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Teachers' organizational vulnerability regarding internal stakeholders and its effects

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Abstract

The purpose of the current study is to examine the organizational vulnerability regarding internal stakeholders experienced by teachers in public secondary schools. Organizational vulnerability refers to teachers' perceived exposure to harm or powerlessness when workplace experiences undermine their professional efficacy, control, identity, or agency. In the study conducted using a qualitative descriptive design, in-depth interviews were conducted with 31 teachers selected using the maximum variation sampling technique. The data were analyzed using inductive content analysis. According to the results of the study, managerial incompetence, oppressive and authoritarian management, discrimination and favouritism, lack of appreciation and gratitude, mobbing, etc. are sources of organizational vulnerability related to administrators. Discrimination based on seniority, gender, hometown and ideology, jealousy and blocking new practices, gossip and whistleblowing, professional incompetence and inertia are sources of vulnerability related to colleagues. While sources of vulnerability related to students include indifference and irresponsibility, rude and disrespectful behaviour, low academic readiness and performance, and hopelessness, academic and pedagogical inadequacies are the sources of vulnerability related to teachers themselves. Organizational vulnerability has three types of effects: individual effects such as internal conflict, sadness, irritability, absentmindedness, restlessness, etc.; familial effects such as complaining to family members, reflecting work stress, etc.; and effects on school life such as decreased motivation, decreased sense of belonging and commitment, decreased work peace and productivity, etc. Overall, the findings indicate that teachers' organizational vulnerability is a multidimensional phenomenon arising from interactions with different internal stakeholders and extending beyond teachers' individual experiences to their family and school lives.

Keywords: Organizational vulnerability; Qualitative descriptive research; Teachers; Vulnerability

1. Introduction

Although the teaching profession is considered one of the most sacred professions in many cultures, perceptions of and expectations toward the profession have been changing as a result of technological and social transformations. Pressures related to adapting to change, accountability demands and expectations of serving as role models may cause teachers to feel powerless, vulnerable and under threat and this situation is described in the literature as the concept of vulnerability. Before delving into the details of teachers' organizational vulnerability, it is useful to clarify the concepts of vulnerability and organizational vulnerability.

Vulnerability generally refers to susceptibility to physical, emotional, or cognitive harm or destabilization (Yamaguchi et al., 2022). In this sense, experiences such as failure, criticism, and negative evaluation may heighten vulnerability when they are perceived as threatening to an individual's self-worth, confidence, or sense of control (Tortoriello & Hart, 2019; Yamaguchi et al., 2022). Vulnerability may take different forms depending on the context, including social vulnerability to external threats and psychological vulnerability associated with difficulties in coping with negative experiences (Araújo et al., 2025). Against this broader background, the present study focuses specifically on organizational vulnerability. The concept of organizational vulnerability, on the other hand, is addressed in the literature in two different ways. In the first approach, the organization is central, and the focus is on the vulnerability of the organization itself as the subject. In the second approach, the subject is the individual and the focus is on the vulnerability experienced by the individual regarding the work environment and his/her position within the organization. Organizational vulnerability in this context is generally examined as

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professional vulnerability. Organization-centred organizational vulnerability is a multifaceted condition describing the susceptibility of an organization arising from its internal weaknesses (e.g., weak management, lack of communication) or external threats (e.g., economic regulations, political conditions) (Chipangura et al., 2024). Individual-centred organizational vulnerability, on the other hand, refers to the feelings of powerlessness, vulnerability and inadequacy experienced by organizational members when work relationships fail, legal regulations pose challenges (Fineman, 2018) or changing environmental conditions threaten their job and career (Bunker, 1997). In the current study, teachers' organizational vulnerability was examined on the basis of the individual-centred organizational approach. This perspective was considered appropriate because the study focuses on teachers' experiences of vulnerability in relation to their professional roles and interactions within the school organization.

Within this individual-centred perspective, organizational vulnerability is conceptually distinct from related negative workplace experiences such as workplace stress, organizational injustice, bullying, burnout, low organizational support, and occupational dissatisfaction. Teacher vulnerability has been associated with situations in which teachers' professional identity and moral integrity are called into question, the limits of their professional efficacy become salient, or their capacity to exercise professional agency and achieve their educational purposes is constrained (Kelchtermans, 1996; Lasky, 2005). Vulnerability may also emerge through teachers' emotional responses to changing professional demands and may influence their professional identity and practices (Song, 2016). Accordingly, negative workplace experiences are not regarded as organizational vulnerability merely because they are stressful, unfair, or unpleasant. Rather, in the current study, such experiences are considered sources of organizational vulnerability when they place teachers in a position of perceived exposure to harm, powerlessness, professional inadequacy, or reduced control over their professional role and practice. Thus, experiences such as unfair treatment, mobbing, lack of support, or problematic interpersonal relations were interpreted as sources of organizational vulnerability when participants' accounts indicated that these experiences threatened their professional identity or moral integrity, constrained their professional agency, or undermined their perceived professional efficacy. This conceptual distinction guided the interpretation and categorization of participants' accounts throughout the analysis.

As previously mentioned, it becomes inevitable for teachers to experience organizational vulnerability in response to the increasing and diversifying pressures and demands of educational stakeholders resulting from changing environmental, social and economic conditions. The questioning of teachers' professional identity and moral integrity by educational stakeholders, especially parents, the loss of control over their tasks and processes and the gap between their desired and actual professional status form the foundations of teacher vulnerability (Kelchtermans, 1996; Zembylas, 2002).

Previous research indicates that teacher vulnerability arises from interconnected relational, professional, and structural conditions. At the relational level, interactions with school administrators, parents, students, supervisors, and other actors within the school environment may challenge teachers' professional authority, identity, and sense of support (Blase, 1988; Gao, 2008; Gleitze et al., 2022; Kelchtermans, 1996). At the professional level, difficulties in meeting expectations concerning teaching effectiveness, curriculum implementation, classroom management, and professional competence may lead teachers to question their efficacy and experience powerlessness or insecurity (Kelchtermans, 1996; Song, 2016). Teacher vulnerability is also shaped by broader structural and organizational conditions, including changing educational policies, legal regulations, cultural expectations, low salaries, job insecurity, excessive workload, exclusion from decision-making, administrative pressure, and poor working conditions (Blase, 1988; Gao, 2008; Gleitze et al., 2022; Usta & Ural, 2025). Taken together, these studies show that teacher vulnerability emerges through the interplay of professional demands, structural conditions, and relationships with actors in and around the school. Among these sources, interactions with internal stakeholders are particularly important because they form part of teachers' everyday organizational experiences and may directly shape their professional efficacy,

control, identity, and agency. This provides the basis for the present study's specific focus on teachers' organizational vulnerability in relation to internal stakeholders.

Previous research associates teacher vulnerability with adverse professional outcomes, including exclusion, defensive behaviours, reduced performance, and constraints on professional development (Song, 2016; Zembylas, 2002). Teacher vulnerability has been associated with reduced professional coping and commitment, as well as serious health problems, including cancer, cardiovascular diseases, and mental disorders (Gleitze et al., 2022). Effective management of teacher vulnerability has been associated with positive interpersonal and professional outcomes, including well-being, collaboration, trust, and learning (Brendel, 2014; Lasky, 2005; Song, 2016). More broadly, constructively addressing organizational vulnerability can foster openness to criticism and professional growth, whereas poorly managed vulnerability is associated with defensive, blaming, and ineffective behaviours (Gilson, 2014; Lasky, 2004; Meyer et al., 2017; Song, 2016). Against this background, the present study focuses specifically on teachers' organizational vulnerability in relation to internal stakeholders, whose actions and interactions constitute an immediate part of teachers' everyday organizational experiences. By identifying the sources and effects of vulnerability associated with these relationships, the study seeks to provide a clearer understanding of teachers' experiences and inform efforts by teachers, administrators, and other relevant stakeholders to address organizational vulnerability more effectively.

As mentioned above, despite the serious impacts and consequences of organizational vulnerability, a limited number of studies have been conducted on teacher vulnerability. The first of these studies was conducted by Blase (1988). In his study, designed using an embedded design, he revealed the dynamics of organizational vulnerability experienced by teachers based on three years of observations and interviews conducted in a single school. Kelchtermans (1996) identified the main sources of organizational vulnerability for teachers through biographical interviews conducted with ten teachers. Lasky (2004) investigated how reforms in the middle school curriculum in Canada affected teacher vulnerability using a mixed-methods approach. Bullough (2005) examined teacher vulnerability during the mentoring process in a case study conducted with one mentor and two interns. Gao (2008) identified the sources of teacher vulnerability by analyzing messages on online teacher platforms. Song (2016), through interviews with five English teachers, examined the organizational vulnerabilities experienced in the context of English language teaching. Gleitze et al. (2022), in their meta-analysis study, identified teachers' organizational vulnerabilities at both macro and meso levels. Argon and Karataş (2025) investigated the relationship between organizational vulnerability and principal-teacher relations. As can be seen, although limited in number, various qualitative and quantitative studies on teachers' organizational vulnerability do exist. It appears that the qualitative studies conducted generally examined organizational vulnerabilities with a small number of teachers, in a single school and within limited contexts such as curriculum changes, mentoring, or English language teaching. No comprehensive research has been found that includes a relatively large number of teacher participants working in different types of schools and examines organizational vulnerabilities related to internal stakeholders in detail. In this context, the main purpose of the current study, which is expected to make a significant contribution to the literature, is to examine in detail the organizational vulnerability process experienced by teachers working in secondary schools with regard to internal stakeholders. In line with this main purpose, the following questions were addressed:

RQ 1) What are the sources of organizational vulnerability experienced by teachers in relation to internal stakeholders?

RQ 2) What are the effects of organizational vulnerabilities experienced by teachers in relation to internal stakeholders?

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

The current study employed a qualitative descriptive design to examine the sources and effects of

organizational vulnerability experienced by teachers in relation to internal stakeholders. Qualitative descriptive research aims to provide a comprehensive and straightforward description of participants' experiences and perspectives while remaining close to their accounts (Sandelowski, 2000, 2010). Unlike qualitative approaches that seek a more highly interpreted or theoretically transformed understanding of a phenomenon, qualitative description is particularly appropriate when a relatively direct description of participants' experiences is sought (Sandelowski, 2000, 2010). Accordingly, this design was considered appropriate for the current study because the purpose was to identify and describe teachers' experiences of organizational vulnerability and organize the recurring patterns in their accounts rather than to determine the essence of a lived experience. Teachers' accounts were therefore examined to identify and describe common patterns concerning the sources and effects of organizational vulnerability.

