

Being or Not Being a Teacher with a Disability in Turkey: Problems and Proposed Solutions

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Abstract

This article examines the problems faced by teachers with disabilities in their professional lives, and the solutions they have proposed for these problems. Equality, social inclusion, and social justice theories were used to provide the conceptual framework and theoretical basis for this research. The study group consisted of 9 teachers with physical, chronic, and visual disabilities. The data, collected through semi-structured interviews developed by the researchers, were analyzed using descriptive analysis techniques. According to the results of this study, one of the most important problems faced by teachers with disabilities is the physical condition of schools. Additionally, arrangements should be made to enable teachers with disabilities to use technological equipment efficiently in the classroom. Teachers with disabilities state that many problems they experience stem from legal deficiencies. To ensure that teachers with disabilities work under more convenient conditions and obtain their legal rights, it is recommended that a regulation be made by adding the title of “teachers with disabilities” to the current professional law.

Keywords: Teacher with a disability, Social justice, Equality,

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Introduction

Today, the growing diversity and inclusiveness of societies have increased awareness of the rights of individuals with disabilities and have brought many important issues to the forefront regarding their participation in social life. Understanding the challenges faced by disabled individuals and providing effective solutions to their problems are both academically and socially crucial. The ability of individuals with disabilities to engage in social life is closely linked to the job opportunities available to them, considering their disabilities. The inclusion of teachers with disabilities in their professional lives during educational processes guarantees an equal and inclusive education. These teachers have a crucial mission to impart not only academic knowledge, but also foster social harmony and life skills among students, thus promoting social development and spreading social inclusion.

The advancement of societies cannot be assessed solely by their economic achievements. The degree of prosperity within society is closely related to the equitable distribution of resources among individuals. The allocation of resources to individuals is linked to social justice. Within this framework, social justice provides equal opportunities for all members of society to access resources and services in their social lives (Çoban-Kaynak 2017). According to Goldfarb and Grinberg (2002), social justice is a concept that advocates the allocation of all rights that arise as a requirement of being “human” to individuals, without positioning them at a superior or inferior level based on their characteristics. Ural (2012) states that individuals possess value simply by virtue of being “human,” and this provides them with equal treatment along with others. When this concept of social justice is applied to individuals with disabilities, it asserts that as members of society, they should enjoy equal rights to all others. According to Gürgen (2017), the foundation of social justice is the inclusion of disadvantaged individuals in society.

At the heart of the objective of forging an inclusive society, it is imperative to accept individuals collectively without prejudice based on their physical attributes, gender, or any other defining characteristics. In the contemporary democratic framework, characterized by significant diversity, it is crucial for individuals to be able to exist as equal citizens, in accordance with their own conception of the common good, in order to establish a fair social structure (Çelik, 2017). Within such a fair societal arrangement, equal inclusion in social life includes participation in various economic, political, and democratic processes (Terzi, 2014). Nonetheless, equality does not imply that all individuals provide identical opportunities. Equality refers to the support and opportunities provided to individuals to overcome obstacles and achieve their full potential. Hence, the concept of equality is closely related to justice

(Devarakonda & Maconochie, 2024). In this regard, the lack of equality may stem from an individual's inability to access fundamental rights in social life. The fact that teachers with disabilities cannot obtain their right to work, which is a fundamental right, highlights the social inequality that individuals experience.

According to reports from the World Health Organization, the global population of disabled individuals exceeds one billion. The "United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities," adopted in 2006, seeks to promote the full and equitable utilization of basic freedoms and human rights for people with disabilities, while also enhancing respect for their dignity as human beings. This agreement has significantly changed the global perspective of disabled individuals (WHO, 2011). With the emphasis on inclusive education, which highlights social justice and equality in education systems (UNESCO, 2017), it is evident that this evolving perspective on disabled individuals has led to improved policies for both disabled students and teachers. For an education system to be truly inclusive, it must not only support disabled children but also advocate for and promote the careers of disabled teachers (Ware et al., 2021). In this regard, similar to trends observed globally, the employment of disabled individuals in Turkey is increasing daily, and it is apparent that laws governing the business environment are being adjusted to meet the needs of disabled individuals.

The implementation of the "Disabled Public Personnel Selection Exam," which aims to enable disabled individuals to become civil servants in Turkey, has led to a notable increase in the number of disabled civil servants. Upon reviewing the annual administrative activity reports published by the Ministry of National Education, it is evident that the number of teachers with disabilities was approximately 10.000. Comparing this figure to the total number of teachers in Turkey, it can be inferred that 1 in every 100 teachers is disabled (MoNE, 2021; 2022; 2023). Given this context, assessing the current professional status of teachers with disabilities in Turkey, who now constitute a significant majority, is crucial for guiding policymakers.

Purpose of the Study

When examining academic studies conducted within the Turkish sample, it was observed that there were fewer studies specifically addressing teachers with disabilities. Moreover, the needs of teachers with disabilities and the problems they experience cannot be postponed. For this reason, it is considered important to identify the problems experienced by teachers with disabilities in Turkey. Consequently, this study aimed to comprehensively examine the challenges faced by teachers with disabilities working in public schools in Turkey, and propose solutions. By focusing on the difficulties encountered in the disabled

teaching profession, the goal is to understand the current situation and contribute to implementing viable steps toward creating a more inclusive educational environment in the future. To achieve this aim, the following questions were addressed:

1. What are the reasons why teachers with disabilities prefer the teaching profession?
2. What facilitative practices are carried out by school administrators to facilitate the professional lives of teachers with disabilities?
3. What are the problems faced by teachers with disabilities in their professional lives?
4. What are the proposed solutions to the problems faced by teachers with disabilities in their professional lives?

Method

Study Design

This study, which aimed to determine the problems faced by teachers with disabilities in their professional lives and propose solutions to these issues, was conducted using a qualitative research approach and a basic qualitative research design. Basic qualitative research focuses on the meanings individuals attribute to their experiences and outlines the framework of these meanings. In this design, data can be collected through interviews (Merriam, 2015). This study endeavors to identify the challenges encountered by teachers with disabilities based on their professional experiences and recommendations for addressing these challenges.

