavers' next possible career paths?

Method

Research Method

A phenomenological research (Cohen et al., 2018) approach was chosen for the study as it was the best method of exploring the meaning of participants' individual experiences (Creswell, 2007) and gaining insight into, and describing, the commonalities that different people perceive in similar experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Fraenkel et al., 2012). This decision aligns with Moustakas' (1994) suggestion that phenomenological studies are most appropriate when the goal is to fully assess the shared experiences of multiple individuals regarding a phenomenon. The overall aim of this study was to investigate the scarcely studied phenomenon of teacher attrition in Türkiye, and to explore the unique experiences of participants and their perceptions of teacher attrition. Therefore, instead of focusing on a few specific aspects of the issue, it was determined that the complex nature of teacher attrition could be better explored through a phenomenological approach.

Participants of the Study

Study participants comprised of two groups: leaving teachers who had voluntarily left the teaching profession after having taught for at least one year, and the in-service teachers who were still actively teaching in schools that had experienced teacher attrition. Several strategies were employed to contact potential participants who were deemed to be able to provide useful information on the research questions. First of all, both of the researchers have a background in education, with one already being acquainted with a number of leavers and in-service teachers. A strategy was to use the social media platform X (formerly known as Twitter) to enable researchers to identify multiple leavers and in-service teachers. X is useful as many experiences are shared on social media, and there are numerous news sharing and announcement accounts related to the teaching profession. The third strategy utilized was that participants were kindly requested during the data collection process to suggest other leavers or in-service teachers who might be interested in participating in the study.

Snowball sampling and maximum variation sampling methods were employed in conjunction with these strategies. The aim of maximum variation sampling was to ensure diversity among participants in terms of gender, age, routes into teaching, school type, subject area, grade level taught, teaching experience, and geographical region. This approach helped to enrich the data and mitigate the potential limitations of the snowball sampling method. The use of the snowball sampling method is particularly valuable in reaching leavers who are often "out of touch" (Karsenti & Collin, 2013, p. 143) and therefore a challenge to locate.

Data was collected for the current study until data saturation was achieved (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). This resulted in the formation of diverse group of participants consisting of 27 leavers and 15 in-service teachers. Table 1 and Table 2 profile the leaving teachers and in-service teachers who participated in the study, respectively.

Table 1. Profiles of the Leaving Teachers in the Study

Participant	Gender	Age	Pathway into the profession	Teaching Experience	Subject Area	School Type
L1	Female	30	Faculty of Ed.	3	English Language	Private
L2	Female	26	Faculty of Ed.	2	English Language	Private
L3	Female	32	Faculty of Ed.	2	English Language	Private
L4	Male	29	Faculty of Ed.	2	Science	Public
L5	Female	33	Pedag. form.	4	Religious Culture	Public
L6	Female	29	Faculty of Ed.	6	Pre-school	Public
L7	Female	28	Faculty of Ed.	2	English Language	Private
L8	Female	31	Faculty of Ed.	6	English Language	Private
L9	Male	28	Faculty of Ed.	3	Social sciences	Public
L10	Male	31	Faculty of Ed.	2	Mathematics	Public
L11	Female	24	Pedag. form.	1	Music	Private
L12	Female	30	Pedag. form.	6	Mathematics	Public
L13	Female	29	Faculty of Ed.	8	Pre-school	Private
L14	Female	45	Pedag. form.	18	History	Private
L15	Male	59	Pedag. form.	32	Physical Ed.	Public
L16	Female	42	Pedag. form.	6	Mathematics	Private
L17	Male	30	Faculty of Ed.	3	Computer Tech	Private
L18	Male	31	Faculty of Ed.	1	Mathematics	Public
L19	Female	48	Pedag. form.	4	English Language	Private
L20	Female	45	Pedag. form.	1	English Language	Private
L21	Male	30	Faculty of Ed.	1	English Language	Private
L22	Female	36	Faculty of Ed.	15	Physics	Private
L23	Male	39	Pedag. form.	6	Mathematics	Private
L24	Female	33	Faculty of Ed.	6	English Language	Public & Private
L25	Female	26	Pedag. form.	1	English Language	Private
L26	Female	36	Faculty of Ed.	9	Pre-school	Public
L27	Female	47	Faculty of Ed.	3	English Language	Private

In terms of the characteristics of the teachers who had left the profession, 19 were female and eight were male. 17 had graduated from faculties of education, while 10 had completed a pedagogical formation teaching certificate program[3]. The teaching experience of the group ranged from one to 32 years. In terms of employment history, 17 had worked in private schools, nine had worked in public schools, while one had experience in both public and private schools. The initial commitment to the teaching profession varied significantly among leavers. While many expressed strong intrinsic motivation, describing teaching as their "childhood dream" or a lifelong aspiration, others had not been so personally inspired to enter the profession. Several participants cited the influence of teachers in the family, stating that they were encouraged or inspired by their relatives' experiences. Among those who had completed pedagogical formation programs, a few had done so because of a genuine interest in teaching, whereas others had chosen a teaching career primarily due to external influences, such as their parental pressure.

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[3] These are alternative certification programs that university graduates outside faculties of education must successfully complete in order to qualify as teachers.

Table 2. Profile of the In-service Teachers in the Study

Participant	Gender	Age	Pathway into the profession	Teaching Experience	Subject Area	School Type
T1	Female	27	Faculty of Ed.	4	English Language	Private
T2	Female	38	Faculty of Ed.	18	Pre-school	Public
T3	Male	42	Faculty of Ed.	21	Physics	Public
T4	Female	26	Faculty of Ed.	5	English Language	Private
T5	Male	30	Faculty of Ed.	4	Mathematics	Public
T6	Male	32	Pedag. form.	7	Physical Ed.	Public
T7	Male	27	Faculty of Ed.	1.5	English Language	Public
T8	Female	25	Faculty of Ed.	1.5	English Language	Public
T9	Male	25	Faculty of Ed.	1	Turkish Language	Public
T10	Female	44	Pedag. form.	16	Physics	Private
T11	Female	41	Faculty of Ed.	17	Elementary	Private
T12	Female	46	Faculty of Ed.	23	Pre-school	Public
T13	Male	38	Faculty of Ed.	7	English Language	Private
T14	Female	50	Faculty of Ed.	24	Chemistry	Private
T15	Female	46	Pedag. form.	13	Pre-school	Public

Among the 15 in-service teachers who participated in the study, nine were female and six were male. Twelve had graduated from faculties of education, while the remaining three had completed a pedagogical formation teaching certificate program. The teaching experience of the group ranged from one to 24 years. In terms of employment history, six were working in private schools and nine in public schools. As with the teachers who had left, the in-service teachers also had diverse motivations for entering the profession. Many were initially passionate about teaching and viewed it as a meaningful career choice, which had often been inspired by personal experiences or influential teachers from their own education. However, some participants admitted that they had never seriously considered teaching and, in some cases, had even disrespected the profession before entering it. Despite this, the majority of these individuals reported that they had since developed a deep appreciation for teaching.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data in this phenomenological study was collected from leaving teachers and in-service teachers via two separate semi-structured interviews in order to obtain in-depth information on participants' perceptions and experiences of teacher attrition. The use of semi-structured interviews (interview guide approach) (Patton, 2014) was invaluable in this study because it enabled the researchers to build up a complete picture of the participants.

The guidelines of Cohen et al. (2018) were followed in the preparation of the interview schedules. The research questions and literature review were used to formulate the interview questions and ensure that they were open-ended and clearly stated. During the formulation of questions, complex vocabulary, double-barreled questions, and speculative inquiries were avoided (Arksey & Knight, 1999). The interview schedules were then reviewed by three experts in educational sciences, as well as by a leaving teacher who was also a doctoral candidate in the field. Minor suggestions regarding the flow, readability, clarity, and comprehensibility of the questions were provided by experts, and necessary revisions were made accordingly. An example of a revision is the question "Did you choose to become a teacher willingly?" being revised to "Can you please explain your reasons for choosing the teaching profession?" to elicit more detailed responses. Similarly, initial questions such as "What is your most recent educational degree?", "Which university and department did you graduate from?", and "When did you graduate from the university?" were, following expert recommendations, consolidated into a broader question: "Can you briefly talk about your educational background?".