2.2. Study Group

The study group consisted of 31 teachers: 11 from Anatolian high schools, 10 from vocational high schools, and 10 from Imam Hatip high schools. Participants were selected through maximum variation sampling to ensure diversity in school type, gender, subject area, and professional experience (Anderson & Arsenault, 2005; Patton, 2002). Data collection continued until saturation was reached (Merriam, 2009). Descriptive statistics for the participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of the Teachers in the Study Group

	n	%
School Type		
Anatolian High School	11	35.4
Vocational High School	10	32.3
Imam Hatip High School	10	32.3
Gender		
Female	19	61.3
Male	12	38.7
Branch		
Mathematics	3	9.7
Turkish Language Education	7	22.6
English	3	9.7
Arabic	2	6.5
Philosophy	1	3.2
Art and Painting	1	3.2
Physical Education	1	3.2
CEIT	3	9.7
Machine	1	3.2
Chemistry	1	3.2
Physics	1	3.2
History	2	6.5
Health services	1	3.2
Electric	1	3.2
Graduate of Imam Hatip High School	3	9.7
Professional Experience		
1–9 years	7	22.6
10–19 years	9	29.0
20–29 years	14	45.2
30 years and more	1	3.2
Education Level		
Undergraduate	15	48.4
Graduate	16	51.6

As seen in Table 1, 19 of the participants are female and 12 are male. It is also seen that teachers

from 15 different branches participated in the study. Moreover, the highest number of teachers has 20–29 years of professional experience. The numbers of teachers with undergraduate and graduate education are nearly equal.

2.3. Data Collection Tools

The data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which are considered one of the most common and useful interview techniques in qualitative research (Packer, 2011). In this context, a semi-structured Organizational Vulnerability Form developed by the researcher was used as the data collection tool in the study. While structuring the interview form, a question pool was created and a draft form was prepared in line with the sub-objectives of the study, taking into account the literature on organizational vulnerability. In order to test the content validity of the interview questions, the draft form was presented to the review of 13 faculty members. Since the concept of organizational vulnerability is relatively new, the study aimed to obtain feedback from as many experts as possible. Seven of the experts are professors in the field of educational administration, three are associate professors in educational administration, two are associate professors in measurement and evaluation and one is a doctoral research assistant in the field of qualitative research. Based on the feedback received from the experts, it was observed that two of the questions were not clearly understood, and they were rephrased in a more explicit manner. Prior to the administration to the study group, a pilot interview was conducted with two high school teachers, one female and one male. During the pilot interviews, participants were asked whether they had previously heard of the concept of organizational vulnerability and whether they could define it. However, the participants interpreted vulnerability primarily as being easily offended or overly sensitive rather than in the organizational sense intended in the study. Therefore, these questions were removed from the final interview form. In the main interviews, organizational vulnerability was introduced as referring to situations in which teachers feel powerless, vulnerable, or under threat in relation to their professional roles, professional experiences, and working conditions.

The interview protocol addressed teachers' organizational vulnerability more broadly. For the purposes of the current article, the analysis focused specifically on participants' accounts concerning organizational vulnerability associated with internal stakeholders and its effects. The main interview questions relevant to this focus were: "Do you experience situations in which you feel vulnerable in relation to your school and profession? Could you tell me about these situations?", "In your opinion, what are the main sources of vulnerability that a teacher may experience in relation to the profession and the school in which they work? When the main sources of organizational vulnerability are considered in terms of individual and organizational (school-related) factors, what might these be? Please explain.", and "How do the vulnerabilities you experience in relation to your profession and school affect you? In other words, how are the situations in which you experience organizational vulnerability reflected in your individual and professional life, practices, and relationships?"

2.4. Data Collection Procedure

First, teachers were contacted by phone or message to request an interview, and the interview dates and times were scheduled according to their availability. In addition, brief information about the subject of the study was provided and questions regarding participation in the study were answered. The interviews were conducted according to the teachers' preferences, either by phone or through Google Meet, Zoom or WhatsApp, using video or audio calls. To protect the teachers' privacy and ensure their comfort, video recording was not used; instead, the interviews were audio-recorded with the teachers' consent. In this context, the interviews conducted with 28 participants who allowed recording were audio-recorded, while three interviews were documented in writing. After the interviews were completed, the audio recordings, which ranged from a minimum of 17 minutes to a maximum of 85 minutes, were transcribed. To prevent any data loss, the audio recordings were listened to again and the transcripts were carefully reviewed.

Thus, the written files, totalling 277 pages and prepared for analysis, were renamed to ensure the confidentiality of the participants. Within this framework, the Anatolian high school teachers participating in the study were coded as A1–A11, the vocational high school teachers as V1–V10 and the Imam Hatip high school teachers as I1–I10.

Regarding researcher positionality and reflexivity, all interviews were conducted by the first author, who was working as a research assistant and pursuing doctoral studies at the time of data collection. The first author had no prior collegial or personal relationship with the participating teachers. During the interviews, the first author also kept observational notes concerning the participants and the interview process. Awareness of the researcher's position and her role in the research process was maintained when engaging with participants and interpreting their accounts.

2.5. Data Analysis

Consistent with the qualitative descriptive design of the study, the data were analyzed using inductive content analysis, in which concepts and categories are derived from the data (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). In inductive content analysis, the organization of data involves open coding, the development of categories, and abstraction (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). This approach was considered appropriate for the current study because the analysis sought to identify recurring patterns in teachers' accounts and organize them into categories describing the sources and effects of organizational vulnerability. Before proceeding to the analysis, the transcribed data were read several times to achieve data familiarity, an important step in the analysis of qualitative data (Green et al., 2007). Then, the coding phase was initiated, and the codes, in other words, the subcategories, were created. Coding refers to the process of organizing data into small information categories and can be carried out either manually or through computer programs developed for qualitative analysis (Creswell, 2013). In the current study, a table was created in an Excel file. While determining the subcategories, the participants' statements were adhered to as closely as possible. After the coding process was completed, categories were established. Category formation is the process of bringing together multiple codes, in other words, subcategories, to create a common pattern or idea (Creswell, 2013). Within this framework, similar subcategories in the table were grouped together, and these similar patterns were named to form the categories. The relevant literature was taken into account during the naming process. Afterwards, the analysis files were transferred to MAXQDA, and the analyses related to subcategories and categories were reviewed. Subcategories and categories that needed to be merged were combined, resulting in a more concise coding structure. Then, figures related to the categories and subcategories were created. The findings were presented using frequencies in figures or text and supported by direct quotations from the participants. The frequencies reported in the findings refer to the number of coded statements or opinions rather than the number of individual participants. Therefore, these frequencies were used descriptively to indicate the relative representation of categories in the data and were not interpreted as evidence that particular participant groups were more likely to experience specific forms or effects of organizational vulnerability. In addition, the data tables containing the subcategories (codes) and categories were reviewed by the researcher's advisor and an academic expert in qualitative research. They examined whether the subcategories were appropriately grouped under the categories and provided feedback on subcategories that could be revised or merged. The researcher then reconsidered the coding and categorization in light of this feedback and made revisions where appropriate.

In the current study, the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Creswell, 2013) were sought to be ensured in order to achieve validity and reliability.

Data saturation and checking the accuracy of the researcher's understanding during interviews were used to enhance the credibility of the study (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 2013). In the current study, data collection continued until data saturation was reached. Saturation was considered to have been achieved when the later interviews largely repeated the patterns identified in earlier interviews and no new subcategories emerged from the data. During the interviews, the researcher summarized participants' responses after each question and invited

them to make corrections or additions to clarify and confirm the intended meaning of their responses. This procedure helped ensure that participants' accounts were accurately understood during the interviews.

Detailed description is an important strategy for enabling readers to assess the transferability of qualitative findings to other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 2013; Merriam, 2009). In the current study, the research process, including participant characteristics, data collection and analysis, was described and documented in detail, and the findings were presented faithfully and supported by direct participant quotations.

Dependability can be enhanced through an audit of the research process and findings to assess their consistency (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). In the current study, the research process, data, findings, interpretations and recommendations were reviewed throughout the study by the researcher's advisor, and revisions were made based on the feedback received.

Techniques such as audit can be used to ensure confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). In the current study, the findings and interpretations were reviewed by both the researcher's advisor and an academic expert in the field of qualitative research, aiming to ensure the criterion of objectivity.

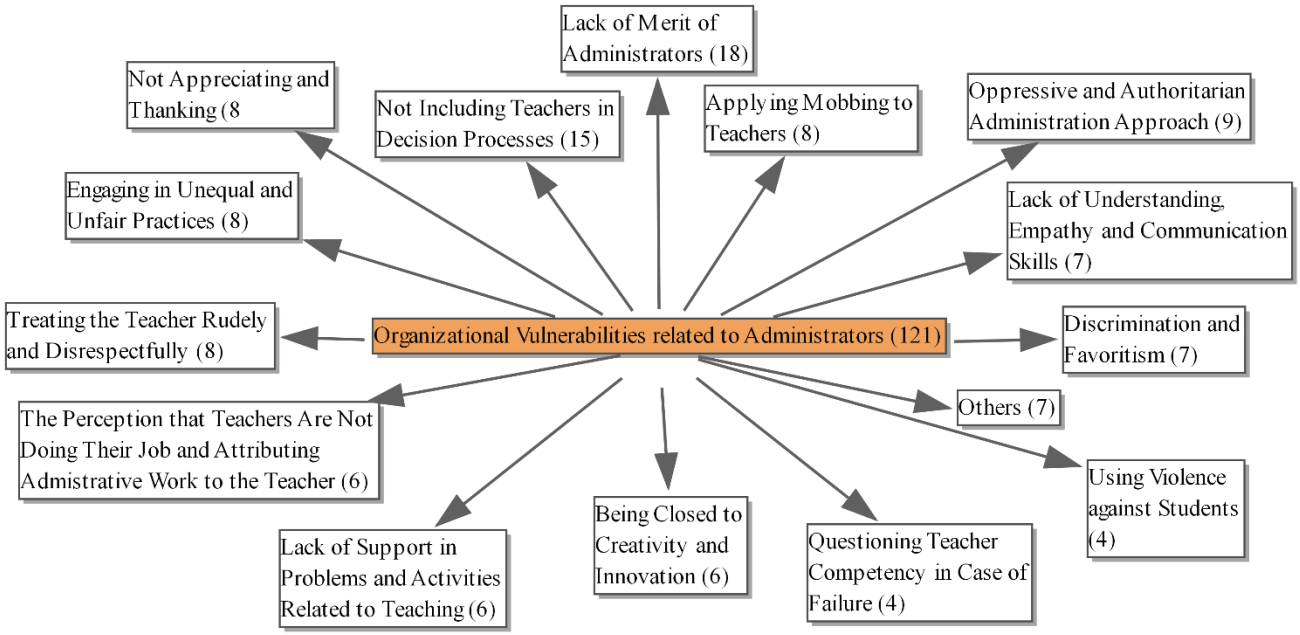
3. Findings

In this section, the findings related to the sources and effects of teachers' organizational vulnerability are presented under the relevant headings. Consistent with the conceptualization adopted in this study, the categories presented below represent conditions or experiences identified as sources of organizational vulnerability when participants' accounts indicated perceived exposure to harm, powerlessness, professional inadequacy, reduced control, or threats to their professional identity, efficacy, or agency.