Study Group

In basic qualitative research, the study group consists of individuals who have direct experience with the research subject (Merriam, 2015). In this study, the study group was comprised of teachers with disabilities, aligning with the research objectives. To comprehensively understand the range of problems faced by teachers with disabilities, the study group was formed using the maximum diversity sampling method. According to Yıldırım and Şimşek (2016), maximum diversity, a purposive sampling method, aims to maximize diversity among individuals experiencing the issue being researched, thereby creating a representative yet concise sample. In this study, efforts were made to assemble the most diverse study group possible, considering variables such as the type of disability, years of experience, subject area, and school level. The teachers with disabilities in the study group were assigned codes ranging from DT1 to DT9, and their identities were kept confidential.

Table 1.

Demographic Information of the Study Group

Participant	Gender	Disability Type	Years of Experience	Subject Area	School Level
DT1	Male	Physical	18	Classroom Teaching	Primary
DT2	Female	Chronic Illness	12	Turkish	Secondary School
DT3	Female	Visual	13	Social Studies	Secondary School
DT4	Female	Physical	4	Science	Secondary School
DT5	Male	Visual	3	Religious Culture and Ethics	High School
DT6	Male	Physical	2	Religious Culture and Ethics	Secondary School
DT7	Male	Physical	9	Social Studies	Secondary School
DT8	Female	Physical	9	Science	Secondary School
DT9	Male	Chronic Illness	2	Informatics	Secondary School

When Table 1 is analyzed, it is observed that among the teachers in the study group who are disabled, 4 are female and 5 are male. Regarding the types of disability, it is noted that 5 teachers have physical disabilities, 2 are visually impaired, and 2 are disabled due to chronic illness. Teachers with disabilities have a range of seniority from at least 2 to a maximum of 18 years. Upon examining the distribution of teachers with disabilities across subject areas, it is observed that there are 2 in social studies, 2 in science, 2 in religious culture and ethics, 1 in informatics, 1 in Turkish, and 1 in classroom teaching. Additionally, among the teachers with disabilities, 1 works in primary school, 1 in high school, and 7 in secondary school.

Data Collection Tool and Data Collection Process

Data for the study were collected using a semi-structured interview form developed by the researchers. Initially, the developed form was analyzed by 2 field experts to assess its suitability for the objectives of the study. Following feedback from the experts, the necessary adjustments were made, and a preliminary application was conducted with 1 teacher with a disability.

Subsequently, final adjustments were made, resulting in an interview form comprising of five questions pertinent to the study's objectives and a section for demographic information. Thereafter, the actual application phase commenced. To decrease the risk of data loss during the application phase, the interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants using voice recorders.

Validity, Reliability and Ethics

To ensure reliability of the research, a brief preliminary interview was conducted with the participants, during which information about the research was provided. Subsequently, interview appointments were scheduled based on the availability of participants. During the interview phase, participants were once again briefed on the purpose of the study, and any queries they had regarding the subject were addressed. All interviews were conducted face-to-face at the schools in which the teachers were employed. To prevent data loss during the interviews, voluntary consent forms were obtained from the participants and the interviews were recorded using a recording device.

To ensure the validity of the research, the forms containing the research questions were subjected to an expert opinion process. The interview questions were reorganized based on the feedback received from the experts. The diversity of the participants was carefully considered in order to gather data from diverse sources. Maximum diversity was ensured by taking into account criteria such as the type of disability, school level, professional experience, branch, and age of the participants. Participants' perspectives were presented to the reader through direct quotations. Furthermore, as outlined in the Data Analysis section, the data obtained were analyzed by both researchers, and the consistency of the analyses was tested. According to the literature, obtaining expert opinions about the interview questions and presenting the data obtained to the reader with direct quotations are important aspects of qualitative research (Merriam, 2015; Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2016). The research underwent ethical evaluation by the Pamukkale University Social and Human Sciences Research and Publication Ethics Committee, and it was approved by the decision dated 12.09.2023 and numbered E.416926.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher's role is defined as a person who meets face-to-face with the participants, experiences their perspectives, when necessary, makes observations during the research, specializes in the subject under investigation, and uses the experience gained during the data collection process in data analysis (Yıldırım, 1999). In this context, the researchers conducted observations at the schools where the participants worked during the data collection process. Interviews were recorded on a voluntary basis. The

researchers had prior specialization in the subject of the study through previous research on teachers with disabilities. Furthermore, one of the researchers possessed firsthand knowledge of the physical and transportation challenges faced by disabled teachers' schools, as he had extensive experience as a school administrator in the data collection area.

Data Analysis

The data obtained from the study were subjected to descriptive analysis. This approach involves organizing data based on themes that emerge from the research questions. Through this method, participants' views are often presented using direct quotations to strikingly convey individual perspectives. Within the descriptive analyses, participant responses were categorized according to the identified themes, aligning the data logically with the research questions (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). The data obtained were analyzed by two researchers. Miles and Huberman (1994) formula was used to determine consistency between researchers, which resulted in a 94% consensus.

Findings

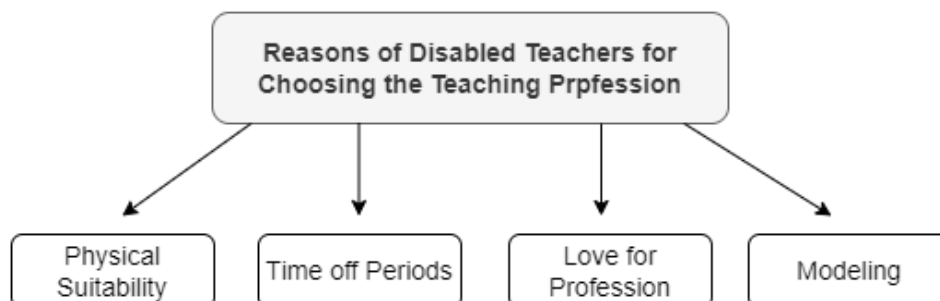
This study aimed to identify the challenges faced by teachers with disabilities in Turkey throughout their professional careers along with the proposed solutions to address these issues. This research delves into various aspects, including the motivations driving teachers with disabilities to pursue their careers, supportive facilitatives implemented by school administrators to enhance the professional experiences of teachers with disabilities, the specific obstacles they encounter, and potential solutions. The following sections present themes derived from the participants' perspectives regarding the suggested solutions.