To finalize the interview schedules, one pilot study with a leaving teacher and one with an in-service teacher were conducted to assess their suitability. Each pilot interview lasted approximately 60 minutes. The results of the pilot studies confirmed that the interview schedules were clear and appropriate for the collection of in-depth data, and so no further modifications were needed. The next stage was to obtain the approval of the Middle East Technical University Human Subjects Ethics Committee (Protocol no. 338-ODTU-2021).

The final versions of the interview schedules consisted of six demographic and 14 open-ended questions for leavers and five demographic and 10 open-ended questions for in-service teachers. The demographic section comprised of questions related to the participants' gender, age, educational background, teaching experience, subject area, grade level taught, school type, employment status, geographical region, and current career (for leavers). The open-ended questions explored various aspects of teaching experience gained (e.g. entering the profession, challenges faced, mentorship received, relationships with colleagues and administrators, working conditions, workload, and leaving/intention to leave the profession).

To initiate data collection, participants were contacted via phone or e-mail to schedule individual interviews. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the logistical challenges of travelling to multiple cities, most interviews were conducted via online video calls using online platforms such as Skype, Zoom, or WhatsApp. Only a few interviews were conducted in person when a participant's preferred interview location was near one of the researchers. At the beginning of the interviews, consent was obtained from participants for audio-recording before they were informed of the purpose of the study, the estimated duration of the interview, and that their responses and personal information were confidential. The interviews lasted for around 60 minutes.

Content analysis, which involved organization of large amounts of text into smaller categories derived from theoretical frameworks (Cohen et al., 2018; Patton, 2014), was used to analyze the interview data. This study followed an "inductive content analysis" approach (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008), which allowed themes to emerge from participants' narratives, rather than being predetermined by an existing framework. Before beginning the analysis, all interviews were manually transcribed by one of the researchers to ensure the data could be thoroughly examined. Two transcripts, one from a leaver and one from an in-service teacher, were selected based on their representativeness and richness. These transcripts were reviewed by three experts in the field to ensure consistency in coding and categorization as part of the inter-coder reliability process. Analysis of the remaining transcripts was conducted after 96-99% agreement had been achieved.

A structured approach was used in the coding process. This approach began with open coding, which included a thorough word-by-word examination of the transcripts and the assigning of codes to meaningful or relevant words or sentences. The next stage was the creation of MS Excel sheets upon which the codes were transferred. This was followed by axial coding in which "certain words, phrases, patterns of behavior, subjects' ways of thinking, and events that repeat and/or stand out" were identified as categories (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 173; Gibbs, 2007, p. 50). The final stage was the identification of themes based on the relevancies and connections among categories.

As with any research, this study has certain limitations. One key limitation relates to participant inclusion using the snowball sampling method, which carries the risk of a lack of diversity in the selection of participants. Leaving teachers are a highly specific group who are difficult to access since they are no longer in the school context, and their career trajectories are often unknown. As a consequence, the number of participants in this study was limited, and relying on referrals may have influenced the diversity of perspectives. However, as pointed out by Noy (2008), sequential sampling can introduce variation with the adding of new participants. Another limitation is that leavers and in-service teachers in this study did not work in the same schools, which meant that the findings do not capture shared experiences within the same school environment. If teachers from the same schools had

been compared, this could have provided deeper insights into how specific school conditions and environments influence attrition and retention.

The trustworthiness of this study was ensured by utilizing multiple strategies based on the criteria of Guba and Lincoln (1982). In order to ensure credibility, the interview schedules were presented to experts in educational sciences, pilot studies were conducted, and the inter-coder reliability process was implemented. The member-checking strategy was also used, in which data and interpretations were checked with participants, both throughout and at the end of the study, to ensure that it was felt that the codes and themes were accurate and unbiased. In order to enhance transferability, the snowball sampling method was complemented by the maximum variation sampling method, thus ensuring that a wide range of characteristics relevant to the study's purpose were represented in the participants. Additionally, detailed description of context, participants, data collection and findings was provided. The dependability and confirmability audit strategy was implemented, in which experts in the field monitored the research process to ensure transparency and accountability, while also providing feedback and suggestions.

Results

This section, which is structured into three main parts, presents the findings of the content analysis utilized to answer the research questions. The first part outlines the results related to the first research question and explores what, according to leaving and in-service teachers, are the reasons for teacher attrition. The second part reports the findings of the second research question with a focus on the timing of teacher attrition, according to Huberman's (1989) classification. Finally, the third part examines the results of the third research question, which investigates the new career paths taken by teachers after exiting the profession.

1. Reasons for Teacher Attrition

The responses to the first research question identified three key themes contributing to teacher attrition: a) pre-service education, b) work life experience, and c) career dissatisfaction and alternative opportunities. Tables 3, 4 and 5 summarize the themes, sub-themes, and categories that emerged from the inductive content analysis.

1.1. Pre-service Education

The findings indicated that pre-service education plays a significant role in teacher attrition. Two key aspects, which emerged from the analysis are the pathways into teaching and the quality of pre-service education.

Table 3. Reasons for Teacher Attrition: The Theme of Pre-service Education

Theme	Sub-themes	Categories
Pre-service education	Pathways into teaching	Graduating from a Faculty of Education
		Completing a pedagogical form. certificate program
	Quality of pre-service education	Incongruence between pre-service education and professional experience
		Teaching practicum experience

Pathways into Teaching: The majority of leavers stated that pedagogical formation certificate programs are "superficial", "perfunctory", and inadequate in terms of content. These leaving teachers argued that such short-term programs fail to provide sufficient preparation for the complexities of teaching. As a result, many participants suggested that only those who graduate from a Faculty of Education should be considered qualified to teach. One leaving teacher, who worked for a year as an English language teacher after qualifying through a pedagogical formation program, expressed her frustration as follows:

> I cannot say that I have seen any benefit from the courses I took in pedagogical formation. How can it be possible to cover four years of training in just six months? It's because I'm not a graduate of a Faculty of Education that I didn't want to be a teacher from the beginning. [L25[4]]

It was seen that leavers who qualified as teachers through a pedagogical formation certificate program felt that the accelerated nature of these programs left them feeling unqualified to be effective teachers. This lack of confidence led them to question their skills and knowledge, which in some cases contributed to their decision to resign.

In-service teachers also agreed that the pedagogical formation certificate programs are insufficient and lack content, although they also argued that alternative methods of becoming a teacher do not necessarily lead to attrition. Instead, these teachers believed that it is hands-on experience in the real classroom environment that truly makes someone a good teacher, regardless of whether they completed a certification program or graduated from a Faculty of Education. They stated that their pathway to teaching was not a cause of any feeling of being "insufficient" or "inadequate" as a teacher. The findings therefore suggest that while the pathways to education do play a role in shaping teachers' experiences, and contribute to attrition in certain cases, it does not indicate a direct impact on attrition.

Quality of Pre-service Education: The findings revealed that one contributor to attrition is the mismatch between pre-service education and actual teaching experience. Many participants from both groups reported feeling "frustrated" and "shocked" once they started the profession and realized that their pre-service experience had not adequately prepared them for actual classrooms. One of the leavers who had worked as a pre-school teacher for eight years stated that:

> The classroom environment portrayed during undergraduate studies is far from reality. For example, in university, we take courses on classroom materials and organization. However, in practice, some schools don't even have proper classrooms. Even if they do, the space is often cramped, overcrowded with students, and lacking essential resources. How am I supposed to arrange the classroom? Simply fitting in a few chairs feels like an accomplishment." [L13]

Many participants from both groups felt that the teaching practicum was too short and failed in many ways to prepare prospective teachers for the real-world challenges of the profession. Many participants described their practicum experiences as "just for show" [L1], and that they did not match "real" school environments. One participant, who is a mathematics teacher in a public school, elaborated on this issue:

> During the practicum, everything was structured. The mentor teacher was always present, and the students behaved well because they knew they were being observed. But once I started teaching on my own, I quickly realized that real classrooms are completely different. I felt completely unprepared. [T5]

The findings showed that the lack of exposure to real classroom dynamics during pre-service education left many novice teachers experiencing a "reality shock", which significantly impacted their motivation and confidence. The findings indicated that the mismatch between pre-service education and real-world teaching experiences, along with insufficient practicum experience, could be a contributing factor to the decision of teachers to exit the profession, especially when combined with other difficulties.