3.1. Administrators as the Source of Organizational Vulnerability

In the current study, it was found that one of the sources of teachers' organizational vulnerability is the school administrators with whom they have close interactions. The sources of organizational vulnerability experienced by teachers in this context are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Administrator-related Sources of Organizational Vulnerability



As seen in Figure 1, the administrator-related sources of teacher vulnerability are grouped into 15 categories. Teachers expressed the most opinions regarding administrators' lack of merit, including lack of competence and knowledge (A6, V3, V4, V7, V10, I1), lack of merit and planning (A6, V3, V6, V7, V8, I1), insufficient knowledge of assessment and evaluation (V3), lack of

leadership qualities and failure to perform their duties properly (V10, I1). Regarding the exclusion of teachers from decision-making, administrators did not give teachers a voice (A8, V5, I3, I7, I8), imposed decisions without seeking their views (A9, I3, I6, I10), disregarded their requests (A3, I6, I7), adopted a "my way or the highway" attitude (I7, I10) and failed to explain the rationale behind their decisions (I7). Oppressive and authoritarian administration involved dictatorial attitudes (I3, I7), threats of disciplinary action (I1), formalistic or authoritarian practices (A2, V5) and excessive emphasis on hierarchy (A6, V5, I7, I10). Other sources of vulnerability included polarization among administrators (V4), resentment toward successful teachers and unjust investigations (V8), slander (A11), dishonesty (V5) and pressure to join a particular union (A6, V4). Some participant opinions regarding relevant categories are as follows:

> They don't know how many days of leave you're entitled to, or, I don't know, if you have a problem, you're supposed to solve it, or if there's an issue with extra lessons, the school administrator doesn't know how to handle it. They can't solve it, and therefore your problems remain unresolved. (V4)

> A colleague of mine faced an investigation just for not buttoning up his jacket. He ended up leaving the school because his relationship with the principal worsened; all because he entered the office without buttoning up his jacket. (A2)

As can be seen from Figure 1, teachers also experience vulnerability due to administrators' lack of appreciation, discrimination and favouritism, and unequal and unfair practices, which participants described as undermining their professional standing and leaving them exposed to differential or unfair treatment within the school. Lack of appreciation involved not expressing gratitude for assigned tasks or good work (A1, A7, A8, V6) and failing to acknowledge teachers' efforts (A8, V6, V8). Discrimination and favouritism included favouring teachers based on personal relationships or union affiliation (V4, V9, A8), showing bias in recommending teachers for recognition (A6), discriminating against teachers from different unions (V4), favouring influential teachers (I5) and undervaluing teachers from different disciplines (A2). Unequal and unfair practices included inequitable distribution of tasks (A5, V3, V8) and classes (V3, V4), bias in expressing appreciation (A7) and unfair organization of class schedules (A1, I5). Some participant opinions regarding relevant categories are as follows:

> […] Every administration has a group they feel closer to, get along with better or can manage tasks together more easily and that group tends to receive certain privileges in schools. (V9)

> For example, I have long hair, and there is another teacher at the school with long hair. They don't intervene with that teacher, but they do intervene with me. They say, "Teacher, I kindly ask you to follow the dress code". […] (V4)

As seen in Figure 1, mobbing, rude and disrespectful treatment of teachers, and violence against students are also sources of teachers' vulnerability. Mobbing included various behaviours (A11, V4, V8, I1, I8), retaliation and intimidation against teachers who opposed unfair practices (A11, I6), and labelling those who intervened as noncompliant (I6). In the category of treating teachers rudely and disrespectfully, which would fall under mobbing if it becomes continuous and systematic, teachers reported inappropriate behaviours (A6, V4, I1, I7), speaking in a commanding tone and shouting (V4, I1), insults (I6), and failure to respond to their calls (I7). Teachers were also troubled by administrators' violence against students, including physical abuse (V4, I4), profanity (V4), and humiliation (V10). These experiences were interpreted as sources of organizational vulnerability because participants' accounts reflected exposure to intimidation, sanctions, humiliation, and restrictions on their professional activities, rather than merely dissatisfaction with interpersonal treatment. Some participant opinions regarding relevant categories are as follows:

> In meetings, the principal can say something that humiliates many colleagues. […] If you intervene and point out that this behaviour is wrong, you may face certain sanctions, experience mobbing, have your materials restricted, lose access to your classroom, or have your schedule disrupted. (I6)

> The bell rings, and the principal stands right at the door of the teachers' room. When the teachers see this, their hair practically stands on end. […] Now, the new vice principal has started doing the same thing to us. He blows a whistle. Can he even blow a whistle? What does that mean? (A6)

As can be seen in Figure 1, lack of support in teaching-related problems and activities,

questioning teachers' competence in case of failure, and assigning administrative tasks based on the perception that "teachers are not doing their job" are also sources of teacher vulnerability. Lack of support included insufficient financial support for assigned tasks (A1), lack of efforts to motivate teachers (A1, A8), failure to support new activities (I6), leaving teachers on their own (I3), and not assisting with student problems (I7). Questioning teachers' competence involved holding them responsible for student failure (A5, V3), evaluating their success solely on students' grade averages (V3), and questioning their professional competence (V5). Assigning administrative tasks based on the perception that "teachers are not doing their job" included assigning menial tasks (A8), perceiving teachers as not actually working (I3) or earning money without real effort (I7), assigning them administrators' own responsibilities (A7, V6, I3), and assigning inappropriate commission duties (A3). These accounts suggest that lack of support and the questioning of teachers' competence became sources of vulnerability when they undermined teachers' perceived professional efficacy or reduced their control over their professional responsibilities. Some participant opinions regarding relevant categories are as follows:

> Sometimes such additional duties are assigned, which both lower your motivation and can prevent you from focusing on your work. […] Now, you're in class, and suddenly you're called to the tender committee your lesson gets disrupted. You're asked to leave the class and complete this paperwork. (A3)

> At the teachers' meeting, our school administrators announce the success rates. […] They say, 'Mr. A, your rate is 30 percent. Could you explain the reason for your failure, please?' According to what am I considered unsuccessful? Just based on that percentage? (V3)

As can be seen from Figure 1, administrators' lack of openness to creativity and innovation and their lack of understanding, empathy and communication skills are also sources of teacher vulnerability. Lack of openness to creativity and innovation included administrators' resistance to creativity (A10), discouraging or obstructing teachers from pursuing graduate studies (A6, V4), and preventing them from initiating new projects or activities (A10, V8, V10). Lack of understanding, empathy and communication skills involved inability to empathize with teachers from different disciplines (A2), failure to engage with or listen to teachers (I10, A6), lack of persuasive ability (V10), taking a stance against teachers based on others' instigation (I1), lack of a conciliatory tone (V4), and failure to value teachers and students (I7). Some participant opinions regarding relevant categories are as follows:

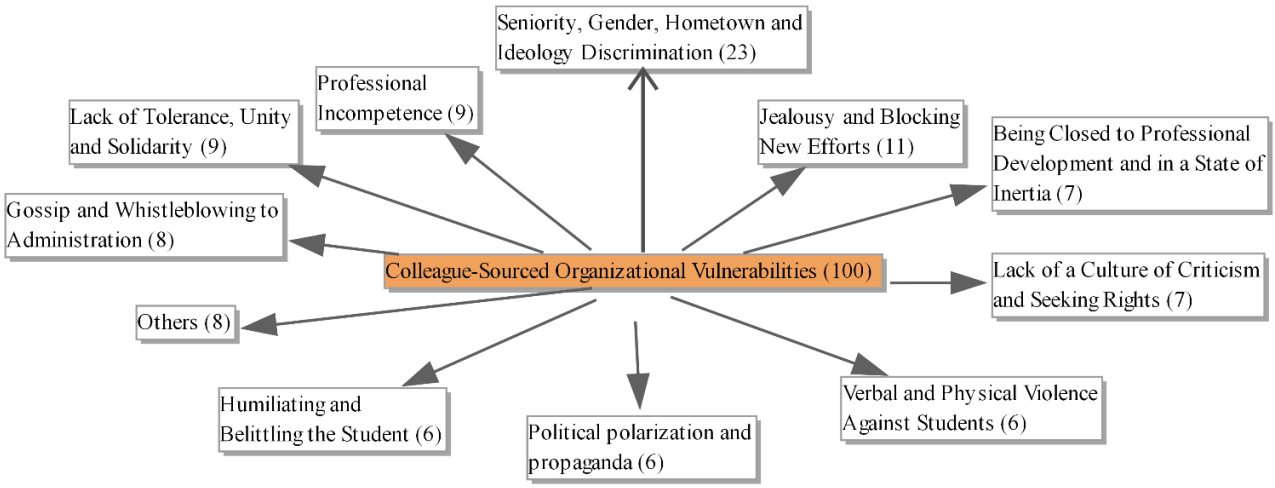
> When we want to carry out different projects, they don't allow it. You're constantly being blocked; they are not open to innovation. […] I was running a creative drama project with College T. […] But in the following years, the school principal didn't allow us to continue the project. (A10)

> Unfortunately, there is no conciliatory language among the administrators either. Schools are often described as spaces of conflict; I don't understand how everyone can misunderstand each other, can fight with each other, can be in conflict and can hold grudges. (V4)

3.2. Colleagues as the Source of Organizational Vulnerability

Teachers' sources of organizational vulnerability related to their colleagues are shown in Figure 2. As can be seen in Figure 2, discrimination based on seniority, gender, hometown and ideology emerged as colleague-related sources of teacher vulnerability in participants' accounts. Seniority-based discrimination involved experienced teachers exerting psychological pressure on younger or newly appointed teachers (I2, I7), using harsh language (V4), disregarding or disrespecting their opinions (I8), belittling their knowledge (A11, I2), establishing hierarchical dominance over them (V4, V7, I2), interfering with their communication with students (I8) and displaying an "I know everything professionally and pedagogically" attitude (A4, I4, I5, I8). Participants' accounts of gender-based discrimination included perceptions that young female teachers were treated as novices by male teachers (V4, V7) and, in V7's account, that vocational high schools had a male-dominated culture in which female teachers facing difficulties were perceived as helpless and in need of support from experienced male teachers. Participants' accounts of ideological and