Reasons for Teacher with Disabilities to Prefer Teaching Profession

The answers given by the teachers with disabilities about the reasons for preferring the teaching profession were analyzed, and the emerging themes are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1.

Themes Related to the Reasons of Teachers with Disabilities for Choosing the Teaching Profession



As can be seen in Figure 1, which presents the reasons why individuals with disabilities prefer teaching profession, these reasons are grouped under 4 different themes.

In the “Physical Suitability” theme, participants expressed a preference for the teaching profession due to various factors such as the expectation that school facilities are conducive to the work of disabled individuals, the widespread availability of schools, ease of transportation, and the low physical demands of teaching. DT1 stated: *“Given my physical condition, it’s essential for me to engage in work that relies on mental rather than physical effort.”* DT9, a teacher with a disability, said, *“My health condition necessitates a slow and steady lifestyle. While I once had different dreams and enjoyed sports, my current situation restricted my physical activities. Thus, teaching emerged as the most suitable profession to maintain a consistent quality of life.”* Similarly, DT5, another teacher with a disability, explained: *“Verbal-based professions are more conducive for visually impaired individuals. Despite initial considerations of other career paths, I chose for teaching due to its reliance on verbal communication.”*

In the theme “Time off Periods,” participants cited several reasons for preferring the teaching profession, including school closures during the summer months, favorable working hours, and daily schedules. DT1 shared her perspective: *“Before becoming a teacher, I spent time working in the private sector. While my job primarily involved desk work and did not exhaust me physically, I had a minimal time off period. Only Sundays were designated as holidays. Despite my teaching degree, I could not secure a teaching position initially; therefore, I found a job in the private sector. However, the teaching offers different scenarios. The extended summer break was particularly appealing to me. Although weekdays can be tiring for me, I can rest at weekends.”*

These factors led me to pursue a career in teaching, despite the potentially higher earnings in the private sector."

In the theme "Love for Profession," participants stated that they preferred the teaching profession for reasons such as their love for children, passion for teaching, and respect for the reputation and sincerity of the profession. DT7 expressed her point of view within the scope of this theme as follows *"Although disabled individuals could not be teachers when I started my education, I continued to pursue the teaching profession. Although I faced various difficulties, I completed my education due to my strong desire to become a teacher. I have a deep love for the teaching profession."* DT1 expressed his decision as follows: *"I chose this profession because of my true passion for the teaching profession, whereas in my previous company, the job I was paid twice as much. Despite the temptation of a higher salary, my heart chose teaching."* DT5: *"Actually, I could have oriented myself towards different professions because my score was sufficient. However, I chose teaching because I enjoy it."* DT8: *"I wanted to be a teacher since I was a child. Physically, standing for long periods tires me out, but I continue to pursue teaching. A few years ago, I struggled to climb stairs and stand because of the frequent surgeries. This led me to transition to civil service. However, as time passed, the surgeries improved my ability to stand and walk. Consequently, I returned to teaching without hesitation."*

In the theme of "Modeling," participants expressed a preference for the teaching profession because they viewed the teachers in their families as examples. DT3 remarked: *"I admired my teachers greatly from a young age. I attended a boarding school for the visually impaired, where we only saw our families during the time off. Consequently, the teachers at our school filled the role of parental figures. My aunt, who is also visually impaired, is a teacher. Both my school teachers and my aunt played a significant role in inspiring me to become a teacher."* DT9 shared: *"My father was also a teacher. I was familiar with his profession and working conditions, and considering my health issues, I followed in his footsteps and became a teacher."*

Facilitative Practices of School Administrators

The themes that emerged from analyzing the responses of teachers with disabilities regarding the facilitating practices carried out by school administrators to facilitate their professional lives are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2.

Themes Related to Facilitative Practices of School Administrators



When Figure 2 is analyzed, it is evident that the facilitative practices implemented by school administrators to support the professional lives of teachers with disabilities are grouped under three themes: “curriculum,” “shift duty,” and “leave.”

In the theme of “Curriculum,” participants stated that school administrators accommodated the requests of Teacher with disabilities when organizing lesson plans, aligning lessons accordingly. Regarding this matter, DT3 stated, “Our school principal always considers my needs when developing the curriculum. At the start of the academic year, all teachers were required to submit their curriculum requests through petitions. For instance, I prefer my first three classes in the morning to be free, as I need to drop off my child at school. In general, my requests were fulfilled. Additionally, because of my challenges in regular classes, he assigned me to Educational Support classes. Since these classes typically have only one student, I can teach it without much difficulty”, DT5: “They make my classes easier. They try to schedule all the lessons on consecutive days, allowing me to have a day off. This gave me the opportunity to rest during the week. In short, they are doing their best to assist me.” DT8: “The school administration takes my curriculum requests into consideration. I did not experience any problems with the curriculum at this school.”

When examining the opinions of participants who expressed their views on the theme of “Shift Duty,” it was revealed that school administrators respected the rights of teachers with disabilities not to be on shift duty, arranged duty areas according to the requests of teachers with disabilities, and implemented facilitating practices in shift assignments. Regarding this subject, DT2 stated: “Without the support of the school administration, I would encounter many difficulties. For instance, they greatly assisted me with my shift-duty locations. I was initially hesitant about my shift location because it would pose problems for me if it were too far from my classrooms. If it is far from the classrooms I attend, according to my schedule, I will face challenges commuting there during

every break. Considering my existing leg problem, moving to the shift location is a problem. However, the school administration takes this circumstance into consideration and assigns me a shift location closest to the classroom where I teach.” DT9 added: “Normally, we have the legal right to not undertake shift duty. The administration asks for opinions on this matter. I opt to undertake shift duty. They identify the most suitable location for me.”

