

***Age Limit for Teachers' Recruitment in Moroccan Public Schools:
Investigation of Teachers and Student Teachers' Perspectives About the Policy***

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Abstract

In November 2021, the Moroccan government launched a new educational policy restricting the age for teachers' recruitment in Moroccan public schools, bringing the age down to 30, which caused a lot of controversy and disagreements among Moroccan student teachers. The aim of this study was to investigate teachers from Moroccan public primary and secondary schools, as well as student teachers' perspectives regarding this policy, including their understanding of and their support for the policy, their opinions about the aims of the policy, and finally their viewpoints regarding the influence of the policy on teaching job opportunities. The study used a mixed methods research design, through an online descriptive survey questionnaire containing closed-ended questions and one open-ended question, which was distributed through social network. 90 responses from student teachers and 63 responses from teachers were received. Answers showed that both student teachers and teachers want to see a better education system and a better teaching quality all over the country, no matter the difference in their opinions and ideas. The majority of student teachers, regardless of their age, as well as teachers, do not really support the policy and do not believe in its aims as highlighted by the government. However, even if minor, there are also some positive viewpoints regarding the policy. More particularly, teachers' responses are slightly more positive compared to student teachers' opinions.

Keywords: Age Limit, Teacher Recruitment, Student Teachers, Teachers, Public Schools, Morocco

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Introduction

Education and training has known significant setbacks in Morocco, therefore, the Supreme Council for Education, Training, and Scientific Research was established, calling for a number of immediate and practical reforms to the country's educational and training systems. Recent initiatives by the Ministry of Education and Training, to address short- and long-term inequalities in the educational system, have been summarized in a strategic report called Vision 2030, which is spanned over 15 years, from 2015 to 2030. This strategic plan determines the priorities for raising the quality of education, vocational training, and scientific research, and targets issues concerning students' poor academic performance and the disconnection between their education and the demands of the labor market. Additionally, it advocates equity and equality in education (Dardary et al., 2021; Smirkou, 2018).

The Moroccan educational system was found to have severe deficiencies that need correction. The strategic vision was developed to sustain significant changes in the country's education system over the course of a multi-level reform process (Morchid, 2020). A number of decisions taken by the Ministry of Education followed the implementation of this strategic vision. Among them are the changes of conditions to recruit teachers in public schools of Morocco. The Ministry of Education had a total recruiting target of 15,000 teachers and 2,000 administrative staff under the 2022 government budget (Toutate, 2021).

The Minister of Education stated that Morocco would implement a new system to control the teaching profession starting from September 2022 (El Attaq, 2021). The pre-selection requirements for the Regional Academy of Education and Training exam are designed to improve teaching by fostering new careers and developing the teaching staff competency. The goal of such initiatives is to improve the educational system and give students needed skills to support national development. In addition to raising teaching standards, the goal is to promote public education (Jaouadi, 2021).

On November 19, 2021, the Minister of National Education, Preschool, and Sports announced the policy. The new age restriction was reduced from 40–45 years in prior recruitment to 30 years of age. The Minister clarifies that the new hiring process is more concerned with the interests of the Moroccan student. The primary objective of the new limits, according to the ministry, is to ensure that new candidates have the necessary training, energy, and passion to offer their students high-quality education (Toutate, 2021).

Many applicants for teaching positions considered the new age limit as discriminatory. Because there will be exclusion of a significant number of diploma holders from the employment market; many have firmly rejected the new recruitment conditions (Toutate, 2021). Moroccans strongly opposed the ministry's most recent reforms, with many objecting to the new age restriction that prevents those over 30 from pursuing a job in public schools. However, the Minister insisted that the reform is a tough but important step forward for Morocco's educational system (El Attaq, 2021). Age restrictions sparked considerable outrage, and many protested in the streets within different cities, to voice their opposition to the ministry's new recruitment regulations (Jaouadi, 2021).