Figure 2
Colleague-related Sources of Organizational Vulnerability



hometown-based discrimination included hostility toward colleagues with different ideologies (V3), limited acceptance of Imam Hatip vocational course teachers (I2), prejudice against teachers from different unions (V4), and favouritism toward colleagues sharing the same ideology (A11, V3) or hometown (A11). Some participants also reported that teachers deliberately attempted to project their ideological or political views onto students. These experiences were interpreted as sources of organizational vulnerability insofar as participants' accounts indicated that they undermined teachers' professional standing, limited the recognition of their views, or constrained their agency within collegial relationships. For example, V3's opinion on this matter is as follows:

> Biased individuals, those who reflect their ideology in their professional practice, push you to the point of organizational vulnerability. They are partial, ideological and do not approach situations objectively. […] You start to worry that by imposing their ideology and provoking certain emotions, they may lead children to anger and resentment. (V3)

Similarly, V7 stated that differing opinions were marginalized and that, unlike in the past, teachers now reflect such differences onto students. As can be seen in Figure 2, participants' accounts also identified political polarization and propaganda as sources of vulnerability, including political partisanship (V3, V6, V7), attempts to establish hegemony, impose one's views and marginalize others (A6, I7, V6). This is clearly reflected in the opinions of V3 and V6, who hold opposing political views but complain about the same situation:

> There are biased behaviours among our colleagues. […] When someone who shares their ideology achieves something positive, they talk about it everywhere. But they ignore the achievements of someone from the opposing ideology. Can political partisanship really go this far? (V3)

> There is a group that reduces the issue to political polarization and partisanship. […] Over time, they have increasingly adopted a partisan, biased stance, distant from criticism. For example, even in minor matters, such as discussions about the 3600 additional indicator (a regulation concerning the pension and retirement benefits of public employees), there are colleagues who refuse to acknowledge the real-life difficulties that everyone experiences regarding teachers' social and economic rights, and instead take the exact opposite approach. (V6)

Based on the discussion above, teachers' professional educator identity appears to have diminished in its integrative role in balancing political or ideological differences. On the other hand, the following participant statements illustrate seniority- and gender-based discrimination:

> For example, in a meeting, when there is an issue regarding a student and I express my own opinion, I might be met with comments like, "You're younger, you're newer." Honestly, this bothers me, because it is my opinion, my perspective. It has nothing to do with being young or a new teacher. (I8)

> In vocational high schools, vocational teachers are often male individuals who have been working at the school for a long time. […] As a result, you constantly feel like a novice; you experience being

> treated as a rookie, and because you are a woman, you are seen as someone who always needs protection. You notice that they act in an interventionist way, assuming you cannot handle even the smallest problem on your own. (V7)

Jealousy and the prevention of new practices, lack of tolerance and solidarity, and lack of a culture of criticism and advocacy for rights are also sources of colleague-related vulnerability. Jealousy and the prevention of new practices involved hindering colleagues' new projects or practices and undermining their motivation (V8, I5, I6, I7), looking for colleagues' weaknesses (A7), mobbing successful teachers (V8), and displaying jealousy (A2, V3, V8, I5). Lack of tolerance and solidarity included intolerance among teachers (V7), lack of cooperation and solidarity (A7, V10, I8), inability to unite and defend their rights (I3, I8), and intolerance toward differing opinions (V6, V7, I8). Lack of a culture of criticism and advocacy for rights, which can be seen as an extension of the absence of solidarity among teachers, involved labelling those who spoke out against injustices as nonconformists (I6), remaining silent in the face of administrators' injustices (A11, I1, I6, I8), failing to engage in self-criticism or accept responsibility (V1), and lacking a critical perspective (V6). Some participant opinions regarding relevant categories are as follows:

> In this country, if you are successful, people don't say, "I'll do the same". Instead, they tell you not to do it; because when you succeed, your colleagues in the same subject area might feel obligated to do the same. (V8)

> Unfortunately, teachers in this country cannot unite; they cannot come together. […] When a healthcare worker experiences violence or hears insults, they immediately unite and can organize a one-day work stoppage. Meanwhile, we face violence from students, violence from parents and mobbing from administrators. And yet, teachers never speak out. (I3)

As can be seen in Figure 2, gossip and whistleblowing to the administration also emerged as sources of colleague-related vulnerability. These included badmouthing teachers to students (A2, I3), sharing teachers' room discussions with students (A7), gossiping with students and attempting to turn them against teachers (V4), gossiping about teachers with administrators (I8), reporting information to the administration (A6), and gossiping about colleagues (V3). In this regard, one participant expressed the following opinion:

> For example, sometimes I would hear something from a student that had been discussed in the teachers' room. The teachers' room is like the bedroom of a house, you talk about everything there at times. But when you later hear it from a student, it's quite shocking. (A7)

As can be seen in Figure 2, professional incompetence, lack of openness to professional development, and inertia also emerged as sources of colleague-related vulnerability. Professional incompetence involved colleagues failing to fulfil the requirements of the teaching profession (A10, V3, V10, I9), being inadequate in their work (V1, V3, V7, I5), and being perceived as having insufficient professional competence (A5). Lack of openness to professional development and inertia included making no effort to improve themselves, perceiving everything as a burden and complaining (A10, I5, I6, I7), showing little respect for the profession (I7), devaluing it by failing to develop themselves (I7), and displaying weariness and hopelessness (V10). In this regard, one participant expressed the following opinion:

> In exams, instead of focusing on what the student needs to learn and know, it's more like, 'Let's ask easy questions, short ones and let's just get it done quickly'. […] They neither put thought into it nor spare the time. They just want to get it over with as soon as possible—everything feels like a chore, a burden. (A10)

Teachers may also experience vulnerability due to their colleagues' interactions with students, particularly humiliating and belittling students and using verbal or physical violence. Humiliating and belittling students included the belief that "these students are no good" (V10, I4, I7), humiliating students (V4), and belittling their achievement and ability (I2, I7). Verbal and physical violence included overly authoritarian attitudes (I4), disregarding students' emotional states and pressuring them through grades (A9), constantly blaming students (V1), using offensive language (V4), and physically harming students (V4). In this regard, one participant expressed the following opinion:

> They use bad words for students such as 'retarded', 'stupid'. This is especially common in vocational high schools. […] Teachers also curse at students. […] Since the students see that teachers solve their problems with violence and cursing, they end up addressing their own problems the same way. (V4)

Within the category of others, colleague-related sources of vulnerability included conflicts over taking classes (A11, V4), failure to fulfil responsibilities in collaborative work (A5, V8), inappropriate attire at school (A7), disagreements within the same subject area about what should be taught (A5), declining humility and empathy alongside increasing selfishness and opportunism (A2), and the prevalence of violent language among male teachers in vocational high schools due to a male-dominated discourse (V7).

Teachers also made various inferences about the underlying causes of colleague-related vulnerability. Some participants attributed teachers' resistance to professional development and inertia to the lack of supervision and inspection (V3, V10), while I7 associated this with the prevailing societal mentality of "just show up and get your salary". Professional incompetence was attributed to flawed teacher training policies and inadequate preparation in education faculties (A4), as well as ineffective teaching internships (V10). V4 attributed gender discrimination and women's discomfort in vocational high schools to the predominantly male educational backgrounds of male students and teachers, suggesting indirectly the importance of coeducation. In the coded accounts, references to gender discrimination were made by participants working in vocational high schools.

According to some participants, teachers refrain from criticizing administrators or seeking justice because they believe that complaints will not change the outcome and may result in being labelled as undesirable persons (V3, A11, I6, I8). This finding is thought-provoking as it points to teachers' weak trust in relevant institutions. Other participants attributed this situation to teachers' fear of losing the benefits of being compliant and their anxiety about outcomes that might disrupt their comfort zones (A6, I6, I8). I6's statement on this issue is as follows:

> The teaching community has these small strongholds that they don't want anyone to interfere with. For example, they have their schedules, and they don't want them to be disrupted. […] Our teachers attach great importance to being able to leave early. They don't want to have problems with the school administration, that's the situation. (I6)

Some participants approached the underlying causes of teacher vulnerability from different perspectives. A8 attributed vulnerability to teachers' inability to make their work visible, in other words, to manage impressions effectively. In contrast, A6 suggested that graduate education increases teachers' awareness, making them more likely to recognize and be disturbed by negative situations. In this regard, A6 expressed the following opinion:

> After completing my master's education […], this actually causes a bit of discomfort. You find yourself thinking, 'I wish I didn't notice this so much, or that it didn't bother me', but by then, it's already too late. (A6)

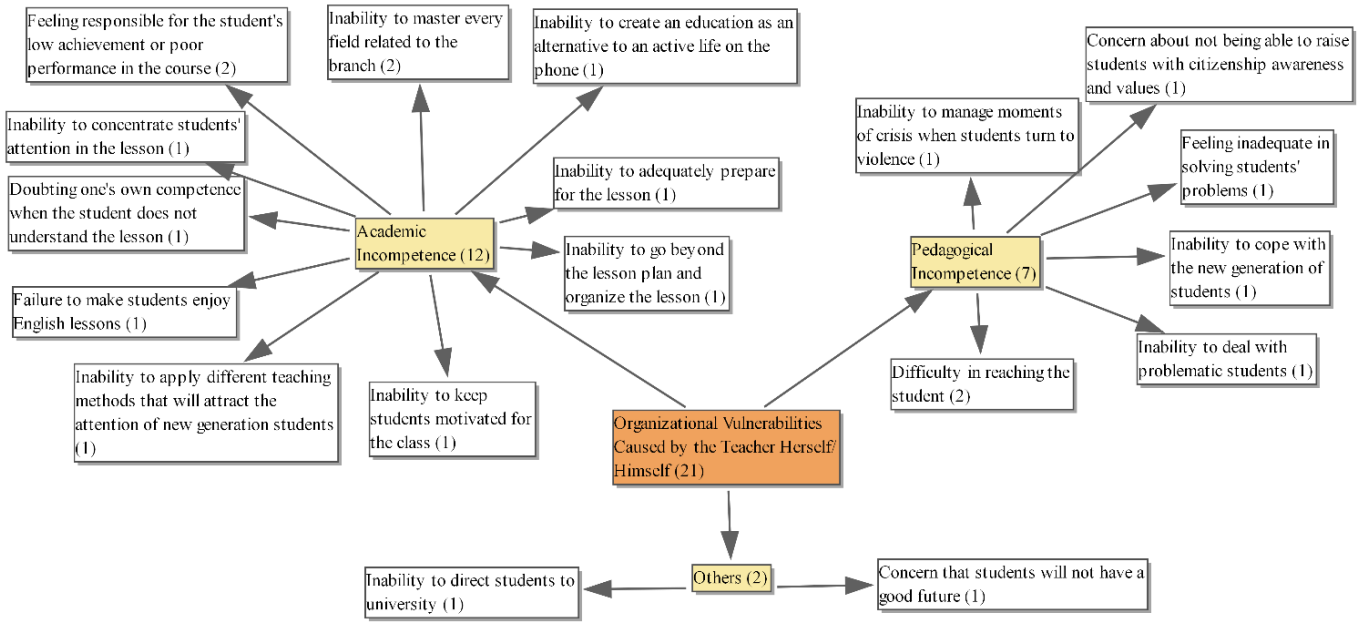
3.3. The Teacher Himself/Herself as the Source of Vulnerability

The analyses revealed that teachers' vulnerability may stem not only from external factors but also from teachers themselves. While identifying their colleagues' professional inadequacies as sources of vulnerability, participants also acknowledged their own shortcomings. The sources of organizational vulnerability stemming from teachers themselves are presented in Figure 3.