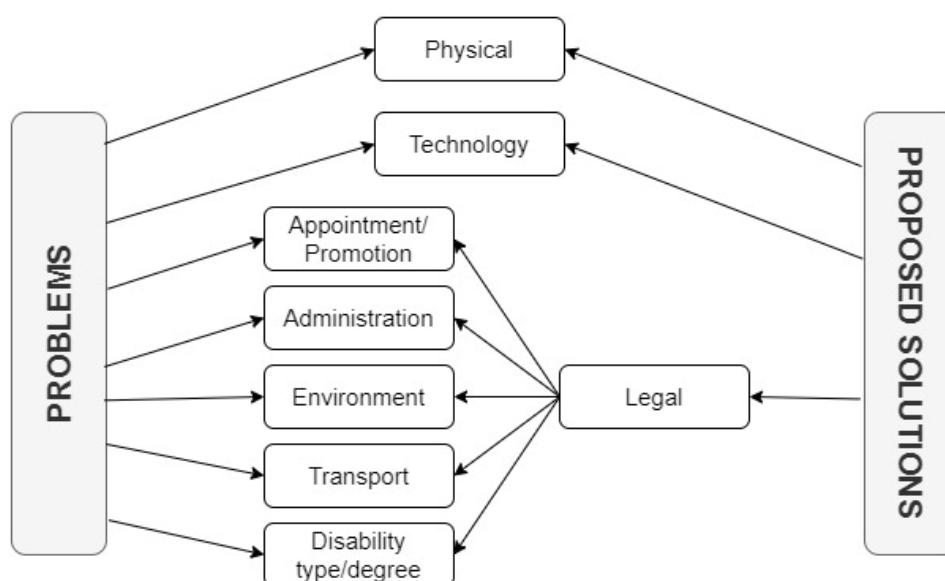
In the theme of “Leave,” participants expressed their opinions that school administrators assisted them when they received medical reports for health reasons or when they needed to take leave for various reasons. Regarding this matter, DT2 stated: “Our school principal does not cause any problems, when we present a medical report or request leave.” Additionally, DT3 expressed: “There are occasions when I am occasionally late due to my dropping off my child to school in the mornings. In such instances, I contact our assistant principal, and he tolerates me. He promptly assigns to a shift-duty teacher to cover me. Consequently, no one is adversely affected.”

Problems Faced by Teachers with Disabilities in Professional Life and Proposed Solutions

The responses of teachers with disabilities regarding the difficulties they faced in their professional lives and their suggestions for solutions were analyzed using a descriptive analysis method. The themes comprising the problems and proposed solutions are schematized in Figure 3.

Figure 3.

Themes Related to the Problems Faced by Teachers with Disabilities in Professional Life and Proposed Solutions



Problems Faced by Teachers with Disabilities in Professional Life

It is observed that the responses provided by teachers with disabilities regarding the challenges they encounter in their professional lives are grouped into seven themes: “physical,” “technology,” “appointment/promotion,” “administration,” “environment,” “transport,” and “type/degree of disability.”

In the theme “Physical,” teachers with disabilities reported experiencing issues related to the physical infrastructure of schools, including stairs, elevators, restrooms, and classroom designs. DT7 shared her perspective on the matter: *“My primary problems at school are the stairs and the elevator. Although the school originally had an elevator, it was nonfunctional until I was hired. Although this problem has been resolved, numerous limitations remain. For instance, restrooms for disabled people are out of order. Because my house is nearby, I often go there to use the restroom. Consequently, there is no urgency to repair this unless I specifically request it, which I find unnecessary. Therefore, a standard protocol for repair without intervention is required. Additionally, the ramps on the school’s sidewalks are worn out, making it difficult for me to walk.”* DT8 added, *“Last year, I struggled to walk because of inflammation in my foot platinum. I could not attend school during this period, as I would not be able to climb the stairs in a two-story building lacking an elevator. I had to get a medical report.”*

Regarding problems in the “Technology” theme, teachers with disabilities have expressed concerns that smart boards in classrooms are not suitable for use by those who are physically or visually impaired. Physically, teachers with disabilities who use wheelchairs find it challenging to access the upper parts of smart boards. Additionally, visually impaired teachers encounter difficulties in utilizing smart boards, owing to the lack of appropriate technological equipment. Two teachers, DT5 and DT7, expressed their concerns: *“The use of smart boards is unsuitable for visually impaired individuals. We constantly need assistance from students because there are no suitable programs available for the visually impaired,”* and *“The smart boards are positioned too high, making it impossible for me to reach the upper corners while teaching from a wheelchair.”*

In the “Appointment/Promotion” theme, teachers with disabilities have highlighted their primary concern as equitable treatment in in- and out-provincial relocation processes compared to their non-disabled colleagues. DT1 expressed this concern by stating, *“Teachers with disabilities and their non-disabled colleagues undergo the same in and out of province appointment procedures, presenting a significant challenge. I cannot be appointed to a school close to my home.”* DT9 echoed this statement: *“It is difficult for*

teachers with disabilities to relocate after they are appointed. In recent years, they appointed everyone for the first time, but it is quite difficult to relocate after being appointed,” DT4: “Our relocations are made based on reporting an excuse in August and February. However, I cannot apply to these in-province appointments. For out-of-province appointments, they evaluated me in the same status as other excuses. I cannot change my school because my score is low. If it continues like this, I will have to work at this school for at least 10 years,” DT3 shared his opinion, “Despite my disability, I have the ability to substitute with other teachers within the school under equal conditions. In fact, I am an extra teacher in our school. The school principal takes the initiative and assigns me to the Educational Support class, thereby eliminating the need to change my school. One of the most important problems for us is the issue of a specialized teacher. We have the right to retire early depending on the degree of disability. For example, when my working life is 18 years, I have the right to retire. Many of my friends with disabilities retire when they complete this period. Now, if I retire after completing my 18 years, I cannot become a head teacher. This is because there is a 20-year term requirement for becoming a head teacher. This period is really a serious problem for us.”