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[4] The direct quotations are labeled as follows: 'L' represents a leaving teacher while 'T' denotes an in-service teacher. The accompanying number corresponds to the participant's assigned identifier in the study.

1.2. Work Life Experience

The work life experience of teachers emerged as the second influencer of teacher attrition. The results indicated that first year experience, classroom management, school climate, teacher autonomy, workload, employment conditions, along with contextual and personal constraints, are all significant contributors to teacher attrition.

Table 4. Reasons for Teacher Attrition: The Theme of Work Life Experience

Theme	Sub-themes	Categories
Work life experience	First year experience	Categories
		Feelings of insufficiency
	Classroom management	Lack of mentorship
		Establishing authority in the classroom
		Responding to the needs of special needs students
		A lack of auxiliary help
	School climate	Crowded classrooms
		Relationships with the administration
		School administrator's orientation
	Teacher autonomy	Relationships with colleagues
	Workload	Excessive busyness
		Lack of leisure/personal time
		Taking a day off/sick leave
	Employment conditions	Job security
		Teacher turnover
		Schools becoming business enterprises
		Unethical practices at private schools
	Contextual and personal teacher constraints the class	The obligatory service period of public school
		Challenges caused by refugee students in
		Teacher status
		Family/care responsibilities
		Personal security concerns

First Year Experience: The first year of teaching was identified as being a significantly vulnerable period for attrition. Many participants reported feeling unprepared, overwhelmed, and inadequate in their teaching skills and self-efficacy during this period, which contributed to their early departure from the profession. They stated that they "felt incredibly inadequate" [L1] and "did not know anything" [L6], and that they "had no idea how to put university knowledge into practice" [L2]. Another participant similarly stated:

> "The first year of teaching was a nightmare for me, I used to come home crying every day, saying that 'I guess I'm not cut out to be a teacher.' It was a very difficult time for me" [L13].

A lack of mentorship further exacerbated these struggles. The results reviewed that private school teachers received no formal mentorship, while public school teachers received mentorship in the form of bureaucratic formalities, rather than meaningful support mechanisms. The participants described their experiences with mentorship as "just for show", and it made them feel "alone" and "helpless". For instance, one of the participants, who was a pre-school teacher in a private school, said:

> I think having a mentor would have made things a little easier. Would I still have come home crying every day in the first year? I don't think I would have because I would have known that other people were also having a hard time. I would have received support from my mentor. [L13]

The findings showed that mentorship provided to early career teachers is crucial for teachers' well-being and retention, particularly during their first year in the profession. A significant number of participants in the study emphasized that a lack of mentorship make teachers feel "alienated", "demotivated" and "inadequate", which could be a contributing factor in feelings of frustration and decisions to exit the profession.

Classroom Management: A large proportion of the leavers felt that classroom management was one of the biggest challenges involved in teaching, particularly during the first few years. The results revealed that, regardless of participants' views of their pre-service education, establishing classroom authority was a significant struggle. One of the leavers, who worked as an English language teacher in a private school for two years, described her struggle to establish authority:

> The moment you enter the classroom; you are alone as a teacher. You are the authority in the room and it was really difficult for me at first to establish this authority. I mean, I tried a lot of classroom management tactics; I acted like I was angry, I shouted at students to shut up, I tried to take the class under my control by piling on the agony, or I don't know, I joked and played for laughs. [L2]

Another significant issue, which emerged was a lack of training and resources to support special needs. Participants reported that they felt, although they were very eager to help every student in their classes, unequipped to meet the needs of special needs students. The wearisome impact of not having any help with special needs students in their classrooms was an issue that was mentioned by both leavers and in-service teachers at all levels (pre-school, elementary, high school, etc.), and is definitely a cause of stress, burnout and eventually, attrition. One teacher who had resigned described her experience of having more than a couple of special needs students in her pre-school classroom:

> That year was incredibly difficult for me. For the first time in my life, I experienced depression. I even went to a psychiatrist because I had no idea how to help the children in my   class. … Then summer came, the school year ended, and I started feeling better. That's when I realized that I didn't want to be a teacher. … Fortunately, that same month, some friends from the Ministry of National Education visited me and mentioned a vacancy in their office. I didn't even ask what the job was about; I just knew I no longer wanted to be a teacher. So, I resigned. [L26]

It was also discovered that pre-school teachers, in particular, need auxiliary help regarding cleaning the classrooms and helping younger students look after themselves. Additional support is also required for teachers at various grade levels with special needs students' self-maintenance and learning, as well as with other extra-curricular duties, such as hall monitoring.

Crowded classrooms emerged as an additional contributing factor to attrition, particularly in public schools. Many participants from both groups felt that classrooms are too crowded to properly maintain order, and that it is overwhelming and stressful for novice teachers when every student speaks at the same time. While in-service teachers acknowledged that classroom management was certainly challenging, they argued that it is not enough as a reason for leaving the profession. However, there is no doubt that classroom management can be the final straw for teachers who already struggling with other challenges, such as workload or lack of mentorship, and are considering resigning.

School Climate: School climate, particularly interactions with the school administrators, administrators' orientation, and interactions with colleagues, were all found to be significantly contributing factors to teacher attrition. It was revealed in the study that nearly all teachers, both leaving and in-service, face, or have faced, challenges in their relationships with their administrators. The majority of participants, who have varying characteristics in terms of the subject area they teach, their teaching experience, and the type of school where they work, reported that lack of support, excessive micromanagement, mobbing, and negative attitudes of the administrator towards teachers, are all

significant causes of attrition. The following are accounts from an English language teacher who previously worked at a pre-school, a history teacher, and another pre-school teacher:

> Even my restroom breaks were controlled. Believe me, it was my administrator who told me to go after the second class and wouldn't allow me to use the restroom during the regular class break. I'm a kindergarten teacher so I don't have official break times. You know, kindergartens don't have 10-minute breaks like other grades do. They even told me to wait until after 1p.m to use the restroom. [L1]

> There was constant pressure regarding grading… One day, I received a message stating that　　no student should receive a grade lower than 50. Of course, I was against it and I had a few students whose grades I refused to change. But the administration could access our passwords in the e-school system, so the administrator changed my password and altered the students' grades using my account. I completely lost it. I felt powerless. This was a direct violation of teacher autonomy—something absolutely unacceptable. [L14]

> The attitudes of administrators toward teachers… Just because they hold a higher position… Criticizing unfairly, being unconstructive, failing to provide guidance— these are all major issues. For instance, while I was eating during my lunch break, my administrator said, "You have two minutes, you're on duty." But I was already aware of that, and I was actively eating　　　at that moment. I wasn't chatting with colleagues or wasting time. If my administrators had been just a little more understanding and supportive, I might have stayed in the profession. 　[L1]

> Honestly, I am not happy with my administrator at this school. For example, they make decisions without consulting or informing us. When the COVID-19 pandemic first started, we were on semester break. When I returned from vacation, I couldn't find my classroom—it had been moved. I used to have my own classroom, but they piled up my belongings and placed me in another teacher's room. I was deeply upset and emotionally drained. I truly lost my motivation. My first thought was, 'Why wasn't I informed about this?' It affected me so much. Teachers should be notified about these changes in advance. This kind of administrative behavior—neglect, disregard, indifference—it's frustrating. People can only endure so much.　[T2]

As it is evident in these accounts, school administrators play a major role in teachers' motivation, well-being and, ultimately, teachers' departure from the profession. Furthermore, in-service teachers are also fully aware that their colleagues leaving to the negative school climate and that this, in itself, is a demotivating factor. Few participants reported that they witnessed colleagues leave the profession due to administrative problems. One English language teacher who is working in a private school shared:

> When I first started working in this school, one of my colleagues left mid-term because he was sick of the system. I can't say I blamed him. I saw many colleagues reach their breaking points, and sometimes I wondered when mine will come. It's demotivating. [T13]

These findings highlight that the school climate not only contributes to attrition, but that it also creates a cycle of dissatisfaction among the teachers who remain in the profession. It was also determined that school administrators' orientation can be a contributing factor in teacher attrition. The participants argued that administrators must be people who are highly qualified to become administrators: i.e. they must "come to the position with merit" [L27] and not be "appointed based on political ideologies" [L15]. For example, one of the leavers, who was a mathematics teacher at a public school, said the following:

The fact that administrators are appointed by certain political bodies to schools, such as unions, creates an environment where a particular political stance feels dominant. Even trying to remain neutral becomes uncomfortable. Many teachers experience this—there is significant pressure to join a union within the school, much more so than in other institutions. Especially in the first semester, there is a union membership count, and afterward, you start receiving persistent phone calls. If you don't take a clear stance, or if you respond cautiously, it can even escalate into workplace bullying. In this sense, school administration plays a concerning role in reinforcing this pressure. [L10]

While teacher unions in schools are generally perceived as being positive, many participants also noted that the pressure to join a particular union can create tension and mobbing, which may be a contributor to teacher attrition.