Literature Review

Age Limit Criterion

Breda and Schoenmaekers (2006) emphasized that age criteria are popular among policymakers because they offer a clear and ostensibly objective standard. The authors go on to say that, age restrictions are not as innocent as they seem; the age thresholds tend to be arbitrary, and age distinctions are sometimes meaningless. The authors' study concluded that policymakers should take into consideration gradually replacing age limitations with other criteria. Age can lead to unreasonable forms of discrimination. The potential of unfair treatment towards people who fall into a different age group exists when using age criteria for entitlements. Age can be a helpful tool for allocating scarce resources. Age restrictions also evade the need for costly and administratively onerous procedures. Due to the difficulty in defining a suitable age threshold, legislators frequently rely on a reference or conventional age. Imposing a criterion could result in significant treatment variations between two individuals with slightly different ages, even by one day only. Lastly, age limitations are also strict; many do not adapt to the social context (Breda & Schoenmaekers, 2006).

Age Limit for Teachers' Recruitment Around the World

While several countries do not adopt any age limit policy for teachers, others consider dissimilar numbers for implementing age limit policies. For instance, Rajaeenia et al. (2018) emphasized that their country Iran considers an age limit for hiring pre-service teachers, unlike several countries including Germany, Japan, Singapore, and the US.

Another research conducted by Jo (2008) highlighted that in South Korea, a 40-year-old age restriction is occasionally being applied for teachers' recruitment. Azizah et al. (2022) stated that in Indonesia, the age restriction to be appointed as a civil servant teacher is 35 years old. In Pakistan, the age limit for hiring female teachers was waived (Behlol et al., 2014). Another study carried out in India emphasized the need for a modification of the upper age limit for female candidates aspiring to become schoolteachers, to a minimum of 45 years old (Nuna, 2016).

A research conducted by Rathee and Jathol (2013) regarding the Teacher Eligibility Test in India, found that 40% of student teachers supported setting an age restriction for taking the test, while the majority of them (60%) opposed limiting the access to a specific age. Yadav (2019) also conducted a research regarding the Teacher Eligibility Test in India. Findings showed that a total percentage of 53% of respondents support the adoption of an age limit while 40% oppose it. As a conclusion, the author pointed out the importance of setting an age restriction, and suggested that the government of India needs to revise its policy on the Teaching Eligibility Test criteria and standards, because not anyone who failed in other professions can be employed as a teacher (Yadav, 2019).

Regarding English speakers teaching in East Asian language programs, the English Program in Korea and the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program have no age restrictions on applicants, although Hong Kong's Native English Teachers Scheme does. Japan Exchange and Teaching Program tries to draw in as many young participants as it can (Jeon, 2020). However, the answer to some issues in schools may occasionally be to hire older teachers. The study conducted by Madhuwanthi (2016) highlighted several factors for employing elderly teachers in private sector schools, such as the dearth of qualified English-medium

teachers, the non-availability of teachers with adequate pedagogical knowledge, the high rate of job turnover among young teachers, the competence of elderly teachers, and their unique expertise as administrators, mentors, and keepers of school culture.

Finally, one study conducted in Canada showed that teachers' motivation varies throughout time. By age group, entry motivation and teacher motivation differ greatly. Regarding entry motivations, the research revealed that teachers of 35 years and older valued “searching for a career change” substantially more than teachers of ages between 22 and 24. As for practice motivations, the survey showed that teachers of 35 years and older gave “the quality of professional life”, a substantially higher priority than teachers aged between 22 and 24 years (Hellsten & Prytula, 2011). This shows that age might play an important role in determining teachers’ motivation, which could be a reason for policy makers to adopt age limit policies for teachers’ recruitment.

Problem Statement and Significance of the Study

Age limit policies are generally problematic all over the world. In addition, concerned people themselves have opposing views on whether to support such policies. Literature regarding this matter is not abundant, specifically in Morocco. Most studies found around the world, either write about age limit for teachers’ recruitment theoretically, or investigate empirically about age restriction policies as part of the whole process and conditions for teachers’ recruitment.

Thus, conducting a study focused on the perspectives regarding the age limit policy only, would add a new perspective to previous literature. More particularly, the current study investigates about a new educational policy and presents new insights in the Moroccan context.

Operational Definitions of Terms Used

Student teachers: in this paper, they refer to students studying in bachelor degree or holding their bachelor degree from public faculties as well as from public institutes of education in Morocco, and intending to become teachers in Moroccan schools. They represent both eligible and non-eligible applicants to pass the national examination for teachers’ recruitment in Moroccan public schools.

Teachers: teachers in primary, secondary junior high and secondary senior high public schools of Morocco.