When examining the issues related to the “Administration” theme, it was observed that practices concerning teachers with disabilities depend on the initiative of the administrator, leading to variations in practices among schools. Teachers with disabilities perceive the level of difficulty they encounter in school life depending on the actions of school administrators. Regarding this matter, DT2 stated: *“Problems such as my shift duty place and class schedule depend entirely on the initiative of the school administration. If the school administration does not provide assistance, I will encounter challenges due to legal deficiencies.”* Similarly, DT7 expressed: *“I am satisfied with the administrators in my current school. When I communicate my problems to them, they offer solutions. However, I am uncertain about what to expect in other schools.”*

It was observed that teachers with disabilities who expressed their opinions on the theme of “Environment” stated that they experienced problems with the prejudices of their students’ parents. On this subject, DT1 said: *“Student parents are prejudiced because of my physical condition. I feel that they think of these questions: Can I teach their children to read and write? Do I often get sick and go to a hospital? Do their children miss classes because of this? Sometimes, they even conveyed their hesitation to the school administration. In fact, if they found an alternative teacher at school, they would not allow me to teach their children. However, this mostly occurred when I first came to school. Later, when they saw their children graduating, their parents became more tolerant. This situation stems from not being accustomed to teachers with disabilities in schools.”* DT3 added, *“Our parents are prejudiced. They react*

when they first hear that I am visually impaired. Actually, I agree with them. Because they have never experienced anything like this in their lives. They did not know what could be achieved. In addition, their children experienced exam anxiety. However, they accepted it over time. In fact, it becomes obvious from their voice tone after one or two weeks. Because our success in oral exams is quite good."

Regarding the theme of "Transport," it is stated that the most significant challenge faced by teachers with disabilities revolves around transportation from their houses to school. Due to the appointment process, teachers with disabilities in schools far from their residences report difficulties commuting to their workplaces. DT7 expressed: *"I can commute to school with the assistance of a wheelchair. There is no problem because the elevator operates within the school buildings. However, many obstacles prevent transportation to schools. Sidewalk ramps, starting from the school's yard, were damaged. Despite residing opposite the school to ease transportation, walking on the sidewalks remains exceedingly challenging."* DT8 added: *"As physically disabled individuals, we may encounter muscle stiffness upon waking in the morning. In such instances, commuting to school is more difficult. I either obtained a medical report or arrived late. Perhaps if I had a workplace within walking distance, transportation would be more manageable."*

Regarding the theme of "Disability Type/Degree," teachers with disabilities argue that treating all teachers with disabilities equally ignores the diversity in needs based on the type and degree of disability. Individuals encounter challenges in their professional lives when their specific needs, determined by their disability type and degree, are not met. DT1 highlighted this issue by stating, *"There is no classification among disabled individuals based on their specific disabilities. For instance, I have a physical disability that requires different needs. Conversely, I have a colleague with heart problems, necessitating different arrangements. While he can commute by car, I rely on my wheelchair for mobility. Despite these distinct requirements, we are evaluated equally in administrative matters such as paperwork, assignments, and responsibilities. However, our needs greatly vary. I have difficulty in multi-storey buildings."* DT9 stated: *"The term 'disabled teacher' is a broad concept. There are many different types of disability among people with disabilities. However, we are all treated equally. Matters, such as appointment and retirement rights, should be regulated based on specific disabilities. Issues arise because all teachers with disabilities are treated as if they have the same disability. For instance, despite my reliance on a wheelchair, I work in a four-story building."*

Proposed Solutions for the Problems Faced by Teachers with Disabilities in Professional Life

In Figure 3, it is evident that the proposed solutions for the challenges encountered by teachers with disabilities in their professional lives are categorized into three themes: “physical,” “technological,” and “legal.”

It is evident that the proposed solutions concerning the “Physical” theme primarily reflect the perspectives of teachers with disabilities, focusing on enhancing the physical infrastructure of schools, such as stairs, elevators, ramps for accessibility, and restrooms. DT7, who proposed solutions to address the challenges arising from the physical conditions of schools where teachers with disabilities work, remarked: *“Most of our schools were not adequately equipped for individuals with physical disabilities. For instance, they built a sidewalk ramp in the school yard for me. However, over time, this ramp was damaged, and the issue remained unresolved, unless brought to their attention. Therefore, schools should have certain standards, especially for disabled people. Therefore, our schools should be disabled friendly, as any person with disabilities may require access at any given time. Therefore, it is imperative that our schools undergo inspections by the Directorate of National Education until they meet these established accessibility standards.”* DT4 expressed his solutions: *“The physical conditions of schools improved only when demanded. In particular, physically and visually impaired teachers are negatively affected by these issues. The elevator is crucial for me; I am fortunate that it is available at this school. Consider a visually impaired friend; her/his classes may be on the upper floors, posing considerable challenges. A viable solution could be to assign fixed classrooms to teachers with disabilities, thus eliminating the need to navigate between classrooms. Instead, classrooms should be adapted to our needs by directing students to our designated spaces.”*

When examining the proposed solutions for the “Technology” theme, it is evident that teachers with disabilities offer solutions to the problems they experience in the use of smart boards in their classrooms. On this subject, DT5 stated: *“Technological infrastructure support should be provided to teachers with disabilities. We usually install speech programs on our phones in daily life. Speech programs can also be installed on smart boards for the visually impaired.”* DT7 expressed his solutions: *“Technological equipment in schools has been designed only for non-disabled individuals. For instance, to use the smart board, I need help from my students because I use a wheelchair. The smart board was positioned too high and I could not reach the top of the screen. In fact, this solution is easy. Keyboards can operate as a smart board. These materials should be prepared in advance according to the type of disability experienced by the teacher. If necessary, the size of the smart board must be*

reduced. But the best solution is to listen to the demands of teachers with disabilities and meet their needs."

When examining the responses of teachers with disabilities regarding the theme "Legal," it becomes evident that this is the theme for which the most comprehensive proposed solutions are offered. In the broadest sense, teachers with disabilities indicate that legal regulations are crucial for addressing the majority of challenges they face in their professional lives. In this direction, they state that legal regulations should be made as a solution to problem sources, such as the appointment of teachers with disabilities, promotions, school administration, environmental accessibility, transportation, and the type and degree of disability. To this end, they emphasized the necessity of implementing specific measures, including the establishment of a specific appointment calendar for teachers with disabilities, regulations facilitating their advancement to head teacher positions within the teaching profession, and legal guarantees ensuring the rights of teachers with disabilities without solely relying on the initiative of school administrators. They also propose that to raise awareness within school environments, schools with a certain number of teachers should be obliged to employ at least one disabled teacher, as in the private sector. Furthermore, they recommend solutions, such as mandatory employment quotas for disabled staff, legal provisions allowing for the adjustment of job placements for teachers with disabilities based on their residential addresses, and legal guarantees of rights tailored to specific needs arising from the type and degree of disability. In this regard, DT6 proposed solutions to problems experienced during the appointment process: *"The E-KPSS exam, through which teachers with disabilities are appointed, can be held annually instead of biennially. This would prevent the accumulation of Teacher with disabilities who cannot be appointed."* DT1 expressed the following: *"Although the appointment of teachers with disabilities is separate, we should not be included in the same candidate pool as regular teachers for provincial, out-of-province, and equivalent appointments. A separate appointment calendar can be created for us."* Another issue believed to be resolved through legal regulations pertains to the Teaching Profession Law, which outlines promotion processes for teachers with disabilities. These teachers asserted that obtaining the right to become head teachers in their professional lives is exceedingly difficult. It is noted that teachers with disabilities, who are eligible for retirement in a shorter period than other teachers due to their disabilities, are unable to attain the title of head teacher because it requires 20 years of professional experience. Consequently, the year requirements in the teaching profession law should be reduced in favor of teachers with disabilities. On this matter, DT3 remarked: *"I will be eligible for retirement after 18 years of teaching due to my disability. Currently, I plan to retire after I complete this period. However, to become a head teacher, I must have at least 20 years of*