The results showed that interactions with colleagues, particularly rivalry, gossiping, and lack of collaboration, are factors in attrition, especially among private school teachers. The majority of leavers explained that teachers' rooms are "terrible places" [L2] and that teachers can be "selfish" [L26] and they do not "help each other" [T2].

The results showed that, given the significant amount of time teachers spend together each day, all participants from both groups valued a positive school climate and teacher cooperation. While the majority of the leavers emphasized that negative relationships with colleagues could contribute to attrition, current teachers believed that such issues would only lead to attrition if this negativity became extreme.

Teacher Autonomy: The findings revealed that a significant number of leavers believed that a significant contributor to their decision to leave teaching was not having autonomy regarding instruction, curriculum, student discipline, the power of sanction, interactions with parents, and grading. A number of participants particularly expressed their disappointment in not having classroom autonomy, with one complaining that "this was not the definition of being a teacher for me" [L14]. Similarly, another leaving English language teacher explained how she would have loved to have been able to tailor lessons for students' particular characteristics and interests:

I would have loved to have been able to prepare something for my own students, for every particular class, or to be able to choose readers, but my options were very limited, and my teaching seemed very inefficient. Yes, the child was learning in a way, but everything seemed to be very trite. … I wished I could have made my own decisions in my own classroom. [L2]

Although in-service teachers did not indicate teacher autonomy as being a primary factor in attrition, they did identify a lack of autonomy in terms of teacher-parent interactions as a major factor in attrition. Many participants referred to parental interference as "the biggest challenge that comes to mind" [L2] about the profession, and as something which is "very frustrating" [L8]. Participants felt that parents try to interfere with everything, from grading to instructional methods, thus limiting teachers' authority, especially in private schools where school administrators sometimes side with parents instead of standing up for the teachers. One teacher currently working in a private school commented that:

Parents often question every detail; why I gave this homework, why I graded that way, why their child didn't get a special privilege. It's exhausting. And the worst part… Administrators rarely defend us. They want to keep parents happy at all costs, even if it means disregarding teachers' authority. [T4]

Another in-service teacher, whose colleague left the profession, said that "one of my friends in the school could not take this toxic environment anymore. He was a mathematics teacher and found a job in a bank. I am actually happy for him" [T14]. The findings showed that while autonomy may not

be the primary reason of attrition; a lack of perceived authority, freedom, and poor support can be a significant contributor to attrition.

Workload: The results showed that excessive workload is a major factor in teacher attrition; with teachers being given excessive responsibilities both during and after school hours, and having little personal or rest time. The majority of participants in both public and private schools described their workload as "unmanageable". One leaver, who worked in a private school, stated that:

> The workload was increasing in every way. It wasn't just about going in and out of the classroom; due to the pandemic, everything was shifted online. We had to convert the entire book into digital format and create animated slides. I even had to learn animation. I left because such unexpected tasks, which were not part of the original remit, were also too demanding and exhausting for me. [L8]

For some participants, the inability to take personal or sick leave without repercussions was a defining factor. A former mathematics teacher, who worked at a public school [L10], described how he had to accompany a family member undergoing surgery at a hospital. Although he informed the administrator in advance, he received a rude call from the administrator questioning his absence. He explained that this lack of empathy was the tipping point that led him to leave the profession. Similarly, a private school teacher [L16] explained that when her father passed away in another city, she was barely given any time off for the funeral, leaving her with the sense that she hadn't time to grieve. Another private school leaver [L1] recalled that after falling seriously ill and being taken to the hospital by ambulance, she was called by the administrator just an hour later and reminded about her next class, with no regard for her health. These cases highlight that while public school teachers may have more rights on paper, administrative attitudes and lack of support still influence attrition. Moreover, private school teachers, who often lack individual and formal rights, face even greater pressures, making these teacher attrition factors particularly significant for this group.

In-service teachers agreed with these concerns, emphasizing just how much they struggle with the workload. One in-service teacher, working in a private school, said:

> People assume we work from 8 to 5, but it is far from the reality. After teaching all day, we're still expected to grade assignments, attend meetings, call parents, and deal with administrative paperwork. I barely have time to rest before another awful day starts. [T1]

Employment Conditions: The results revealed that employment conditions, especially in private schools, have a profound influence on teacher attrition. Participants complained that because teachers are laid off in case of sickness or pregnancy, there is little or no job security, thus increasing the teacher attrition rate. Many leavers felt that schools function more like business enterprises than educational institutions, and that it is these unethical practices that led to their decision to leave. For example, one of the leavers, who worked at a private school [L1], explained how the contract of a colleague being diagnosed with cancer was not renewed at the end of the year because it was felt that her treatment and condition would cause her to miss classes due to exhaustion and a lack of energy. Another leaver who also worked at a private school stated that:

> The school administration openly prioritizes parent and customer satisfaction. So much so that we are told during the in-service training that: 'A parent may be just a parent to you, but for us, they are a customer.' When you hear this… over time, you begin to accept it—no matter how much it contradicts your ideology, background, or the education you received. [L13]

In-service teachers also reflected on these conditions, noting that witnessing high turnover rates among their colleagues affected their own morale. One teacher who works in a private school stated:

> "Every year, we lose good teachers; not because they don't love teaching, but because they cannot keep up with this chaos. It's exhausting. Watching them, we wonder, when it will be our turn?" [T4].

It is clear that mismanagement and unethical practices at private schools are significant contributors to teacher attrition. Participants lamented how their employment conditions made them feel worthless and pessimistic about their future, thus provoking them to leave.

Contextual and Personal Constraints: While the reasons given above for teacher attrition were common across participants, there were others that were more personal and mentioned by only few individuals, yet remaining significant for teacher attrition.

One such influence was the obligatory service period of public school teachers, of which both leavers and in-service teachers described their feelings of isolation and emotional exhaustion. Many teachers who were first assigned to a rural or culturally different region describe their feelings of "imprisonment" and their struggles with adjusting to a new place while missing their loved ones. One of the leavers stated:

> They are [young novice teachers] sent to east; "imprisoned" for three to four years. I say "imprisoned"- I'm sorry, but they can easily be imprisoned by depression when their familiar social environment is replaced by an unfamiliar place. They suddenly find themselves in an isolated setting, far from the social life they have known… Especially for those who grew up in the west, where the culture is vastly different from that of the east. You are forced to completely change your way of life and adapt to an entirely new reality. When assigned to a village school, for instance, sometimes you are the only teacher there and have to sometimes be the school's administrator. It can also be really hard to be accepted by the local community. [L5]

As Türkiye is currently hosting millions of refugees from neighboring countries such as Syria, Iraq, Iran, and other countries such as Pakistan, the country faces unique educational challenges (The International Organization for Migration, n.d.) with the increasing number of refugees enrolled in public schools. Many leavers and current teachers explained how they were deeply disturbed and demotivated due to the majority of the students having troubles at home, such as their fathers being involved in smuggling, or desperate economic conditions. Many participants also witnessed "refugees unlawfully approaching underage female students in schools" [L18]. Another serious problem stated by both leavers and in-service teachers was that many of the refugees often don't speak Turkish or do not have the necessary educational background; despite being placed in upper grades because of their age. Participants explained how this damages the classroom dynamics and greatly increases teachers' workload and responsibilities to the class. Having too many refugee students in classrooms was cited by several participants in their decision to leave, due to it being a cause of serious problems and stress, in addition to the other instructional problems they face.