Objectives of the Study and Research Questions

The objective is to study teachers and student teachers’ perspectives regarding age limit policy in Morocco. The central question can be presented as follows: What are the perspectives of teachers and student teachers in the public sector, regarding the age limit policy?

The overarching question can be framed into the following sub-questions:

1. To what extent do teachers and student teachers understand the policy?
2. To what extent do teachers and student teachers support the policy?
3. To what extent do teachers and student teachers agree with the aims of the policy?

4. What are the teachers and student teachers' opinions regarding the influence of the policy on teaching job opportunities?

Research Methodology

Research design and method: The study represents a mixed methods research design. The descriptive research method was used. Quantitative data and qualitative responses were collected.

Population: Students studying in bachelor degree or holding their bachelor degree from public faculties and public institutes of education in Morocco, aiming to become teachers in Moroccan schools, as well as teachers in primary, secondary junior high and secondary senior high public schools of Morocco.

Sample: The participants were contacted online following purposive sampling. The sample is composed of bachelor degree students or holders, from Moroccan public faculties and public education institutes, and who are willing to become teachers in Moroccan schools. The sample also includes teachers from Moroccan public primary and secondary schools. 153 questionnaires were received in total, including 90 responses from student teachers and 63 responses from teachers.

Tool used: An online mixed questionnaire was used. Two slightly different questionnaires were developed; one intended for teachers and one for student teachers, where questions were adapted to each category of the participants. Each questionnaire includes four parts, starting with demographic information, and the three remaining parts are about student teachers and teachers' perspectives regarding the policy, including first, the understanding of and support for the policy, second, opinions regarding the aims of the policy, and third, viewpoints regarding the influence of the policy on teaching job opportunities. In each section of these three parts, there are close-ended questions for quantitative data collection. At the end of each questionnaire, there is one optional open-ended question to give voice to participants to express their ideas and opinions freely. Data was gathered online through social network. The questionnaire was translated into French and Arabic to better fit the Moroccan context. The responses were collected using Google Forms and downloaded in Excel format. Information was retranslated from Arabic and French into English. The table was exported to SPSS for data analysis and presentation of graphs.

Findings and Discussion

There are two kinds of questionnaires, one intended for student teachers and one for teachers. In each questionnaire, there are two components, one for the quantitative part and the other one for the qualitative question.

1. Student Teachers' Questionnaire: Quantitative Data

The questionnaire was divided into four parts. First, demographic questions, including gender, level of study, and age. Second, the understanding of and support for the policy, including four items. Third, opinions about the aim of the policy; including four items, presented by a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". Finally, opinions about the influence of the policy on future teaching job opportunities, using three items.

1.1. Demographic Information

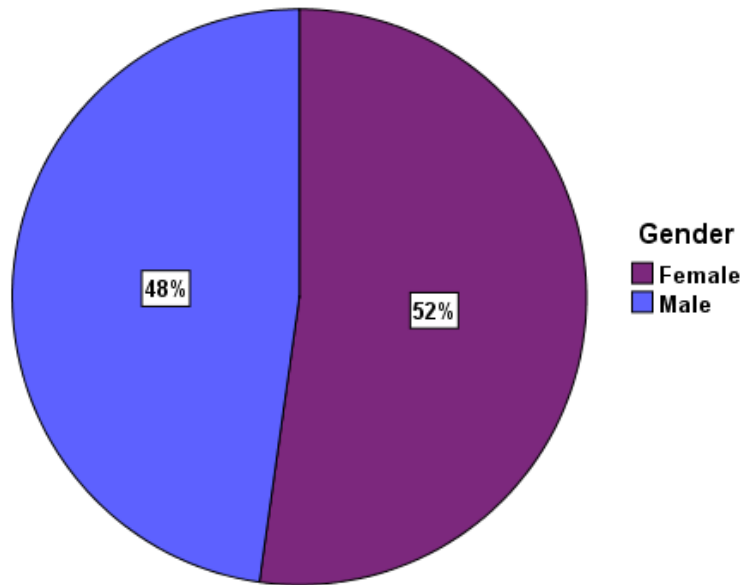


Figure 1: Student teachers' gender

The percentages show balanced proportions for male and female student teachers. Females represent a slightly higher proportion of 52% compared to 48% of male student teachers.

