

An examination of teachers' preferences for postgraduate education

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Abstract. This study aimed to determine the views of teachers working in public schools regarding their pursuit of postgraduate education. The study group consists of teachers working in public schools affiliated with the Hatay Provincial Directorate of National Education in the 2023-2024 academic year. A semi-structured interview form developed by the researcher, consisting of three questions, was used as a data collection tool to ascertain teachers' views on postgraduate education. This qualitative research employed the phenomenology model as the method. The findings reveal that teachers wish to pursue postgraduate education to enhance their personal development, increase their motivation, and stay updated with new knowledge. However, they face challenges in meeting the admission requirements for postgraduate education. Additionally, the heavy workload at school prevents them from allocating sufficient time for postgraduate studies, and they feel pessimistic due to the limited availability of postgraduate education quotas at universities.

1 Introduction

During the transition from an industrial society to an information society, global changes in science and technology have led to profound transformations in education systems, as in many other fields [1]. To keep up with advancements in the production and flow of knowledge, adapt to change, and avoid falling behind, countries have had to continually revise their education systems [2, 3, 4, 5, 6]. According to [7], the main goal of modern education systems is to cultivate individuals who are open to change, innovative, and capable of producing and utilizing knowledge [8]. The foundation of achieving this goal lies in training qualified teachers. In other words, a quality education can only be provided through qualified teachers [9]. According to [10], the qualifications of teachers are considered one of the key criteria for determining the quality of a school. This demonstrates that the educational success of a school is directly related to the academic and professional competence of its teachers.

According to the Basic Law of National Education, teacher preparation is carried out through general education, specialized subject education, and pedagogical formation education [11]. These foundational trainings enable teachers to acquire the knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary throughout their professional lives. By adding up-to-date

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knowledge and skills to the education they receive at universities, teachers play a key role in preventing society from falling behind and ensuring the continuity of social development [12]. According to [4], there are two main paths for teachers at the start of their careers to further their professional development. First, they can improve and update their existing knowledge and skills by participating in in-service training programs. Second, they can pursue postgraduate education to enhance their academic knowledge and pedagogical formation skills. Therefore, universities play a crucial role in enabling teachers to improve themselves academically and professionally, learn about new pedagogical approaches, teaching methods, and research opportunities, and increase the quality of education in their schools [13].

Postgraduate education goes beyond undergraduate education, aiming to provide teachers with advanced knowledge, expertise, and experience in the same or different fields [14]. Postgraduate education aims to train individuals capable of producing knowledge, possessing critical thinking skills, using interdisciplinary approaches to solve current problems, and supporting social development [15]. According to [16], postgraduate education contributes to scientific and technological progress and plays a crucial role in training the highly qualified individuals needed by countries. Thus, in the face of rapidly changing and developing technologies, postgraduate education is essential for equipping individuals with the necessary skills and has been gaining increasing importance [13, 17, 18, 19]. Considering the contributions of postgraduate education to both the professional and personal development of individuals, it is clear that guiding teachers toward these educational opportunities has become a significant necessity [4]. In this context, [20] observed an increase in teachers' demands for postgraduate programs to further their personal and professional development. According to [21], factors such as the voluntary nature of postgraduate education, the strictness of application requirements, and the challenges encountered during the process limit teachers' interest in postgraduate programs. Therefore, the Ministry of National Education should encourage and support teachers in pursuing postgraduate education [22].

Postgraduate education is critically important for teachers to continue their professional development and adopt modern educational approaches, reflecting these approaches in their classroom practices [23]. These essential educational opportunities should be provided face-to-face, but when conditions are not suitable, they must still be offered online [24]. Therefore, investigating the reasons why teachers pursue postgraduate education will help understand their professional and personal development and the challenges they face throughout the process. This research aims to guide education policies and all educators working in the field of teacher training programs in enhancing the quality of education systems and increasing teachers' academic competence.

1.1 Purpose of the Research

Today, many adults hold undergraduate degrees. As a result, being a university graduate is often seen as a standard achievement. Consequently, many undergraduate graduates seek to advance to the next level by obtaining a master's degree. Earning a master's degree can provide individuals with greater job opportunities as well as personal satisfaction. In some fields, holding a master's degree has become a requirement for employment. The purpose of this study is to determine the perspectives of teachers working in public schools regarding postgraduate education.