Participants from both groups also highlighted that they were extremely motivated to teach all students in the classroom, regardless of their ethnicities, but were unable to do so effectively because a lack of rules and regulations with the integration of immigrants into the Turkish education system was creating chaotic school and classroom environments, all of which amounted to yet another cause of stress for teachers. This finding indicated that, although having many refugee students in classrooms may not be a direct cause on teacher attrition, it is likely to be a contributing reason for teachers who are already lacking support and additional resources.

A number of leavers in this study cited employment status as a reason for leaving the profession. These participants, who were employed as contracted teachers rather than permanent staff, explained how they felt disadvantaged due to differences in rights and working conditions. While official regulations grant contracted teachers many of the same rights as permanent teachers, participants perceived their status as limiting and insecure. These teachers complained about the parents of the students not taking them seriously, colleagues sometimes mocking them, and their salary being significantly lower than that of a permanent teacher, making it difficult to make ends meet. For these teachers, it was this sense of instability and lack of professional recognition that were the main reasons for them leaving.

Family responsibilities influenced the decision of some leavers. A couple of female participants explained how, for them, becoming a mother and childcare responsibilities made staying in the profession impractical as getting a job would mean that their entire teacher salary would go to child care. This was the reason that one of the participants gave for her decision, while another expressed her desire to go back to the profession after her child starts pre-school.

Finally, personal security concerns related to a traumatic experience was the main reason for leaving the profession for a mathematics teacher assigned to a southeastern province of Türkiye:

> Rockets were falling on the Syrian side—about three times a day. They were landing dangerously close to us; one even struck a girls' dormitory just 200 meters from the school. Many of my students' homes were damaged, and 20 to 30 people lost their lives. Experts from the provincial defense came to train us on what to do when a rocket hit—how to protect the students. I was in shock and scared for myself, as well as for the students. There were attacks every single day. The windows would shake, and we would rush to press the kids against the walls, keeping them away from the windows. After that, you can't just act like nothing happened—I couldn't go back to teaching as if everything was normal. [L18]

Although this participant's reason for leaving was unique, it is important to highlight this experience. This participant emphasized that, no matter how much a person wants to be a good teacher and contribute to educating children in disadvantaged areas, the feeling of being in personal danger will always be more important, thus leading to his decision to leave the profession. Overall, these findings show that while systemic issues, like workload or a lack of administrative support, play a dominant role in attrition, such external challenges can also have a considerable influence on teacher attrition.

1.3. Career Dissatisfaction and Alternative Opportunities

The results revealed that monotony, a lack of challenge within career steps and opportunities for professional development, the status of the teaching profession, salary and compensation, and the pull of other job opportunities, all contributed to the teachers' decision to leave.

Table 5. The Reasons for Teacher Attrition: The Theme of Career Dissatisfaction and Alternative Opportunities

Theme	Sub-themes
Career dissatisfaction and alternative opportunities	Monotony
	A lack of challenge within the career steps and opportunities for professional development
	Status of the teaching profession
	Salary and compensation
	Other job opportunities

Monotony: While many participants felt that an advantage of the teaching profession was that it allowed them to stay energetic and creative, as they get to improve themselves and their teaching methods/skills, there were few leavers who stated that the main reason for them leaving teaching was monotony. These participants, regardless of subject area or school type, found teaching the same content year after year repetitive and uninspiring. One participant described feeling "tired of always doing the same thing" [L13], while another said: "Teaching the same thing over and over again feels soulless; I cannot imagine myself doing it for another 10 to 15 years" [L24].

In-service teachers also acknowledged that the repetitive nature of teaching could be discouraging for some, and believed that school support and opportunities for instructional innovation are required to maintain motivation. One in-service teacher reflected:

> I've seen colleagues struggle with burnout because they felt like they were just doing the same thing again and again. It is not actually the case, I believe, but without collegial support and teamwork, I can understand why some would feel like that and leave. [T4]

A Lack of Challenge within the Career Steps and Opportunities for Professional Development: Many leavers expressed their frustration regarding the absence of well-defined career steps and opportunities for professional development. They believed that the teaching profession lacks challenging career steps that present opportunities for effective professional development. Moreover, the belief of these participants that their developmental efforts were not at all appreciated played a part in their decision to depart [L10]. One of the leavers, who worked in a private school, explained:

> Teachers are absolutely not encouraged or allowed to improve. I worked at ... [a very prestigious school that is known for valuing quality education and for its highly qualified teachers], which is known for valuing quality education, but it is definitely not like that. They make us receive in-service trainings that do not help us improve at all, nothing else is allowed. The only job of the teacher was to stand before the disciples like a shepherd. It's quantity over quality for them. [L1]

Many participants agreed that the career steps in the teaching profession had not been well-thought out and do not encourage teachers to develop themselves professionally. One physics teacher working in a public school stated:

> Even if you are passionate about teaching, it is frustrating when you realize that your hard work won't be appreciated. Some of my friends left because they felt they were not progressing in a meaningful way. [T3]

The findings showed that the lack of structured career steps and meaningful professional development opportunities were a contributor for some teachers to teacher attrition, and it also reduced the motivation and job-satisfaction of in-service teachers.

Status of the Teaching Profession: The vast majority of the participants from both groups believed that the reputation of the teaching profession and the social status of teachers have been declining in society. A significant number of participants shared several incidents from their daily lives where they were treated disrespectfully by others. They felt that people have a misconception about teachers: that they are low-paid, but it's a job that anyone can do and that it's easy money because you get a three-month holiday during the summer. The majority of the participants were very demoralized by this depiction, and felt like "slaves" who "have no personal rights and who do not see any value in the society" [L13].

Most leavers argue that while they began their careers positively motivated to influence the younger generation, they had become disillusioned after realizing that their contributions are not actually valued by others, and so they decided to leave the profession. Moreover, it was pointed out that as the cutoff score to enter the faculties of education is very low, the majority of new teachers are only teachers because their scores in the university entrance exam were not enough for them to select another faculty. One of the leavers said:

> People often assume that we chose the teaching department simply because our university entrance scores were only high enough for teaching. They don't consider that we might have chosen teaching voluntarily. I believe the admission score should be higher because too many people enter the field just because their scores limit them to teaching. When that happens, it becomes completely normal to hear comments like 'It's okay'—as if they are trying to console you—when you tell someone, 'I am a teacher.' [L7]

In-service teachers also echoed these feelings, noting that they often feel undervalued. One teacher stated:

> "We give so much of ourselves to this job, but no one sees it. I have seen many colleagues look for other jobs; they wanted to be respected, even if they earn the same, they chose to leave" [T6].

The results indicated that a significant proportion of participants from both groups feel unvalued and underrated, which eventually cause frustration and lead them to switch careers where they can feel more appreciated.

Salary and Compensation: Salary and compensation was one of the most common reasons of attrition according to both groups of participants. Many leavers stated that the main reason of their departure was the low salary, which they called "chickenfeed" and "barely enough" for their personal needs [L1], and it was very poor compensation for all of the hard work and effort they put in [L8]. Similarly, many in-service teachers described how they struggle to make ends meet each month and so often consider leaving. They also acknowledged that their former colleagues who left had made a sensible decision, especially if they had found better-paying jobs. One leaver explained that he loved teaching, but had to think about his future, and it would be "silly" to stay in teaching when he can earn more and work less [L17].

Participants further highlighted that teacher salaries in both public and private schools are not able to keep up with high inflation. The situation is particularly severe in private schools where many institutions often illegally pay teachers less than the minimum wage.

Other Job Opportunities: The results also indicated the availability of higher-paying jobs or better working conditions is a contributor to teacher attrition. Participants from both groups acknowledged that alternative career paths often offer higher salaries, more flexible work schedules, and a decreased workload. Although almost all of the participants still believed that teaching has sentimental value for them, and they started the profession mainly for intrinsic reasons, after working for a while, they eventually decided that their well-being and personal needs were a priority. An in-service teacher said that she sees more teachers leave for alternative jobs every year, which makes those who remain wonder if they should perhaps do the same [T11].