teaching experience. Therefore, this requirement must be modified. As a solution, teachers with disabilities can be promoted to head teachers in a short time. The only thing to do is to add a sentence on this subject to the professional law.” It is evident that teachers with disabilities have formulated solution proposals for the administration theme, which is another challenge they encounter. Teachers with disabilities state that administrators in their schools should take the initiative to make appropriate arrangements. They emphasize that the behaviors of school administrators towards teachers with disabilities can vary. According to teachers with disabilities, the most obvious solution is to ensure their rights through legal provisions. They believe that if their rights are legally protected, disparities in treatment among schools diminish. DT7 expressed his opinions, *“I am content with the administrators at my current school, but I am uncertain about what to anticipate if I seek a transfer to another school. Since our rights are not legally guaranteed, it is imperative to establish legal protections to eliminate discrepancies in administrative practices.”* DT1 also proposed a solution to the administration theme: *“I had a lot of problems with my former school principal. Allright, he would not cause any direct problems regarding my disability, but I could not even express my demands because we could not get along. Now, that we have a new school principal, I am more comfortable. However, this should not be the case. My rights should be mentioned in detail in these regulations. For example, if I am physically disabled, my classroom must be on the first floor. The law must state this: I should also be able to request this class, regardless of the principal. If the school has no first-floor classroom, they should not assign me to this school. National education regulations should include special provisions for teachers with disabilities. Otherwise, we do not know what we will encounter with each change in administration.”* Teachers with disabilities believe it is important to raise social awareness to eliminate the negative prejudices of students’ parents. Therefore, priority may be given to assigning disabled personnel to schools with more than a certain number of staff, as in the private sector. Consequently, many schools now have teachers with disabilities, providing the community with the opportunity to witness their abilities. DT1, who proposed a solution to environmental problems, said, *“When I first came to school, parents had prejudices because of my appearance. This is the reaction I got used to. Teachers with physical disabilities are uncommon. Imposing a similar obligation on the private sector regarding the employment of individuals with disabilities in educational environments will help parents get used to the existence of teachers with disabilities.”* It is evident that teachers with disabilities have proposed solutions for transportation to school problems, which is another challenge faced by them. Teachers with disabilities asserted that their residential addresses should be considered during the appointment process. On this matter, DT8 stated, *“Especially the physically Teacher with disabilities may encounter significant transportation problems to school.*

Therefore, the provision 'they are assigned to the school closest to their houses, regardless of their score' should be included in the regulations concerning the appointment of teachers with disabilities. The shorter the distance between the school we work at and our home, the fewer transportation problems we will encounter". Similarly, DT7 commented, *"I purchased a house right across the school to avoid transportation problems. However, I still encounter issues with the sidewalks. However, if I wish to be transferred here, I will have to relocate. Consequently, school norms should be established to assign us to a school near the area where we reside."* The last problem for teachers with disabilities pertained to the type and degree of the disability. One of the most significant issues for teachers with disabilities is the lack of classification based on disability type or degree. Teachers with disabilities advocate that their rights be legally guaranteed through the establishment of a classification system consistent with their needs. According to the participants, the requirements of a visually impaired teacher in a school setting differ from those of a teacher with a chronic condition, such as Mediterranean anemia.

For this reason, it is necessary to determine which type of disability possesses which rights through legal regulations. DT9 stated that the concept of disabled teaching is comprehensive and proposed a solution: *"There should be categorization among teachers with disabilities. Our needs should be determined according to the type and degree of disability. All issues such as duty periods, working conditions, course load, shift obligations, and seniority periods should be determined according to these categories and legally guaranteed."* DT1, another teacher with a disability who proposed a solution to the same issue, stated: *"The needs of teachers with disabilities vary depending on their type and degree of disability. I am physically disabled, and my needs are very different from those of people with heart disease. Therefore, there must be arrangements to address the problems faced by teachers with disabilities."*

Results and Discussion

In this study, which aimed to explore the challenges faced by teachers with disabilities in their professional lives and identify potential solutions, we first attempted to reveal the underlying factors influencing their career choices of teachers with disabilities. It appears that teachers with disabilities prefer the teaching profession because of factors such as its suitability for their physical abilities, longer holiday periods compared to other professions, their passion for teaching, and the influence of role-model teachers from their past experiences. Reviewing existing literature has revealed that pre-service teachers similarly prefer the profession for comparable reasons (Çermik, Doğan, and Şahin, 2010). Furthermore, the nature of teachers' disabilities has emerged as a significant

factor in their career decisions. Teaching ranks prominently among the preferred professions for visually impaired individuals (Yüner, 2018). Consequently, there is a noticeable increase in the number of visually impaired teachers in Turkish public schools in recent years (Kış, Gürgür, and Akçamete, 2012).