1.2 Research Problem

The main research question is: What are the views of teachers working in public schools regarding postgraduate education? To make the research more detailed and comprehensive,

the following sub-questions are addressed: (1) What does a master’s degree represent for you? (2) What are the advantages of pursuing a master’s degree in your opinion? (3) What are the disadvantages of pursuing a master’s degree in your opinion?

2 Methodology

This section covers the research design, population and sample, data collection tools, data collection process, and data analysis.

2.1 Research Design

In this qualitative study, a phenomenological design was used to determine the perspectives of teachers working in public schools on postgraduate education. The qualitative research method prioritizes studying social phenomena within their environments with a theory-building approach [25]. The phenomenological design is an inquiry strategy in which the researcher explores the meaning, structure, and essence of human experiences as described by the participants [26, 27].

2.2 Population and Sample

The study group consists of a total of 50 teachers working in public schools affiliated with the Hatay Provincial Directorate of National Education. Some demographic characteristics of the teachers who participated in the study are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the participating teachers

Variables		N	%
Gender	Female	21	42.0
	Male	29	58.0
Professional Seniority	5-10 years	15	30.0
	11-20 years	12	24.0
	21-30 years	13	26.0
	31+ years	10	20.0
Total		50	100

According to the data in Table 1, out of the total 50 participants, 42.0% (n=21) are female, and 58.0% (n=29) are male. Regarding professional seniority, 30.0% (n=15) have 5-10 years of experience, 24.0% (n=12) have 11-20 years, 26.0% (n=13) have 21-30 years, and 20.0% (n=10) have over 31 years of experience.

2.3 Data Collection Tool

In the study, a semi-structured interview form developed by the researcher was used as a data collection tool to determine the teachers' perspectives on postgraduate education. The interview form consists of two sections. The first section includes demographic variables related to the participants, while the second section comprises three open-ended questions about the research topic. Before the interviews, communication was established with the teachers, and mutually convenient days and times were scheduled. Each interview lasted approximately 10-15 minutes.

2.4 Data Collection & Analysis

For the analysis of the data obtained from the interviews with the participating teachers, content analysis, a qualitative research method, was used. As a result of the content analysis, relevant codes were extracted, and the most suitable themes were identified. The findings of the research are presented in tables for better clarity. Each interviewed teacher was coded as T1, T2, T3, and so on.

3 Findings & Interpretations

In this section, the responses obtained from the interviews with teachers are analysed, tabulated, and interpreted.

The findings related to the first sub-question of the research, "What does a master's degree mean to you?" are presented below:

Table 2. Teacher opinions on the meaning of a master's degree

Themes	Categories	N	Examples of Teacher Responses
What does a master's degree represent?	Pursuing a career, becoming an academician	19	T21: "I want to pursue a master's degree to become an academician. I believe I will further develop myself in academia." T44: "For me, a master's degree means a career."
	Advancing educational level	13	T19: "The world is rapidly moving towards master's and even doctoral degrees. Being a bachelor's graduate is not enough these days." T39: "I prefer having a master's degree over a bachelor's degree. It's always necessary to raise the bar."
	Increasing motivation	11	T9: "A master's degree enhances my motivation towards education and adds excitement to my teaching." T23: "I can't keep up with innovations. A master's degree would energize me and increase my motivation for education."
	Necessity	7	T8: "I believe pursuing a master's degree will become mandatory in the future." T33: "A master's degree should be mandatory for every teacher, and it should be offered alongside the bachelor's degree."

Based on the data in Table 2, it is determined that teachers view a master's degree as a pathway for career advancement, becoming an academic, raising their educational level, increasing motivation, and as a potential requirement.