Overall, the results of the study revealed that teachers usually do not leave because of a single reason or an isolated incident. Instead, many of the struggles abovementioned accumulate during a teacher's career, whether short or long, and this will eventually lead to a decision to depart. The results also showed that some of the reasons might be particularly influential on teachers' decision. For example, while the relationships with the administrator or low salary are found to have a direct influence on attrition, having refugees in the classroom might be a triggering influence. It is likely that it is the simple addition of factors that is the ultimate cause of attrition.

2. When Do Teachers Leave?

In the present study, Huberman's (1989) classification of *Professional Life Cycle of Teachers* was used as the theoretical framework for the second research question regarding the timing of teacher attrition. Table 6 summarizes, in relation to the Huberman's (1989) framework, the periods of attrition of the leavers who participated in the study.

Table 6. The Teaching Experience of Leavers in relation to Huberman's (1989) Framework of Professional Life Cycle of Teachers

Phases Based on the Professional Life Cycle of Teachers	Years of Experience	f
Survival/Discovery	1-3	14
Stabilization	4-6	8
Experimentation/Reassessment	7-18	4
Serenity/Conservatism	19-30	0
Disengagement	31-40	1

Huberman suggested that the first three years are the "career entry phase", in which teachers may experience either an easy or difficult start to their career. If the beginning is perceived to be easy, this leads to the discovery period in which teachers enjoy having students, a classroom and colleagues, while a difficult beginning leads to a period of survival in which teachers face a reality shock and a variety of struggles. In this study, it was found that 14 teachers left in the period between the first to third years of their careers. The findings revealed that participants in the study who felt anxious, panicked, and inadequate at the beginning of their career had a difficult career entry and so decided to leave teaching. As one in-service teacher observed:

> I have seen several new teachers leave after their first year. They were passionate and young, but without proper support, they felt lost. We also struggled, but we stayed … We were lucky to have good colleagues and administrators at that time. [T14]

The second phase, spanning the forth to sixth years of teaching, is referred to as the "stabilization" phase. According to Huberman (1989), this is considered the most stable period regarding teacher attrition, as teachers in this phase tend to develop professional commitment and abandon alternative career prospects. However, eight leavers in this study exited the profession in their supposed 'stabilization' phase. Participants reported that, despite overcoming the initial challenges of their careers, workload and school climate remained as significant causes of stress. While Huberman (1989) referred to this phase as being a period of "stabilization", the findings of the present study suggest that attrition rates can still remain high during this period due to multiple contributing factors. Additionally, a few leavers and in-service teachers suggested that this was because some teachers do not quit immediately, but instead wait for a few years hoping that things will get better. However, when they realize nothing really changes, they eventually leave.

For the third phase, which spans between seven to 18 years of teaching, Huberman (1989) classified two possible trajectories: "experimentation/activism" or "reassessment/self-doubt". In the "experimentation/activism" phase, teachers may experiment with different instructional materials, or they might want to take on additional roles and responsibilities. During the "reassessment/self-doubt" phase, teachers may feel a sense of monotony, and have concerns that the possibilities of starting a new career are fading away. In the present study, four leavers left the profession between the seventh to 18th years of their career. These participants argued that they loved teaching initially, but then decided to leave because of the harsh working conditions, and the fact that there were other jobs they can do where they can earn more, or have more flexible schedules.

For the fourth phase, which spans the 19th to 30th years of teaching, Huberman (1989) suggested that there are two trajectories: "serenity/relational distance" or "conservatism". Teachers who are in the "serenity" phase may feel bored, but are relaxed as they accept the situation. In contrast, teachers who are in the "conservatism" phase may feel more pessimistic about the younger generation, believe that teachers are not sufficiently valued in society, and so have reduced commitment to teaching. None of the teachers in the present study left the profession during this phase.

The final phase, which spans the period between the 31st and 40th year of teaching, is referred to as the "disengagement" phase. In this phase, teachers may feel either serene, or bitter, as they eventually disengage from the profession. In the present study, there was only one teacher who left after teaching for 32 years. This participant explained that, while he loved being a teacher for intrinsic reasons throughout his career, he ultimately decided to leave after so many years due to the changes in the education system. More specifically, he was bitter about the evolving teacher and student profiles. He also emphasized that leaving the profession after many years is particularly challenging, as finding another job in mid-life is far more difficult than for younger teachers who leave early in their careers and can pursue training for alternative careers more easily. Furthermore, it was noted that only those with an additional source of financial income could afford to leave teaching after so many years in the profession.

Overall, the results have shown that in the present study, more than half of the leavers left the profession in the first three years of their career; a considerable number left in the following four to six years, and the number of leavers decreased mid-career and towards retirement. Due to the study employing a qualitative approach with purposive sampling and a limited sample size, it does not seek to generalize the results to the broader teacher population. Instead, the aim of the study is to provide rich and detailed insights into the specific experiences of the participants. The hope is that the valuable perspectives provided by participants can highlight the underlying patterns, which contribute to teacher attrition. Considering the findings of the study regarding the reasons of teacher attrition, it is of note that the majority of leavers were novice teachers, and thus reported struggles such as the receiving of mentorship, classroom management, or administrative support.

3. Possible Career Paths of Leavers

To address the third research question, leavers who participated in the present study were asked about their career trajectories following their departure from teaching. The findings revealed that six leavers have continued working within the field of education, 12 leavers have transitioned to careers outside the education sector, and nine leavers are currently not employed.

The results showed that there were few leavers who would like start teaching again one day, particularly if the working conditions were to be improved, because they loved the core of being a teacher. However, many felt that the systemic issues within the profession outweighed their passion for teaching. Similarly, the participants who still work within the field of education stated that they loved teaching for intrinsic reasons, but they had to prioritize their own needs. These participants argued that they are now happier because they still work with students in a way, without dealing with the struggles of the profession, and as they earn more money with flexible working conditions. They also mentioned that their current roles allow them to focus more on individualized student support, which they found fulfilling. One participant explained:

> I still work with students, but now I do it on my own terms. I don't deal with grading, administrative pressure, or unrealistic expectations. I can actually focus on helping students where they need it most. [L19]

The participants who are now working outside the field of education generally agreed that they would never go back to teaching, although they admitted they sometimes miss their relationships with students. Many of these participants said they were "glad" that they left teaching as they now earn more and enjoyed better working conditions. For instance, two participants stated: "I would not go back to teaching unless I have to. ... I don't think I will ever want to experience the same things again." [L2] and "I didn't know what the job was like. If I had known, I would have never taken it" [L18]. Additionally, several respondents highlighted that their new careers provided opportunities for the professional growth that they felt was limited in teaching. Table 7 demonstrates the career trajectories of the leavers who participated in the study.

Table 7. Career Trajectories of Leavers

Participant	Gender	Profession after Leaving Teaching
L1	Female	OUT: Translator at an embassy
L2	Female	Marketing specialist in the cinema industry
L3	Female	Not employed
L4	Male	Not employed: Pursuing graduate studies
L5	Female	IN: Part time in Guidance Research Center, Preparing for KPSS
L6	Female	Not employed: Preparing for KPSS
L7	Female	Not employed: Preparing for KPSS
L8	Female	Not employed: Stay at home mother
L9	Male	OUT: Working at an embassy
L10	Male	IN: Research assistant
L11	Female	Not employed
L12	Female	OUT: Pilates instructor
L13	Female	OUT: Flight attendant
L14	Female	Not employed: Studying at university
L15	Male	OUT: Store owner
L16	Female	Not employed
L17	Male	OUT: Working at a bank
L18	Male	OUT: Air-traffic controller
L19	Female	IN: Private tutor
L20	Female	OUT: Worked at a bank and as a yoga instructor
L21	Male	OUT: Working at a medical company
L22	Female	Not employed: Stay at home mother
L23	Male	IN: Publishing, YouTube content creator, private tutor
L24	Female	OUT: Social media content creator, TV host, handcraft tutor
L25	Female	OUT: Data analyst
L26	Female	IN: Working in research and development in MoNE
L27	Female	IN: Faculty member at a university

Note: IN refers to professions related to education sector, OUT refers to professions unrelated to education sector

The findings are intriguing because they indicate that the leavers who received a thorough education, and were once highly motivated to become teachers, now believed that they would never go back to teaching in any circumstances. Such negative teaching experiences only underscores the seriousness of the situation, and the importance of teacher attrition research in exploring teacher opinions and views to combat attrition.