Second, the research determined the measures taken by school administrators to facilitate the professional lives of teachers with disabilities. Accordingly, to assist teachers with disabilities, school administrators organize lesson schedules and duties that meet their needs. Additionally, school administrators facilitate leave options for teachers with disabilities when necessary. It is important to note that all the participants in this study were actively employed. However, the rights of teachers with disabilities that are exempt from certain duties are outlined in Article 91, paragraph 2 g of the Secondary Education Institutions Regulation of the Ministry of National Education: *“Teachers who are disabled, have disabled children, or have disabled dependents are not assigned to shifts. However, teachers with these conditions may be assigned shifts if they wish, with priority given to their day preferences.* Despite these rights, it can be argued that the reason teachers with disabilities who participated in the research accepted shifts was their desire to earn a shift fee. This result indicates that the rights granted to teachers with disabilities can lead to financial loss. It is evident that school administrators support teachers with disabilities in preventing them from experiencing financial loss. According to Kış, Gürgür, and Akçamete (2012), the arrangements made for teachers with disabilities should be more detailed than those made for non-disabled individuals. This is because providing administrative support through necessary arrangements in schools for teachers with disabilities is a crucial prerequisite for their job satisfaction (Obiakor, Kars, Algozzine, and Utley, 1995).

Another finding from this research indicates that teachers with disabilities face many challenges in their professional careers and develop solutions to address them. These challenges can be categorized into seven main groups: physical (1), technological (2), appointment/promotion (3), administration (4), environment (5), transport (6), and disability type/degree (7). Teachers with disabilities believe that many of these issues, which they perceive as problematic, can be eliminated through legislative regulations. Consequently, it is evident that most challenges faced by teachers with disabilities stem from legal gaps. An examination of the existing literature on teachers with disabilities reveals that while the classifications may vary, the underlying issues remain similar. Aldakhil (2019), conducted a study with six Teacher with disabilities and found that the problems faced by Teacher with disabilities could be grouped into three categories: spatial obstacles (1), negative attitudes (2), and language use and discriminatory behaviors (3). In another study by Tuygun (2019) involving visually impaired teachers, it was observed that the problems experienced by

teachers in their professional lives fall into three categories: systemic issues (1), problems arising from interactions with others (2), and self-generated problems (3). Türkan and Keskinçalış-Kara (2023) defined the challenges faced by visually impaired teachers in their professional lives as follows: problems in the teaching process (1), problems with school administration (2), difficulties with colleagues (3), challenges with parents (4), accessibility of technological tools (5), and physical accessibility of school facilities (6).

Within the scope of this research, it is evident that the primary challenge experienced by teachers with disabilities is related to the physical conditions of schools. Teachers with disabilities reported that the physical infrastructure of the schools where they work, including elevators, stairs, classrooms, and restrooms, negatively affected their professional lives. They emphasized that to address these issues, school buildings need to be designed with teachers with disabilities in consideration, and these accommodations should be subject to periodic inspections. Research indicates that similar problems are prevalent in other contexts. A study conducted by Obiakor, Karr, Algozzine, and Utley (1995) stated that one of the primary challenges faced by teachers with disabilities is independent mobility within the school and transportation. Kış, Gürgür, and Akçamete (2012) revealed that only 8.4% of the schools had wheelchair ramps and 5.9% had elevators so that teachers with disabilities could act independently, while 85.7% of the schools examined in the study lacked any arrangements. Therefore, it is evident that the working conditions for teachers with disabilities are far from ideal, and to improve this situation, arrangements such as wheelchair ramps and elevators should be implemented in school buildings.

Another finding from this research indicates that teachers with disabilities encounter challenges when utilizing smart boards, which are essential technological tools in educational settings. The visually impaired teachers who participated in this study faced difficulties with this technology. As a proposed solution, it is recommended to install supportive software programs for visually impaired individuals on smart boards. Çiftçi (2019) also observed that visually impaired teachers struggle with interactive whiteboards and encounter obstacles when using other technological devices such as computers, printers, and photocopiers in schools. Similarly, Tuygun (2019) emphasized the necessity of integrating appropriate programmes into classrooms to enable visually impaired teachers to efficiently utilize available technological resources. In their study, Kula, Avcı, and Haşlamam (2020) discovered that hardware is a significant challenge for teachers with disabilities aiming to integrate information and communication technologies into their teaching practices. Considering that this issue is particularly noteworthy as nearly three-quarters of teachers with disabilities have disabilities that affect their teaching abilities (Kış, Gürgür, & Akçamete, 2012), technological opportunities can be integrated into the

classroom to compensate for disabled teachers' inadequacies. And this allows them to become class guides (Şahin, Sevim, Çiğdem, & Aydın, 2011). Additionally, enabling teachers with disabilities to utilize technological tools and applications in their teaching processes not only promotes their active involvement in teaching but also facilitates their integration into society on an equal basis.

Another finding concerning the challenges experienced by teachers with disabilities and their proposed solutions is their conviction that many of these problems can be addressed through legal regulations. Teachers with disabilities argue that issues such as assignment, promotion, school administration, environment, transportation, and the type and degree of disability can be effectively solved through legislative measures. For instance, teachers with disabilities face challenges during appointment processes within and between provinces as well as in promotion opportunities. These obstacles often arise from the practice of considering teachers with disabilities as similar to their non-disabled colleagues in the relocation process. For example, teachers with disabilities seeking appointments within a province may find themselves grouped with other teachers and evaluated solely based on seniority points, regardless of their needs. It is evident that teachers with disabilities are not granted any privileges in promotion. This lack of recognition poses a significant barrier to the advancement of teachers with disabilities in their professional careers. For instance, according to the teaching profession law, one must teach for a minimum of 20 years to attain the position of the head teacher. However, some teachers with disabilities may be eligible for retirement after only 18 years of teaching. Teachers with disabilities perceived this situation negatively. Therefore, it is crucial to regulate the teaching profession law to regulate career planning periods specifically for teachers with disabilities, aiming to address the challenges they face.

Within the scope of this research, it is evident that teachers with disabilities face additional challenges originating from school administrators. These teachers expressed reliance on the initiative of school administrators due to inadequate legal protection. In fact, they emphasize that the enforcement of regulations by school administrators may change due to a lack of clear provisions addressing teachers with disabilities within educational activity guidelines. Similar issues have been reported in previous studies. According to Şahin, Sevim, Çiğdem, and Aydın (2011), one of the primary challenges encountered by visually impaired teachers in their professional careers is the bias exhibited by school administrators. Çiftçi's (2019) study, conducted with visually impaired teachers, revealed that teachers often face issues such as prejudice, discrimination, and mobbing with school administrators. Moreover, the Association of the Visually Impaired in Education (EGED) reported in 2017

that 17% of the visually impaired teachers surveyed had negative relationships with their administrators.