As can be seen in Figure 3, pedagogical and academic inadequacies emerged as sources of teachers' self-related organizational vulnerability in participants' accounts. Pedagogical incompetence included difficulties in coping with new-generation and challenging students (A8, V2) and solving their problems (A6), inability to reach students effectively (V7, I8), failure to manage crises (I8), and inability to instil the desired values and sense of citizenship in students (A7). Some participant opinions regarding these pedagogical inadequacies are as follows:

> I had a situation where the students were fighting right in front of my eyes and I couldn't separate them. In fact, I had a panic attack right there and couldn't separate them; on the contrary, I also felt terrible. (I8)

Figure 3
Sources of Organizational Vulnerability Stemming from Teachers Themselves



> Sometimes there are incredibly mischievous students who disrupt the classroom environment. […] Sometimes we can't cope with the students' problems. It's not just about delivering the lesson, you're not only teaching. […] You struggle to manage and sometimes I feel inadequate. (A8)

These experiences were interpreted as sources of organizational vulnerability when teachers' perceived inability to manage challenging situations or reach students effectively undermined their sense of professional efficacy and control over their classroom practice. Regarding academic inadequacies, teachers reported concerns about lacking full command of their subject area, being unable to implement contemporary teaching methods, coming to class unprepared, failing to regain control of the lesson when deviating from the plan, being unable to maintain students' attention and motivation, and feeling responsible for students' shortcomings (A5, A6, I3, I7, I8, I9, I10). Some participant opinions are presented below:

> I am a good teacher when it comes to folk dance. But, for example, when it comes to the basketball branch, I feel inadequate. When it comes to practical application, I don't see myself as competent. (I3)

> Sometimes you can't capture the students' attention because we are still teaching lessons primarily through lectures. We're in the 21st century. Yes, we have smart boards and we try to use them as much as we can, but still, as I said, the students are already saturated with that. […] In Arabic lessons, I am not good enough at handling the students. (I10)

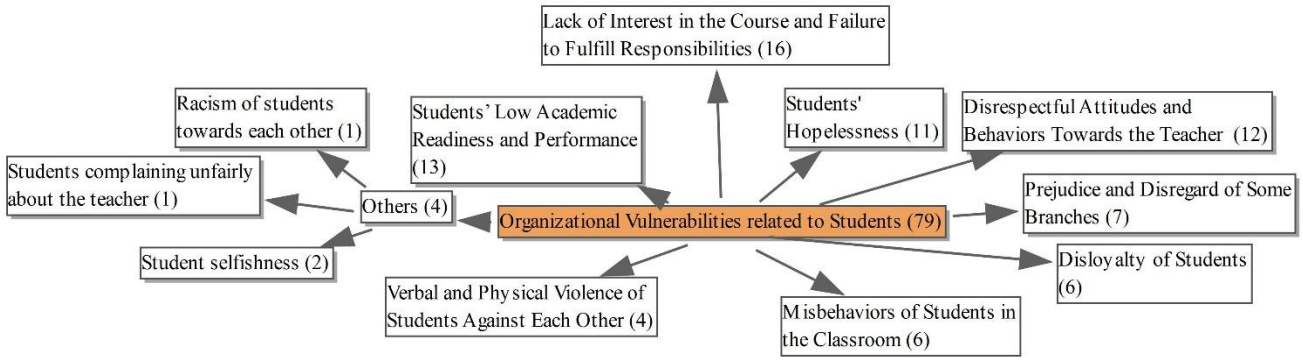
Of the 21 coded opinions concerning teacher inadequacy presented in Figure 3, 16 were contributed by participants with 13 years or less of professional experience. Professional experience therefore emerged as a contextual characteristic reflected in these accounts.

3.4. Students as the Source of Organizational Vulnerability

Analysis of the participant views revealed that the sources of teachers' organizational vulnerability stemming from students can be grouped into 9 categories. Accordingly, the sources of teachers' student-related vulnerability are shown in Figure 4.

As indicated in Figure 4, students' lack of interest in lessons and failure to fulfil their responsibilities emerged as a source of student-related teacher vulnerability in participants' accounts. This included unwillingness to listen (I1, I10) or follow the lesson (A3, V3), lack of interest (A4, A7, V9, V3, V10, I1, I2, I9, I10), coming to class unprepared (I2), and failure to fulfill

Figure 4
Sources of Organizational Vulnerability Stemming from Students



lesson-related responsibilities (I2, I9). As an extension of this lack of interest, undesirable classroom behaviours included using phones during class (V7, I9, I10), making noise (A3), being easily distracted (I10), and disregarding rules (I2). Students also displayed prejudice and lack of appreciation toward certain subjects, including undervaluing English in Imam Hatip high schools (I7), prejudice toward philosophy (I1) and English (I7), undervaluing art and sociocultural courses (A1), lack of interest in mathematics (A3), and vocational high school students' lack of appreciation for non-vocational courses (V4, V7). Some participant opinions regarding these categories are as follows:

> That is, children already know that they will work in a factory or in industry in the future. Therefore, they do not attach much importance to literature classes. (V4)

> Since I work at an Imam Hatip school and because of my subject, philosophy, I sometimes face serious problems. […] The students' perspective is immediately like, 'A philosophy teacher must be someone without faith.' They say things like, 'Teacher, do you have a religion? What you say confuses us, will I lose my faith?' […] (I1)

These statements suggest that students' prejudice is not necessarily directed toward a particular subject; rather, depending on the type of education they receive, they may undervalue courses they perceive as offering little pragmatic benefit for their future careers or examinations.

As can be seen in Figure 4, student hopelessness is also a significant source of teacher vulnerability. This category included students' feelings of despair (A4, V4, V7, V10, I10), lack of aspirations (A4, V7), pessimism and resignation (V7, V10, I10), and feelings of inferiority or inadequacy (I10). Teachers associated students' lack of interest and hopelessness with several underlying factors, including being forced by parents to attend an unwanted programme or school (I9), an overly difficult curriculum, acceptance of failure from the outset, and excessive engagement with smartphones (I10), low family socio-economic status and acceptance of their circumstances or fate (A4, I6), and concerns about unemployment and future prospects (V9). I10 also attributed hopelessness to the grouping of schools by achievement level, which creates a caste-like system of which students are aware. Some participant opinions regarding these inferences are as follows:

> We live in a specific geographic region and a particular context, and unfortunately, day by day, we are living in increasingly constrained conditions. […] With each passing day, their future seems even more uncertain, and there are always difficulties they must overcome. Therefore, they understandably fall into hopelessness. (V9)

> Everyone essentially accepts everything according to their own standards. Call it fate, if you will. In other words, "My parents are like this, so at most I can achieve the same" and their dreams extend no further than what they see in TV series, which are entirely utopian. (A4)

> No matter how much we deny it, such a caste system exists. These children come to our schools, but they say, "My level is already fixed; I can't achieve much." They come with a bit of this lack of self-confidence and believe they won't be able to succeed. (I10)

As shown in Figure 4, students' low academic readiness and performance also emerged as a

source of teacher vulnerability in participants' accounts. This category included concerns about students' academic skills (A6, A7, V9, I3, I5), academic level (A4, I7, I9, I10), and low academic readiness (V4, V9, I7, I9). V4 attributed students' low academic readiness to families' low socio-economic status, inadequate nutrition, and fatigue from walking to school, while I9 associated students' academic difficulties with economic hardship, the need to work, and domestic unrest. One participant expressed the following opinion:

> As teachers, we look at the background of the incoming students, after all. […] Unfortunately, students cannot even construct a sentence about themselves properly. This may be a disadvantage of vocational high schools. But I have also worked in Anatolian high schools, and it was not much different; moreover, there is a student profile around us that seems to be deteriorating day by day. (V9)

As shown in Figure 4, students' disrespectful attitudes and behaviours toward teachers are also sources of vulnerability. These included disrespectful communication (A6), rude attitudes and behaviours (V5, V7, I2), disregarding (A3), insulting (I2), harassing (V7), humiliating (V5, I2), and approaching teachers with prejudice (I2). I2 also reported perceiving some behaviours of foreign students as disrespectful toward Turkish culture and values. Student ingratitude was another source of vulnerability, including viewing teachers merely as grade-givers (A2), former students no longer greeting them despite previously established emotional bonds (A2, I2, I6), and graduates failing to recognize them despite teachers' efforts (A2, I2). These experiences were interpreted as sources of organizational vulnerability when participants' accounts indicated that disrespect, humiliation, or lack of recognition threatened their professional standing, sense of worth, or security in their interactions with students. One participant expressed the following opinion:

> While I tried to direct him to the classroom, the student called me 'retarded'. What can you do? They can say that to you very easily, and the student received no punishment. […] You're just not important to them. For example, a few days ago I saw a former student on the street, and even though he saw me, he turned his head the other way. (I2)

As can be seen in Figure 4, student-to-student interactions are also sources of teacher vulnerability. These included bullying (A7), physical violence and offensive language (V7), disrespectful communication (A6), and disregarding rules (I2). Within the category of others, teachers were also disturbed by students reporting them to counsellors or administrators even when the students themselves were at fault (I2), students' selfishness (A7, I10), and racism toward one another (I4). One participant expressed the following opinion:

> There are certain rules at school, for instance, students should not come to class wearing makeup. […] When a student came like that once or twice, I told her I could no longer allow her into class dressed that way. The student slammed the door and left. On top of that, she went and reported me to the counsellor. (I2)

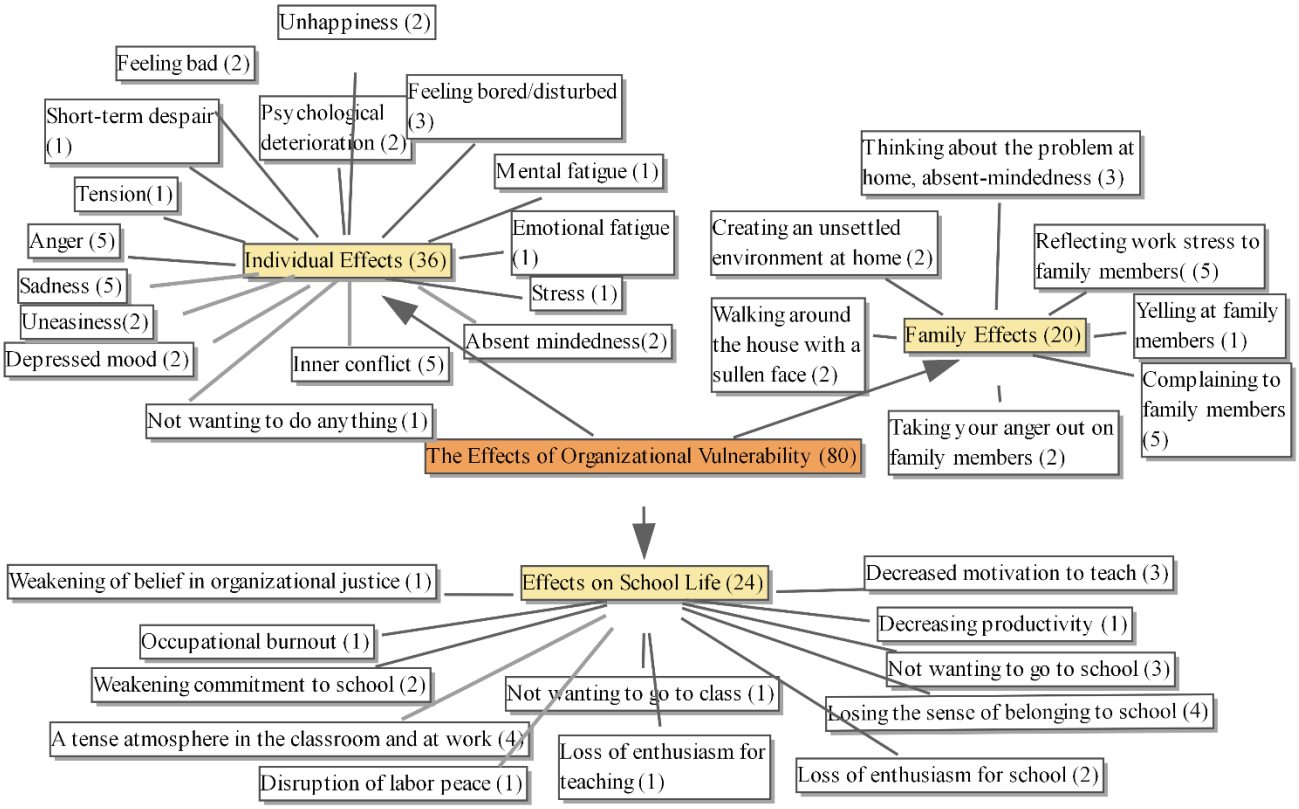
3.5. Effects of Organizational Vulnerability Experienced by Teachers

The analysis shows that, despite teachers' efforts not to let the organizational vulnerability they experience affect their professional and family lives, this vulnerability still has various individual and familial effects, as well as effects on their school lives. These effects are shown in Figure 5.

As shown in Figure 5, organizational vulnerability negatively affects teachers' mental and emotional well-being, resulting in internal conflicts, boredom, sadness, irritability, tension, restlessness, low morale, absent-mindedness, feeling unwell, unhappiness, hopelessness, mental and emotional fatigue, and deterioration of psychological well-being. These outcomes were treated as consequences of organizational vulnerability rather than as indicators defining vulnerability itself, thereby distinguishing the experience of vulnerability from related outcomes such as stress, emotional exhaustion, and occupational dissatisfaction. Some participant opinions regarding these individual effects are as follows:

> Well, first of all, my nerves get on edge, and my peace of mind is disturbed. When you experience something with a student, the class atmosphere becomes tense. That's one thing. And when you have a problem with a colleague, there's naturally tension as well. (A6)

Figure 5
The Effects of Organizational Vulnerability Experienced by Teachers



> It affects me negatively. You start feeling frustrated too, thinking, "Why am I even bothering?" You spend 30, 40 minutes talking and explaining, but nothing changes. (V9)

As shown in Figure 5, organizational vulnerability also has familial effects, including complaining to family members and being absent-minded at home, taking out anger on family members, creating a tense home environment, and shouting at them. Some participant opinions regarding these familial effects are as follows:

> You get upset during the day and haven't been able to release your anger. When you come home, you take it out on someone, getting angry at your spouse, at your child. […] In other words, you somehow take out your frustration on those at home. (I2)

> People say they leave work at school when they come home, but I can never do that, for example. When I get home, I end up talking about work with my family… This affects my life because I don't really separate my work from my personal life. (A8)

These findings indicate that teachers may have difficulty maintaining work-life balance. Of the 20 coded opinions concerning familial effects, 16 were expressed by female participants, indicating that female participants contributed a greater number of coded opinions concerning these effects.

As shown in Figure 5, organizational vulnerability also negatively affects school life by weakening organizational justice, commitment and sense of belonging, disrupting workplace harmony, reducing teachers' enthusiasm, teaching motivation and productivity, creating reluctance to attend class or school and aversion to school, and generating tension in the classroom and school. Some relevant participant opinions are as follows:

> For example, regarding a particular class, I simply don't want to go back there; my feet drag me away. In another class, I can teach more enthusiastically, cheerfully and energetically. But in that class, I don't even want to look in the direction where the students are. (I2)

> Every problem we experience at school makes us grow averse to it, that's certain. If you have issues with the administration, you don't feel like going to school. […] Being at school, being in that environment, creates tension; people become unhappy and don't feel a sense of belonging. (I1)

Some teachers stated that the effects of vulnerability diminished with age and experience (A7,

I8, I9). Others did not perceive vulnerability solely negatively but viewed such experiences as opportunities for personal growth, reflecting what may be described as positive vulnerability. One participant expressed the following opinion:

> Some experiences provide valuable lessons. They show me how I should act or what path I should take. I believe that going through certain situations turns them into an advantage, giving me experience to find calmer, easier or better solutions. (I8)

4. Discussion

The findings revealed that teachers described organizational vulnerability in relation to administrators, colleagues, themselves and students, with administrator-related experiences being particularly prominent in the coded accounts. This is unsurprising given teachers' direct interaction with administrators within a hierarchical power structure and is consistent with previous research identifying administrators as an important source of teacher vulnerability (Blase, 1988; Kelchtermans, 1996). Importantly, these conditions were interpreted as sources of organizational vulnerability not simply because they represented negative workplace experiences, but because participants' accounts indicated that they generated perceived exposure to harm, powerlessness, professional inadequacy, reduced control, or threats to professional identity, efficacy, and agency. The relevance of professional agency is also supported by Badal (2025), who found that top-down professional practices that marginalised teacher voice and professional autonomy constrained teacher agency. Administrator-related sources included managerial incompetence, exclusion from decision-making, authoritarian leadership, lack of appreciation and instructional support, inappropriate assignment of administrative tasks, questioning teachers' competence, discrimination and favouritism, unfair practices, mobbing, disrespectful behaviour, poor empathy and communication skills, and resistance to creativity and innovation. Previous studies similarly highlight administrators' lack of managerial competence as a source of teacher vulnerability (Kazak & Çiner, 2021).

Meritocracy refers to a system in which outcomes such as jobs, wealth, and power are allocated on the basis of merit, traditionally understood in terms of intelligence and effort but more broadly encompassing relevant abilities, training, and experience (Son Hing et al., 2011). In educational administration, this principle implies that appointments and leadership responsibilities should be based on professional competence, expertise, leadership capacity, communication skills, and fairness rather than irrelevant or preferential considerations. From this perspective, teachers' vulnerability when working under administrators whom they perceive as lacking the competencies required for their positions is understandable. Empirical evidence indicates that perceived merit in school administrators is positively associated with teachers' organizational loyalty and work effort and significantly contributes to predicting both outcomes (Özdemir, 2013). More broadly, administrative support is positively associated with teacher leadership and professional agency (Tosun & Bozkurt Bostancı, 2024), while meta-analytic evidence indicates that leadership is meaningfully associated with organizational performance (Danişman et al., 2015). These findings suggest that perceptions of administrator competence and merit may shape not only teachers' evaluations of school leadership but also their commitment, effort, and capacity to function effectively within the organization.

Oppressive and authoritarian management was prominently represented in the coded accounts concerning administrator-related sources of vulnerability. This raises concerns about teachers' capacity to educate self-confident and critical individuals who can challenge injustice while they themselves work under pressure and authority. Similarly, Kelchtermans (1996) notes that authoritarian administration may restrict teachers' identity, creativity and preferred teaching practices. Blase and Blase (2006) also found that authoritarian practices resulted in humiliation, self-doubt and loneliness, ultimately harming educational activities and the school environment. Such management may further increase organizational silence and reduce trust in administrators and emotional commitment (Parlar et al., 2022). Similar concerns have been reported in other studies (Alanezi, 2024; Gleitze et al., 2022; Usta & Ural, 2025).

Mobbing and rude or disrespectful administrative behaviours, particularly when persistent and systematic, were also identified as sources of teacher vulnerability when they exposed teachers to intimidation, humiliation, sanctions, or constraints on their professional activities. This finding is consistent with numerous studies documenting mobbing in schools (Blase & Blase, 2006; De Wet, 2010; Kazak & Çiner, 2021; Ökdem, 2023; Temli Durmuş, 2023; Usta & Ural, 2025). School administrators are a major source of teacher mobbing, which may undermine teachers' performance, self-confidence, respect for the school, physical and emotional well-being, motivation and organizational silence (Blase & Blase, 2006). Administrator mobbing has also been associated with personality traits and inadequate supervision (De Wet, 2010). Organizational culture can either inhibit or enable workplace bullying and that, among teachers, higher perceptions of mobbing are associated with greater organizational silence and lower perceptions of organizational justice (Jacobs & Teise, 2019). Increasing teachers' awareness of mobbing and their legal rights (Ökdem, 2023), alongside appropriate sanctions, may therefore contribute to its prevention. Accordingly, prevention should extend beyond individual coping and include organizational and institutional measures.