Discussion and Conclusion

The results of this study highlight the complex and multifaceted nature of teacher attrition in Türkiye, and so reveal the interplay between structural, cultural, and economic factors that influence the career decisions made by teachers. This section discusses the results of the study, in relation to the corpus, to better understand teacher attrition.

One of the results of this study was that it found that many teachers struggled with the transition from pre-service education to in-service teaching, some even describing it as a "reality shock", and so felt unprepared for the realities of teaching and other classroom challenges. While this finding aligns with international studies on teacher attrition (e.g., Buchanan, 2012; Huberman, 1989; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002; Veenman, 1984), the situation in the Turkish context presents distinct challenges for teachers. As pedagogical formation certification programs create a gap between theoretical knowledge and practical classroom experience, it is often difficult for novice teachers to adapt to the profession. Support is provided by the conclusion of Carver-Thomas and Darling-

Hammond (2019), which is that when other factors are held constant, teachers who completed an alternative certification program are 25% more prone to resign from teaching when compared to teachers who qualified in more traditional ways (e.g. teacher education programs in universities). Moreover, many pre-service teachers, whether graduated from a faculty of education or having completed a pedagogical certification program, gain false expectations of what their teaching environment will be like due to the unrealistic classroom contexts presented on their training. The result is that they face with various challenges that lead them to leave the profession. This is particularly an issue for new teachers in disadvantaged areas.

That said, the results regarding what are the pathways to teaching and are the impacts on teacher attrition, remains contested. While some participants in this study felt that their alternative pathway to the profession did affect their decision to leave, other in-service teachers expressed their confidence in their abilities and skills as teachers. This discrepancy also raises questions about the quality of these certification programs. Although some teachers are satisfied with the pre-service education they received in pedagogical formation programs, the existence of these programs are creating a glut of teachers in Türkiye. Approximately 40,000 pre-service teachers graduated from a faculty of education in 2022-2023 (Council of Higher Education [YÖK], n.d.), and there were a total number of approximately 250,000 students in faculties of education in the 2023-2024 academic year (YÖK, n.d.). In addition, almost 80,000 graduates annually receive their qualifications through a pedagogical formation program (Çakır et al., 2024). However, the hiring capacity of the public schools remains around 40,000 teachers each year. This imbalance creates a highly competitive job market, unstable positions in private schools, and dissatisfaction among teachers and teacher candidates.

Another key driver of attrition found in this study is the negative influence of school administration and organizational climate. Many participants reported a lack of administrative support, excessive interference and micromanagement, a top-down hierarchy, and lack of leadership and guidance as significant influences on teacher attrition. These results align with previous studies in literature (e.g., Borman & Maritza Dowling, 2008; Den Brok et al., 2017; Glazer, 2018; Gonzalez et al., 2008; Karadal et al., 2018; Mason, 2017; Troyer, 2018); but also acquire unique inferences in Türkiye, where participants argue that school administrators might be favored and assigned based on their political orientation. Another issue raised by participants is that teachers may feel pressured and decide to leave the profession in public schools in Türkiye where political influences shape the decisions made by administrators. In private schools, administrators may function more as business managers than educators, being much more concerned with prioritizing 'customer satisfaction' over teachers' rights and well-being. This was also reported as being the case by participants in the current study, as well as being highlighted in other research (e.g. Çakır et al., 2024; Şahin, 2022).

A number of leavers also emphasized that them having almost no autonomy on their classrooms or instruction was a lesson in the realities of teaching, which does not match their previous "idealistic" views. The rigid, exam-oriented structure of Türkiye's education system limits teachers' ability to innovate in the classroom, reducing their role to mere implementers of a standardized curriculum. Similar to the results of the present study, a few previous studies have also shown that lack of autonomy results in teachers feeling disconnected from the profession (Buchanan, 2012). This is particularly evident when there is a discrepancy between teachers' initial perceptions of the profession and their actual experiences in practice (Newberry & Allsop, 2017). In Türkiye's context, this is further heightened because of high parental involvement, where teachers often find themselves in conflicts between their work, parental demands and judgment. These tensions, combined with lack of administrative support and top-down hierarchy, create a sense of dissatisfaction, leading to teacher attrition.

Workload emerged in this study as another major influencer of teacher attrition. Participants explained that teachers are overworked, with excessive responsibilities including administrative tasks, hall-monitoring, grading, homework checking, all of which makes balancing professional and personal lives a struggle. Similar concerns have been widely documented in the literature as well (e.g., Buchanan,

2012; Day et al., 2006; Den Brok et al., 2017; Harmsen et al., 2018; Khawary & Ali, 2015; Mason & Poyatos Matas, 2015; Newberry & Allsop, 2017; Sammons et al., 2007; Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014; Sutcher et al., 2016). While most participants viewed workload as overwhelming, some specifically identified lesson planning, grading, and homework checking as particularly onerous. Unlike administrative tasks, which are only extraneous burdens that can be reduced, lesson planning, assessment, and feedback are essential aspects of teaching and instruction. Many leavers and in-service teachers also compared teaching to other professions, arguing that employees in other fields can leave work behind, whereas teachers often continue working after school hours. While this is a valid concern, teaching extends beyond classroom, requiring constant preparation and evaluation. Therefore, it needs to be acknowledged by teachers that, while bureaucratic demands might be minimized, certain responsibilities are intrinsic to the profession.

One of the key results, which emerged in the current study, is job security, particularly in private schools, which increasingly operate as business enterprises. Many participants reported experiencing unethical practices being practiced at such schools, including short-term contracts, salary fraud, and lack of benefits, as being their reasons of attrition. Given that private school teachers in Türkiye fall under Labor Law No. 4857, rather than Teacher Profession Law, their rights and employment conditions are less regulated, leaving them vulnerable to unstable working conditions (Çakır et al., 2024). In public schools, job security is stronger, but the obligatory service was identified as an influence on teacher attrition. Assignment to geographically isolated regions, or to disadvantaged schools, made adaptation to the profession particularly difficult, and lead to attrition for some teachers. This result aligns with previous research arguing that teachers in rural or difficult-to-staff areas tend to leave because of isolation, adaptation problems, and limited resources (e.g. Billingsley, 2004; Buchanan, 2010; Buchanan et al., 2013; Elfers et al., 2009; Güvendir, 2017; OECD, 2005; Roberts, 2015).

Another factor unique to Türkiye is the placement of refugees in schools. Concerns were raised about the lack of clear policies and regulations regarding these students' integration into the education system, insufficient teacher training for handling language and cultural barriers, and increased classroom management challenges, all of which all contribute to the decisions of teachers to resign. Research in other contexts also suggests that schools with increased number of minority students, particularly in disadvantaged areas where teachers do not receive support and/or specialized training, experience higher attrition rates (Wagner, 1993).

While the current study found well-documented influences of attrition such as workload, salary, or job security, a less-explored influence, which also emerged was the perceived monotony of the work. Several participants stated that their reason of leaving was mainly how boring and monotonous they found teaching. However, no direct links between boredom and teacher attrition were found the literature review. Undoubtedly due to perceptions of teaching as being monotonous is highly subjective; and while some people perceive teaching as repeating the same thing over and over for years on end, others perceive teaching as being very creative and open for improvement.

Another less expected result of this study was that almost all participants from both groups argued that working in a less equipped school actually motivated them as they felt more fulfilled in helping those students to explore their potential and increase their awareness. This contrasts with existing literature, which suggests a that lack of school resources or facilities can trigger attrition, especially in disadvantaged regions (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Mason & Poyatos Matas, 2015; Solomonson et al., 2018). This contrast may mean that while participants in this study valued their professional fulfillment by working in a disadvantaged school, the cumulative burden of other challenges outweighed this motivation, leading to attrition.