Another challenge faced by teachers with disabilities in their professional lives is the bias they encounter in their school environments. As the integration of individuals with disabilities into the workforce has only recently gained significance, prejudicial attitudes towards teachers with disabilities have emerged. Teachers with disabilities have proposed solutions to address these biases through legal reform. Accordingly, to address prejudice against teachers with disabilities, it is proposed to increase the number of disabled staff in schools. In this regard, there should be legal regulations to employ at least one disabled staff member.

In a report released by the EGED, it was found that 20% of participants reported experiencing mobbing, despite visually impaired teachers generally maintaining positive relationships with their parents (EGED, 2017). Conversely, Çiftçi (2019) found that visually impaired teachers typically do not encounter issues with their students' parents. Similarly, Kış, Gürgür, and Akçamete (2012) noted in their research that 85.8% of teachers with disabilities did not face any negative interactions while communicating with parents. The social acceptance of individuals with disabilities has significant importance, as they should have equal access to opportunities in areas such as employment, education, and social rights, regardless of their disability (Şahin, Sevim, Çiğdem, & Aydın, 2011). Hence, promoting the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in various professions is crucial to increasing their social acceptance. However, Karataş and Karataş (2017) argued that although the private sector has shown an increase in employing individuals with disabilities in recent years, there has been no such increase in the public sector.

Another significant challenge faced by teachers with disabilities in the current study was transportation. Evidently, these teachers encounter difficulties in providing transportation between their residences and schools. This issue arises largely from not being assigned to schools in proximity to their homes. To address this, it is proposed that legal regulations be implemented to solve this challenge. Accordingly, it is recommended that appointment and relocation regulations ensure that teachers with disabilities are assigned to the schools closest to their residential addresses. Previous research in the field also highlights the transportation problems experienced by teachers with disabilities. For instance, Kış, Gürgür, and Akçamete (2012) found that nearly all teachers with disabilities faced obstacles commuting from their residential areas to their schools. Similarly, Givner and Ferrell (1998) noted serious transportation issues for teachers with disabilities who commute between their homes and workplaces. Furthermore, Tuygun (2019) observed that visually impaired

teachers encountered difficulties due to the lack of regulations, such as tactile paving and audible signals on school routes.

This study identified another challenge encountered by teachers with disabilities in their professional lives, which is associated with the type and degree of their disabilities. It is important to note that the personal rights of teachers with disabilities remain unchanged regardless of their specific disability. However, their individual needs may vary based on their type of disability. Many of the teachers with disabilities participating in the study emphasized this point, suggesting that there should be a certain form of classification for teachers with disabilities. These views are supported by the existing literature. Gilbride, Stensrud, Ehlers, Evans, and Peterson (2000) discovered that visually impaired employees faced more significant difficulties on average than the other disability groups. Consequently, school administrators are expected to find creative solutions for Teacher with disabilities (Obiakor, Kars, Algozzine, & Utley, 1995). In this regard, it becomes evident that providing specialized resources aligned with the specific type and degree of disability is an important prerequisite for the professional success of teachers with disabilities.

Upon evaluating the challenges experienced by teachers with disabilities and the solutions they develop, it became apparent that these issues generally stem from legal deficiencies and result in unsuitable working conditions. However, as emphasized by Obiakor, Kars, Algozzine, and Utley (1995), individuals with disabilities also possess talents. When they are afforded opportunities, such as employment, promotion, accessible transportation, and necessary equipment, they can enhance their talents and themselves, like other individuals. Therefore, arrangements need to be made to support disabled teachers' working lives. Similarly, studies in the literature argue that reforms should be implemented for teachers with disabilities in schools (Aldahil, 2019; Kış, Gürgür, and Akçamete, 2012). This is because these arrangements enhance job satisfaction of Teacher with disabilities (Kış, Gürgür, and Akçamete, 2012).

Recommendations

The following solutions have been proposed for teachers with disabilities to overcome challenges in their professional lives and attain conditions equal to those of other teachers:

- This study indicates that teachers with disabilities encounter difficulties related to the physical accessibility of school buildings. To address this issue, the existing conditions of school buildings should be considered when assigning teachers with disabilities. Schools should be categorized as either

“disability-friendly” or “disability-accessible,” based on their current infrastructure, and priority should be given to assigning teachers with disabilities to the former.

- This study indicates that visually impaired teachers, in particular, face difficulties in utilizing smart boards and other technological devices. This issue can be addressed by installing supportive programs for visually impaired individuals on smart boards within schools. Additionally, smart boards and technological equipment in schools that employ teachers with disabilities should be customized to meet their specific needs.
- The results revealed challenges in the process of requesting appointments for teachers with disabilities. To address this, an appointment schedule for teachers with disabilities should be devised. Furthermore, arrangements should be facilitated to allow teachers with disabilities to relocate within or between provinces to request assignments to the school nearest to their residence address.
- It is clear that teachers with disabilities face difficulties in obtaining promotions throughout their teaching careers. For example, becoming a head teacher often requires a minimum of 20 years of experience. However, some teachers with disabilities may be eligible to retire after 18 years, preventing them from attaining their head teacher positions. To eliminate this problem, a new title for teachers with disabilities should be added to the teaching profession law and the periods in the teaching career stages should be rearranged.
- It has been observed that parents of students hold prejudices against teachers with disabilities. To promote greater inclusion of individuals with disabilities in the workforce, schools with a certain number of employees may be obligated to employ individuals with disabilities.
- It has been noted that individuals with disabilities face significant difficulties in traveling from home to school. To address this issue, providing teachers with disabilities to work in the school closest to their residences could be a solution; for this reason, the preference lists of teachers with disabilities can be considered first in order to make new appointments to vacant positions in schools.
- Evidently, the needs of teachers with disabilities vary depending on the type and degree of disability. However, regulations designed for teachers with disabilities evaluate all types of disability. This situation reveals significant issues for certain types and degrees of disability. Therefore, when preparing regulations for teachers with disabilities, consideration should be given to their specific disability types and degrees.

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