In addition to the vulnerability caused by mobbing in administrator-teacher relationships, teachers are also affected by incidents of violence within administrator-student relationships. Indeed, administrators' use of violence against students is one of the sources of teacher vulnerability. The persistence of violence in contemporary schools is concerning, particularly as administrators have been identified among those who frequently resort to violence (Özmen & Küçük, 2013). This may stem from pressure to maintain order and discipline, the arbitrary use of hierarchical power to assert authority, or inadequate legal regulations against violence.

Administrators' discriminatory behaviours, as well as other unequal and unjust practices that can be evaluated in the same context, are also among the main sources of teacher vulnerability. Supporting this finding, several studies have documented discrimination and favouritism in administrators' practices (Arslan et al., 2024; Kazak & Çiner, 2021; Kelchtermans, 1996). Teachers may experience such practices in decision-making, task allocation, rewards and punishments, access to support, union or civil society membership and on the basis of gender, beliefs or cultural differences (Arslan et al., 2024; Kelchtermans, 1996). These experiences may evoke anger, unhappiness and loneliness, while reducing teachers' school belonging and motivation and increasing cynicism and intentions to leave the school (Arslan et al., 2024; Kazak & Çiner, 2021).

Teachers reported insufficient administrative support and being perceived as not working hard enough, sometimes resulting in menial tasks or excessive committee duties. Similar concerns regarding heavy workloads and inadequate administrative support have been reported previously (Gao, 2008; Gleitze et al., 2022; Tadesse & Derza, 2020; Usta & Ural, 2025). Organizational support theory highlights such support as important for enhancing job satisfaction, commitment and performance while reducing withdrawal behaviours (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Administrative support has likewise been associated with greater teacher job satisfaction (Rachmadi et al., 2024), feelings of determination, happiness, confidence and being valued (Argon, 2014), as well as organizational support and teacher leadership (Tosun & Bozkurt Bostancı, 2024). From the perspective adopted in the current study, however, inadequate administrative support does not constitute organizational vulnerability in itself; rather, it becomes a source of vulnerability when it leaves teachers feeling professionally unsupported, less able to manage their responsibilities, or with reduced control over their professional practice.

Teachers reported insufficient appreciation from administrators and described feeling vulnerable when their professional competence was questioned, particularly in relation to perceived failures. This finding closely reflects Kelchtermans' (1996) conceptualization of teacher vulnerability, in which threats to professional identity and limits to perceived efficacy can leave teachers feeling that their competence and professional integrity are being questioned. More recent research similarly shows that challenges to teachers' professional credibility and perceived capability can generate insecurity, loss of confidence, and vulnerability in relation to teacher identity (Bacova & Turner, 2023; Twyford, 2025). In this sense, vulnerability lies not simply in the

absence of appreciation but in the broader experience of being insufficiently valued or having one's professional worth and efficacy called into question. Recognition and appreciation may therefore be particularly important organizational resources for teachers. At a broader organizational level, perceived organizational support is strengthened by fairness, supervisor support, and organizational rewards, and is associated with greater job satisfaction, affective commitment, and performance (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Teacher-specific evidence reinforces this pattern. Dreer-Göthe (2025) found that perceived appreciation was positively associated with teachers' job satisfaction and negatively associated with emotional exhaustion and intentions to leave, with appreciation from school leaders emerging as one of the most influential sources. Similarly, positive interpersonal recognition has been linked to teachers' sense of self, job satisfaction, and decisions to remain in the profession (Cuervo, 2025). These findings suggest that recognition from administrators may contribute not only to teachers' satisfaction and retention but also to the maintenance of a valued and competent professional self.

According to the current study, administrators' lack of openness to creativity and innovation, together with deficiencies in understanding, empathy and communication skills, creates vulnerability among teachers. Conversely, teachers expect effective school leaders to demonstrate strong communication skills, empathy, openness, accessibility, respect and inclusiveness in decision-making (De Castro & Jimenez, 2022; Jiang & Lu, 2020; Quiroz & De Jesus, 2022; Saguiler, 2024). Given the socially and emotionally charged nature of schools, empathy enables administrators to better understand teachers' emotions and problems, reduce emotional defensiveness and facilitate effective problem-solving (Wolff et al., 2002). Thus, empathy, understanding and effective communication are essential leadership qualities, and their absence may constitute an important source of organizational vulnerability for teachers.

Colleague-related experiences also emerged as a source of organizational vulnerability in participants' accounts concerning internal stakeholders. The main sources of vulnerability associated with colleagues include discrimination based on professional experience, gender, hometown or ideology, political polarization and propaganda, gossiping and reporting information to the administration, jealousy and resistance to new practices, professional incompetence, lack of openness to professional development and a tendency toward inertia, absence of a culture of criticism and advocacy, verbal and physical violence or humiliation toward students and a lack of tolerance, unity and solidarity.

Participants' accounts indicated experiences of discriminatory behaviour, political polarization and propaganda among colleagues. Given teachers' role-model function, participants' accounts of discrimination and political polarization among colleagues raise concerns about their potential implications for students and the broader school community. Within the conceptual framework of the current study, discrimination and polarization were considered sources of organizational vulnerability when they marginalized teachers, diminished the recognition of their professional views, or constrained their agency within collegial relationships, rather than simply because they represented unfair or undesirable workplace practices. Discriminatory practices among teachers have also been revealed in several other studies. For example, in a study conducted by Dağlı and Han (2017), teachers described the reflection of their colleagues' political views in the school environment as a significant problem. Similarly, in the study by Kozikoğlu and Senemoğlu (2018), polarization among colleagues was identified as one of the major issues faced by teachers. Mohammed et al. (2023) state that polarizations based on beliefs, ethnic identity, gender, and political ideology hinder the development of positive relationships among teachers.

Gossip and colleagues reporting information to administrators also emerged as sources of teacher vulnerability when such behaviours undermined interpersonal trust and left teachers feeling exposed within collegial and administrative relationships. Although gossip and rumours are forms of informal organizational communication, negative gossip can undermine trust, openness and honesty, creating a harmful work environment that reduces morale, motivation, teamwork and institutional performance (De Gouveia et al., 2005; Jullanda et al., 2025). Despite these negative consequences, gossip remains prevalent in educational organizations, particularly

regarding internal school matters (Akyürek, 2020). Its main causes include administrators' attitudes, jealousy, curiosity, lack of information, communication breakdowns and group formation (Sari & Aslan, 2024). To mitigate its negative effects, school administrators should promote transparent and effective communication, maintain formal communication channels and establish effective feedback mechanisms.

According to the current study, teachers' sources of organizational vulnerability include their colleagues' jealousy and obstructive attitudes toward new practices, professional incompetence, lack of openness to professional development and general inertia. Supporting these findings, Kelchtermans (1996) found that teachers experienced vulnerability when new teaching initiatives were met with colleagues' jealousy and attempts at obstruction. Previous studies have also reported that some teachers resist professional development, fail to keep up with innovations and engage insufficiently in activities supporting professional growth (Dağlı & Han, 2017). Notably, these criticisms were voiced by teachers themselves, highlighting the seriousness of the problem. Excessive workload and professional development activities that do not address teachers' actual needs may further contribute to this reluctance (Ezel Acar & Erozan, 2024). Given the importance of continuous professional development, collaborative practices such as peer learning, joint planning and classroom observation may offer valuable support. Such practices, exemplified in Japan (Cobb et al., 1995), resemble professional learning communities, which foster teacher development through collegial learning and shared leadership (Melvin, 2011). Accordingly, establishing professional learning communities and facilitating planned classroom and school visits may support teachers' professional development.

Teachers expressed concerns about limited tolerance, collaboration and solidarity among colleagues, as well as a weak culture of criticism and advocacy, reflected particularly in reluctance to engage in self-criticism or challenge injustice. Previous research similarly indicates that teachers may favour individualism in instructional practices (Saks et al., 2025) and demonstrate limited collaboration in planning, project development and peer observation (Demirtaş, 2010). Institutional conditions may further shape teachers' capacity to exercise professional voice and agency; organizational and administrative support have been positively associated with teacher leadership, while structures that marginalize teachers' voices can constrain professional agency (Badal, 2025; Tosun & Bozkurt Bostancı, 2024). Such deficiencies may foster organizational silence and hinder students' democratic citizenship awareness, as teachers' pursuit of rights represents both a professional responsibility and a means of safeguarding democratic values (Alouf, 2025).

Verbal and physical violence among colleagues is among the sources of vulnerability identified by teachers. Previous research has similarly documented the persistence of verbal, psychological and physical violence perpetrated by teachers in schools. Özmen and Küçük (2013), comparing surveys conducted six years apart, found that students continued to report all three forms of teacher violence, although physical violence had decreased over time. More recently, Sancak Aydın and Nalbant (2026) reported that teacher-perpetrated emotional violence may take forms such as humiliation, mockery, ignoring and excessive criticism, with negative consequences for students' academic motivation, self-esteem and classroom participation. Given teachers' role in shaping student behaviour, exposure to such practices may risk normalizing violent attitudes and behaviours among students. Therefore, teacher education programmes should include training on managing challenging student behaviour, effective communication, anger management and violence prevention.

Student-related experiences also emerged as a source of organizational vulnerability in participants' accounts concerning internal stakeholders. Students' lack of interest in lessons and failure to fulfil their responsibilities, undesirable behaviours, hopelessness, low academic readiness and performance, disrespect toward teachers, prejudices or indifference toward certain subjects and verbal or physical violence toward one another all contribute to teachers' sense of vulnerability. These student-related difficulties were interpreted as sources of organizational vulnerability not merely because they made teaching more demanding, but when participants' accounts indicated that they challenged teachers' perceived professional efficacy, reduced their

sense of control over classroom processes, or threatened their professional standing in interactions with students. Supporting these findings, previous studies have identified student disinterest and undesirable behaviours as major causes of academic failure and significant problems faced by teachers (Dağlı & Han, 2017; Ekinci et al., 2012; Halitoglu & Uzunboylu, 2025; Kazak & Çiner, 2021). Student disinterest has long been recognized as a persistent problem in education and has been associated with teacher burnout and attrition (Farber, 1984; Haberman & Rickards, 1990). In this respect, burnout should be understood as a potential consequence of prolonged vulnerability-related experiences rather than as equivalent to organizational vulnerability itself.