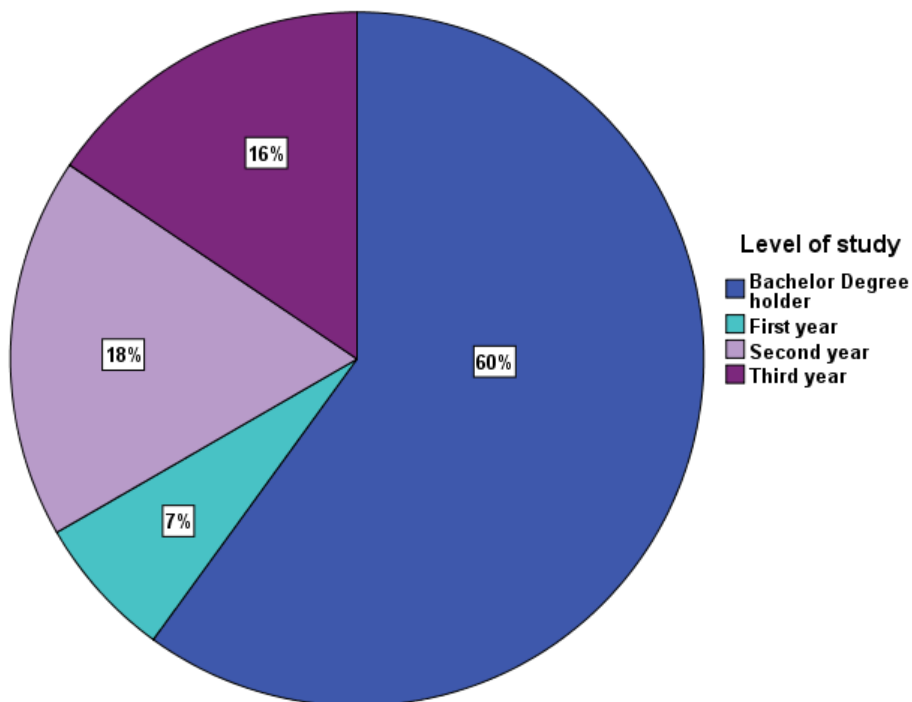


Figure 2: Student teachers' level of study

The pie chart shows that most respondents are bachelor degree holders (60%), followed by students in their second year of bachelor studies (18%). 16% of students are in their third year of bachelor and only 7% are in their first year of bachelor studies.