The lack of challenge in career steps and opportunities for professional development was identified as being an influence on attrition. Some participants believed that, no matter how hard they work, they would remain in the same position without recognition, and so would not be encouraged to grow professionally and personally. This sense of stagnation decreased the motivation of the participants and contributed to their decision to leave the profession. Career progression is significant in teaching; as argued by Day (2012), and when career advancement is limited, teachers may feel disengaged and demotivated, thus increasing the likelihood of attrition. Similarly, participants in this study also found existing career steps and professional development opportunities ineffective, describing them as "not meaningful for personal and professional growth". Financial concerns further compounded these issues. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) data indicate that teacher salaries increase with experience in many countries, whereas there is minimal difference in Türkiye between a new teacher's salary and that of a teacher with 15 years of experience (OECD, 2020). Results showed that this lack of financial incentives may also discourage teachers from staying in the profession (Demirel Yazıcı & Cemaloğlu, 2022).

Another notable result of the study was that many participants left, or considered leaving, the profession because they felt unappreciated and undervalued by society. This aligns with global trends in which the status of teaching has been declining (Borman & Maritza Dowling, 2008; Schleicher, 2019b; Welch et al., 2017). Participants believed that society perceives teachers as being underpaid and overworked, thus contributing to the decreasing attractiveness of the profession and leading teachers to seek higher-paying and more respected jobs (Goldring et al., 2014; Johnson & Birkeland, 2004; Keçeci & Keskinkılıç Kara, 2023).

A low salary and lack of compensation was underscored in the present study as key reasons of teacher attrition. Many participants, both from public and private schools, emphasized that financial struggles played a major role in their decision to leave. This result is consistent with prior research emphasizing low salary and lack of compensation as being major influences on attrition (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Hancock & Scherff, 2010; Khawary & Ali, 2015; Loeb & Beteillie, 2009; Mason & Poyatos Matas, 2015; Olsen & Anderson, 2007; Solomonson et al., 2018). However, other previous studies have suggested that low salary and lack of compensation are reasons of attrition only for teachers who are not intrinsically motivated to teach (Ashiedu & Scott-Ladd, 2012). Interestingly, this was not the case in the present study, in which the participants were generally eager to become teachers for intrinsic reasons and were thus committed to their students. However, these teachers made the decision to leave because they had serious difficulties providing for their families on a teacher's salary.

The availability of alternative career opportunities was also critical in teacher attrition. Many leavers stated that they left the profession once they found better-paying jobs, while many in-service teachers stated that they would leave for better alternatives. These findings are confirmed by certain studies, which found that having alternative job opportunities can be a reason of attrition, regardless of a teachers' initial commitment to teaching (Ingersoll, 2001; Olsen & Anderson, 2007). Moreover, previous studies suggested that having a master's degrees or specific degrees has an influence on attrition as those teachers are more sought after in the job market (Borman & Maritza Dowling, 2008; Mastekaasa, 2011; With, 2017). The results showed that, with the rise of alternative career opportunities, particularly in corporate training, publishing, or private tutoring, many teachers are looking for higher-paying and more flexible professions that allow for career progression.

With respect to periods of teacher attrition, the results of the present study showed that the attrition rate is highest in the early years of a teachers' career. This result aligns with previous studies that suggest that the first five years of a teacher's career is the riskiest period (e.g., Allen, 2005; Borman & Maritza Dowling, 2008; Glazer, 2018; Hancock & Scherff, 2010; Huberman, 1989; Ingersoll, 2003; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Solomonson et al., 2018). However, unlike other studies which argue that teacher attrition has a U-shape curve, in which the highest rate is among younger teachers at the beginning of their career, the lowest towards mid-career, and increases again towards retirement (Arnold et al., 1993; Department of education and Science, 1990; as cited in Macdonald, 1999; Ingersoll, 2001), the current study found that the attrition rate decreases after mid-career. It is suggested that is largely because of the national economic instability and that teachers believe it would be difficult to find another job after so many years in a single profession. Moreover, while the job market is so unstable, and there is almost no job security in the private sector, teaching, especially in public schools in Türkiye, which is seen as a "guaranteed" civil service job, is very difficult to walk away from, particularly as many teachers have no extra savings or other income.

Finally, the results regarding career trajectories highlight how many leavers completely distanced from the profession, and so look to the better salaries, career development, and flexible working conditions available in other fields. Even those who remained in the field of education preferred alternative roles that allowed them to work with students, but outside the school context, where there are systemic struggles. This aligns with previous research arguing that attrition is often influenced by structural issues, rather than lack of passion and commitment (Ingersoll, 2001; Johnson & Birkeland, 2004).

Suggestions

This section provides several suggestions for practice and for further research based on the results of the present study and of the related literature. Firstly, the following can be suggested for practical implementation:

Improving Teacher Education and Preparation:
- The pedagogical formation certificate programs should be more selective, require higher completion thresholds, and include structured teaching practicum to better prepare teacher candidates.

- Pre-service education should provide more realistic teaching experiences, such as where in-service teachers share their experiences with pre-service teachers.

- The teaching practicum should start earlier in pre-service education and offer wider experiences in various types of school (public/private, city center/rural).

Supporting Novice Teachers in Schools:
- Schools should implement formal mentorship for novice teachers, both in public and private schools, ensuring mentors are trained and available for regular, face-to-face guidance.

- Novice teachers should receive structured support in classroom management strategies to increase their confidence and reduce stress.

- Schools/administrators should allocate tasks effectively to prevent excessive workload, ensuring that teachers focus on instruction, rather than last minute tasks and administrative burdens.

Enhancing School Conditions and Leadership:

- Where possible, class sizes should be reduced, and additional staff or auxiliary help should be assigned to classrooms with special needs students.

- School administrators must be highly qualified, and appointed based on merit, in order to create and maintain a positive school climate.

- Teachers should receive in-service training regarding their interpersonal skills, collaboration and teamwork skills to enhance collegial support and teamwork.

- Teachers should have more flexibility in instruction, course planning, and assessment methods while maintaining accountability.

- Policies should ensure that private school teachers receive fair wages and legal protections, with mechanisms to monitor compliance.

- Experienced, rather than novice teachers, should be prioritized for assignments in rural and disadvantaged areas as part of mandatory service. Teachers who originate from these regions could be given the opportunity to work in specific schools, as their familiarity with the local culture may enable them to connect with students more effectively. To make these placements more appealing, and to increase teacher motivation, a "total compensation" approach could be implemented. This might include higher salaries, housing assistance, access to counseling and psychological support, and the organization of social and cultural activities.

- Clear regulations regarding the placement of refugee students in schools should be established as a matter of urgency. These students require both academic and psychological support to facilitate their integration into the education system. Additional language courses could be incorporated into their educational program, along with tailored support programs to help refugee students better integrate.

Improving Teachers' Status in Society:

- The threshold for entering the faculties of education should be raised to ensure high-quality teacher candidates. Instead of expanding the number of faculties, existing programs should focus on quality improvements to align with national educational needs.

- Teacher salaries should be increased to improve the attractiveness of the profession and increase social status.

- Long-term workforce planning should be conducted to balance teacher supply and demand, thus considering unemployed teachers, while also ensuring that schools have sufficient teachers.

Increasing Public Awareness and Policy Transparency:

- Teacher attrition statistics both from public and private schools should be publicly available to raise awareness and inform policy decision on teacher retention.

  Moreover, the following suggestions can be made for further research:

- Although teacher attrition phenomenon is frequently examined abroad, there is a limited number of studies conducted with leaving teachers in Türkiye. In order to investigate teacher attrition more thoroughly, more studies within the country's context should be conducted. Further studies with participants who possess different characteristics can also be conducted.

- Further studies examining the vastly different experiences of public and private school leavers can be conducted.

- Although there are several international studies which focus on teachers' initial commitment to teaching, the influence of initial commitment on attritions was not particularly examined in this study, and so could be further investigated.

- A further study adopting the life history method could be valuable in terms of understanding attrition through participants' personal and professional lives.

- The present study revealed that attrition is multifaceted and many interrelated factors over a teacher's career influence attrition. A further study can be conducted to build a model explaining the complex relationship of the multiple variables that lead to attrition.

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