The findings related to the second sub-question of the research, "What are the advantages of pursuing a master's degree?" are presented below:

Table 3. Teacher opinions on the advantages of pursuing a master’s degree

Themes	Categories	N	Examples of Teacher Responses
Advantages of pursuing a master’s degree	Financial gain, emotional relief	19	T7: “As far as I know, pursuing a master's degree increases the additional class fees and helps reduce our ranking.” T32: “The idea of pursuing a master's degree relieves me emotionally, even makes me happy, It fills me with joy.”
	Publishing papers, writing articles	12	T16: “Having my article published in a journal would make me happy.” T28: “I would be pleased to participate in conferences and have my presentation published.”
	Participating in academic events, recognition	11	T19: “I would be happy to meet well-known academicians at conferences. In fact, taking part in such events is very important to me.” Ö32: “I've always wanted to attend a conference.”
	Gaining knowledge about updated curricula	8	T20: “Curricula are constantly being updated. Seeing these updates in a course would increase my knowledge.” T47: “It would comfort me to receive education from experts on the implementation of updated curricula.”

According to Table 3, the advantages of pursuing a master's degree include financial gain, emotional relief, publishing opportunities, participation in academic events, increased recognition, and gaining knowledge about updated curricula. According to [28], teachers should have a thorough understanding of their curriculum and be well-versed in it.

The findings related to the third sub-question of the research, "What are the disadvantages of pursuing a master's degree?" are presented below:

Table 4. Teacher opinions on the disadvantages of pursuing a master’s degree

Themes	Categories	N	Examples of Teacher Responses
Disadvantages of pursuing a master’s degree	Foreign language issue	27	T25: “I couldn't pursue a master's degree because I don't have a foreign language.” T41: “I couldn't pursue a master's degree because it required a foreign language.”
	Time and workload issue	10	T39: “I work as a classroom teacher. Since I go to school every weekday, I don't have time for anything else.”

			T46: “My weekly workload is too much, so I don't have the energy for a master's degree.”
	Anxiety, stress	8	T24: “You need to work hard to pursue a master's degree; it's a psychological battle.” Ö38: “The thought of pursuing a master's degree causes me anxiety.”
	Communication, technology issues	5	T9: “In a master's program, you need to actively use technology.” T43: “I can't spare the time for a master's program due to my family and children.”

Based on the data in Table 4, the disadvantages of pursuing a master's degree include foreign language requirements, time and workload, anxiety, stress, technology usage, and communication challenges.

4 Conclusion & Recommendation

In this section, the conclusions drawn from the findings based on teachers' responses to the research questions about pursuing a master's degree, along with suggestions regarding the identified problems, are presented.

4.1 Conclusions

Natural Pursuing a master's degree has increasingly come to be regarded as a standard educational step by many. This is primarily due to the high number of undergraduate graduates and the growing number of individuals obtaining master's degrees. The study aimed to determine what a master's degree signifies for teachers. According to the teachers' perspectives, a master's degree represents career advancement, raising the country's educational level, producing qualified human resources, becoming an academician, increasing one's education level, boosting motivation, and fulfilling a necessity.

Based on the teachers' views on the advantages of pursuing a master's degree, it was concluded that the benefits include financial gain, emotional and psychological relief, opportunities for publishing, participation in academic events, increased recognition, acquiring knowledge about updated curricula, and improving overall competence.

However, as with many subjects, teachers also hold some negative opinions about pursuing a master's degree. Based on their views, the disadvantages include issues related to foreign language requirements, time constraints, workload, anxiety, stress, technological challenges, communication difficulties, concerns about competency, psychological and physical fatigue, and unmet expectations.

4.2 Recommendations

From the interviews with teachers, it was found that many of them wish to pursue a master's degree, but they give up on this goal due to their inability to meet the entrance requirements, particularly for thesis-based programs. Therefore, special quotas should be established for teachers working in public schools who wish to pursue a master's degree.

Teachers expressed that universities either do not open enough master's program slots or open very few. Thus, the number of available spots for master's programs at universities should be increased.

The research revealed that teachers often cannot find the time to pursue a master's degree due to their heavy teaching loads. Consequently, the workload of teachers in public schools who are either pursuing or wish to pursue a master's degree should be reduced, and they should be given more free time.

Teachers believe that they will face difficulties, experience stress, and feel anxious when they start a master's degree due to various reasons. Psychological support should be provided by relevant institutions to those teachers who anticipate stress or anxiety related to their studies.

Some teachers feel inadequate in using technology. To address this, technology lessons should be provided through in-service training by school technology and computer teachers or relevant educational authorities to improve teachers' technological skills.

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