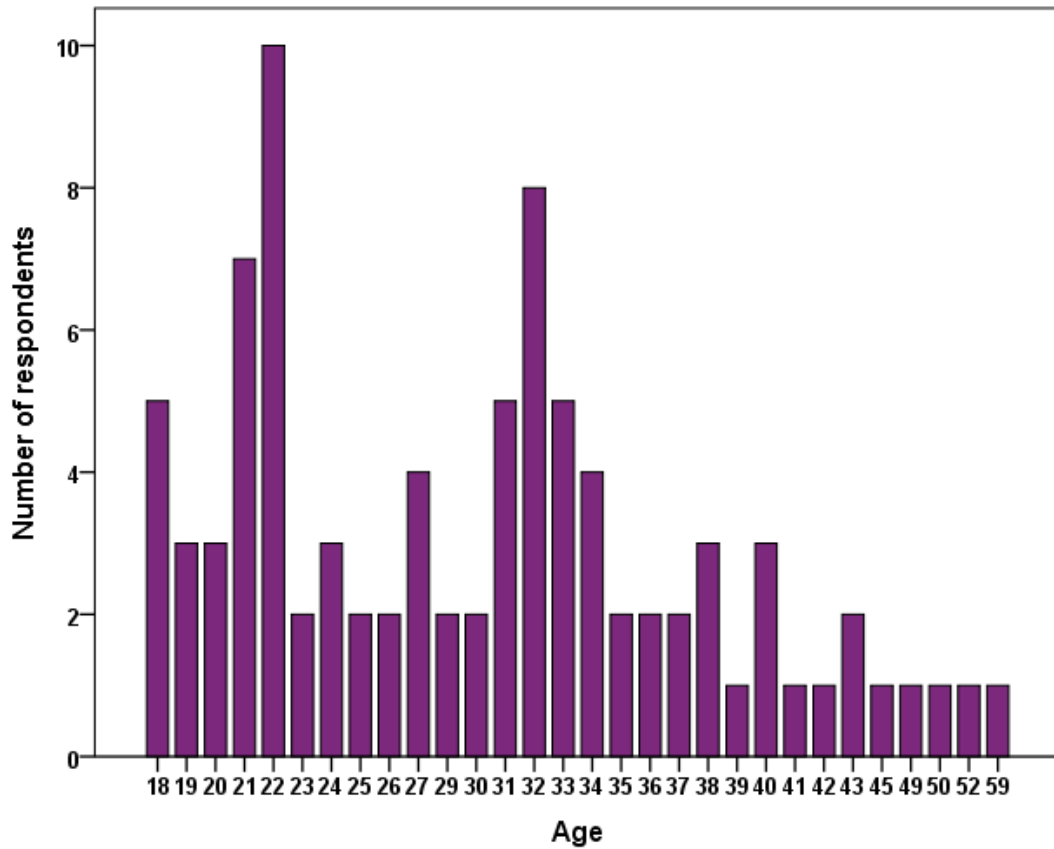


Figure 3: Student teachers' age

The mean of age variable is 29.72. Ages of respondents vary from 18 to 59 years old. The majority of the participants are 22 years old, followed by student teachers' age of 32 and 21 years old, respectively.

1.2. Knowledge About, Understanding of, and Support for Policy

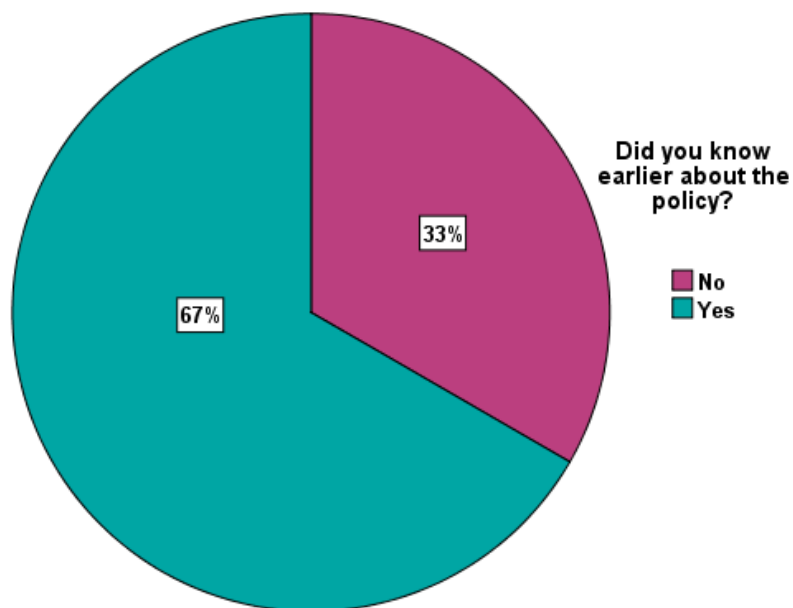


Figure 4: Student teachers' prior knowledge about the policy

The majority of student teachers (67%) were aware of the policy. However, one third of the respondents did not know the policy earlier. This means that the policy is not being widely and properly communicated, even though the target population has access to internet and is targeting teaching job positions.

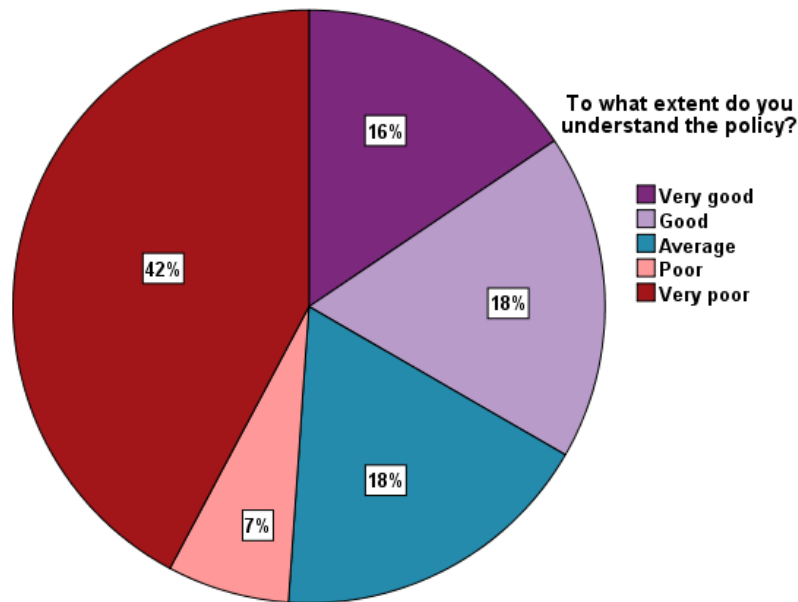


Figure 5: Student teachers' understanding of the policy

Almost half of the respondents (49%) do not understand what the policy has brought as a change. The majority of respondents (42%) have a very poor understanding of the policy, which shows that there is need for a better explanation of educational policies, especially towards the concerned stakeholders.