Another source of teacher vulnerability identified in the current study is students' hopelessness. Participants' accounts suggest that this vulnerability may emerge when teachers encounter students who have limited expectations for their educational, occupational, or personal futures and perceive few possibilities for improving their circumstances. Previous research indicates that adolescent hopelessness is associated with socioeconomic disadvantage and family-related conditions; for example, lower family income and lower parental education have been associated with higher levels of hopelessness among high school students (Özmen et al., 2008). Future orientation is also relevant, as adolescents with higher career aspirations have been found to report lower levels of hopelessness (Dudovitz et al., 2017). School-related conditions may contribute as well, with longitudinal evidence showing that school belonging and exclusion are associated with the development of learned helplessness during adolescence (Raufelder & Kulakow, 2022).

Students' low academic readiness and performance are also among the sources of organizational vulnerability identified in participants' accounts. Consistent with this finding, previous studies have shown that teachers frequently express concerns about students' low academic levels and performance (Dağlı & Han, 2017; Haberman & Rickards, 1990). Similarly, Özgan and Tekin (2014) found that teachers attributed students' low academic levels and readiness to inadequate prior education, insufficient student effort and limited parental support, which also created difficulties in classroom management and discipline.

Disrespectful, humiliating, and degrading attitudes and behaviours toward teachers constitute an important source of teacher vulnerability. Participants' accounts indicated that such behaviours may arise in teacher–student interactions and undermine teachers' sense of professional respect, recognition, and emotional security. This finding is consistent with recent evidence showing that teachers are exposed to a range of student-directed harassment and aggression, including degrading remarks, verbal threats, intimidation, and other forms of hostile behaviour (Andersen & Winding, 2025; Lehfid & El Bakkali, 2025; McMahon et al., 2024). Andersen and Winding (2025), for example, identified being called degrading names as the most frequently reported form of student harassment toward teachers, while national evidence has linked verbal and threatening aggression from students with greater teacher anxiety and stress as well as stronger intentions to transfer schools or leave the profession (McMahon et al., 2024). Teacher-directed aggression has also been situated within the broader school-climate context, with teachers describing such experiences as affecting their emotional safety, professional engagement, and willingness to remain in their positions (Peist et al., 2024). These interactions may also contribute to a deteriorating relational climate in the classroom. Although the present findings suggest that some teachers may respond to repeated disrespect by becoming more distant or harsh, this reciprocal process should be interpreted cautiously. Evidence concerning teacher behaviour indicates that harsh, humiliating, or otherwise negative teacher responses can reduce students' motivation, classroom participation, self-confidence, and respect for teachers (Sancak Aydın & Nalbant, 2026). Thus, disrespectful student behaviour and negative teacher responses may become mutually reinforcing within strained teacher–student relationships, potentially undermining both teacher well-being and the classroom climate.

The fourth source of vulnerability related to internal stakeholders, as identified by teachers, is teachers themselves. The sources of teachers' organizational vulnerability related to themselves include pedagogical inadequacies such as being unable to cope with students, manage crises or reach learners, as well as academic shortcomings such as lacking full command of their subject

area, failing to apply contemporary teaching methods, attending class unprepared and struggling to regain control of the lesson when deviating from the lesson plan. These concerns were particularly evident among less experienced teachers, whose acknowledgement of their own shortcomings may reflect openness to improvement and positive vulnerability. From the conceptual perspective adopted in this study, however, pedagogical or academic inadequacy was not regarded as organizational vulnerability in itself; rather, it became a source of vulnerability when teachers perceived such limitations as undermining their professional efficacy or their capacity to exercise control and agency in their professional practice. Similarly, less experienced or newly appointed teachers may experience vulnerability due to perceived academic inadequacy and responsibility for student failure (Kelchtermans, 1996). Teachers have also reported inadequacies in content, pedagogical and contextual knowledge (Uysal & Özmutlu, 2023), while perceived responsibility for student achievement may contribute to feelings of inferiority (Song, 2016). Difficulties in communicating with students and managing undesirable behaviours are also reported, particularly among novice teachers (Kozikoğlu & Senemoğlu, 2018), and may reduce job satisfaction and motivation while increasing feelings of inadequacy and social isolation (Kazak & Çiner, 2021).

The organizational vulnerability experienced by teachers has various negative effects on their personal, family and school lives. The main individual effects include inner conflict, irritability, sadness, loss of morale, psychological distress, absent-mindedness, restlessness, feeling unwell, unhappiness, lack of motivation, stress, mental and emotional fatigue and hopelessness. These outcomes should therefore be distinguished conceptually from organizational vulnerability itself: stress, emotional fatigue, hopelessness, and related forms of psychological distress represent potential consequences of vulnerability rather than defining characteristics of the construct. Consistent with these findings, previous studies have associated teacher vulnerability with hopelessness (Bullough, 2005; Lasky, 2005), unhappiness and loss of morale (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2015), emotional and physical exhaustion (Blase, 1988; Lasky, 2005), irritability and stress (Gao, 2008; Lasky, 2005), as well as fear, defensiveness, disappointment and scepticism (Bullough, 2005; Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2015; Lasky, 2005).

Organizational vulnerability also has familial effects, including transferring work-related stress to the home environment, complaining to family members and creating domestic tension. In the current data, a greater number of coded opinions concerning these familial effects were contributed by female participants. At school, vulnerability may reduce teachers' motivation, productivity and enthusiasm, create tension, weaken organizational justice, commitment and belonging and disrupt workplace harmony. While decreased motivation, reluctance to attend school and classroom tension may represent relatively short-term effects, alienation, weakened commitment and belonging, loss of organizational trust and professional burnout may be more enduring and difficult to reverse. Consistent with these findings, Kelchtermans (1996) associated teacher vulnerability with reduced motivation, commitment, job satisfaction, performance and work adaptation, as well as professional burnout. Accordingly, reduced job satisfaction and professional burnout are treated here as possible downstream consequences of sustained organizational vulnerability, rather than as interchangeable with organizational vulnerability itself. Similarly, Gao (2008) found that vulnerability may lead teachers not only to lose enthusiasm for the profession but also to become deeply alienated from it, even perceiving teaching as "demeaning". Song (2016) further reported that teachers may distance themselves from students and restrict their teaching activities, thereby reducing teaching effectiveness.

5. Recommendations

In light of the findings of the current study, several recommendations can be proposed for practitioners, policymakers, and future research. Greater attention to relevant qualifications and expertise in the selection and professional preparation of school administrators may help address some of the administrator-related conditions associated with teachers' organizational vulnerability. Mentorship programmes for school administrators could also support leadership development by facilitating professional learning from experienced administrators.

The academic and pedagogical difficulties described by participants further suggest the need to strengthen teachers' professional preparation and continuous professional development, particularly through practice-based experiences and ongoing learning opportunities. In addition, fostering critical self-reflection, respect for differences, and constructive professional relationships may help address vulnerabilities associated with political polarization and seniority. Creating opportunities for experienced teachers to share their knowledge and expertise in supportive ways may also be beneficial. Continuous professional and personal development could further be supported through engagement with professional literature, digital educational resources, and teacher development opportunities.

Future research could examine the prevalence, causes, and prevention of discrimination based on seniority, gender, and ideology. Given that accounts of gender discrimination were reported by participants working in vocational high schools, further studies could explore gender-based discrimination in these settings in greater depth. In addition, as some participants from subject areas such as philosophy, literature, and English described vulnerability when their work was perceived as peripheral to the core functioning of the school, future research could investigate organizational vulnerability across different subject areas and school types.

6. Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of the current study. One limitation concerns the context-specific nature of the sample. Data were collected from 31 teachers working in public secondary schools within a specific educational context in Türkiye. Therefore, the findings should not be generalized to teachers working in different educational settings, school types, or sociocultural contexts.

Another limitation is that the findings are based on teachers' self-reported experiences and perceptions. As with other interview-based research, participants' accounts may have been influenced by recall, personal interpretations, or their willingness to disclose sensitive experiences.

Another consideration concerns the interpretive role of the researcher. As is inherent in qualitative research, the analysis and interpretation of the data involved researcher judgement. Although repeated engagement with the data and external review of the coding and categorization were used to enhance the rigor of the analysis, the findings necessarily reflect, to some extent, the researcher's interpretation of participants' accounts.

Moreover, the data were obtained only from teachers and were not triangulated with the perspectives of other internal stakeholders, such as school administrators or students. Including these stakeholder groups could have provided a more comprehensive understanding of organizational vulnerability within schools.

A further limitation relates to the use of different interview modes. While some interviews were conducted by phone, others were conducted online through platforms such as Google Meet, Zoom or WhatsApp. Differences across interview modes may have influenced the nature or depth of participants' responses. In addition, three interviews were not audio-recorded because the participants did not consent to recording, and detailed notes were taken instead. Although these notes were documented during the interviews, the absence of audio recordings may have resulted in the loss of some nuances or details in participants' accounts.

Finally, the use of frequency counts in presenting the qualitative findings should be interpreted with caution. The reported frequencies represent the number of coded statements or opinions rather than the number of individual participants and are intended only to indicate the relative

representation of categories within the data. They should therefore not be interpreted as estimates of prevalence or as evidence of differences between participant groups.

7. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that teachers' organizational vulnerability is a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by their interactions with administrators, colleagues, students, as well as by their own professional and pedagogical limitations. Administrator-related factors constituted one of the sources identified in participants' accounts, highlighting the relevance of leadership practices and organizational relationships to teachers' experiences of vulnerability. In particular, inadequate managerial competence, authoritarian and unfair practices, insufficient support and recognition, and ineffective communication may create organizational conditions in which teachers feel professionally and emotionally vulnerable. At the same time, vulnerability arising from collegial relationships, student-related difficulties, and teachers' perceived professional inadequacies indicates that organizational vulnerability cannot be attributed to a single stakeholder or organizational factor.

The findings further demonstrate that the consequences of organizational vulnerability extend beyond teachers' immediate emotional experiences. Vulnerability may negatively affect teachers' psychological well-being and family lives while also reducing their motivation, productivity, enthusiasm, organizational commitment, sense of belonging, and trust in the school. More enduring experiences of vulnerability may contribute to alienation and professional burnout and may ultimately affect teachers' classroom practices and teaching effectiveness. Thus, teachers' organizational vulnerability should not be regarded solely as an individual or emotional issue, but as an organizational concern with potential implications for teachers, schools, and the educational process more broadly. Creating school environments characterised by competent and supportive leadership, fairness, mutual respect, effective communication, professional collaboration, and opportunities for continuous development may therefore be important for reducing teachers' vulnerability and supporting their professional well-being.

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