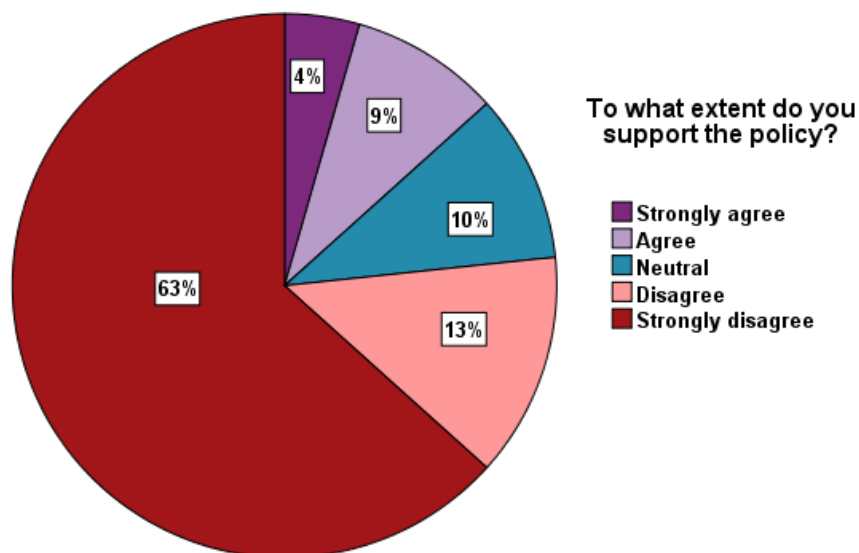


Figure 6: Student teachers' support for the policy

Only 13% of the respondents support the policy, while the vast majority (76%) do not support the age limit restriction, including 63% strongly disapproving. This clearly shows the opinion of student teachers regarding the policy.

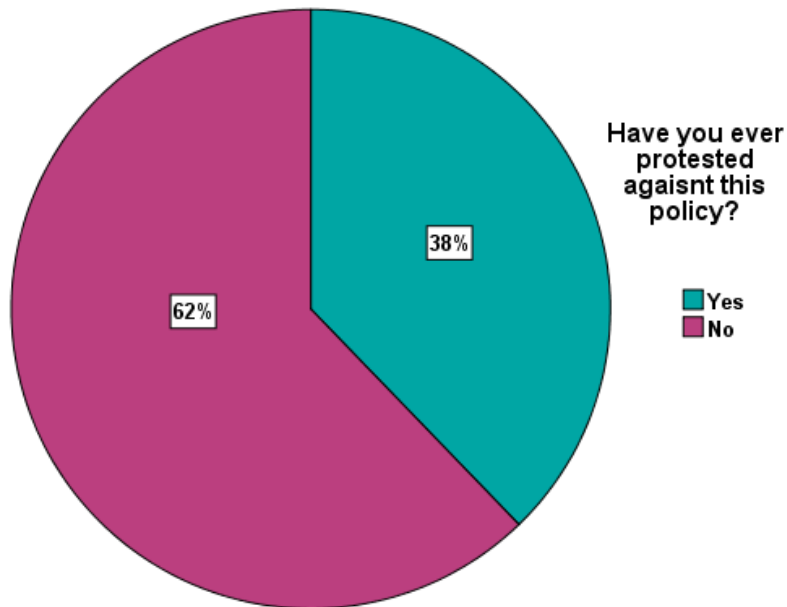


Figure 7: Student teachers' prior protest against the policy

More than a third of the respondents (38%) have protested against the policy. This category is quite important, since it must include students already knowing and understanding the policy. This percentage shows that there is an important number of student teachers hoping that age restriction gets revisited.

1.3. Opinions About the Aims of the Policy

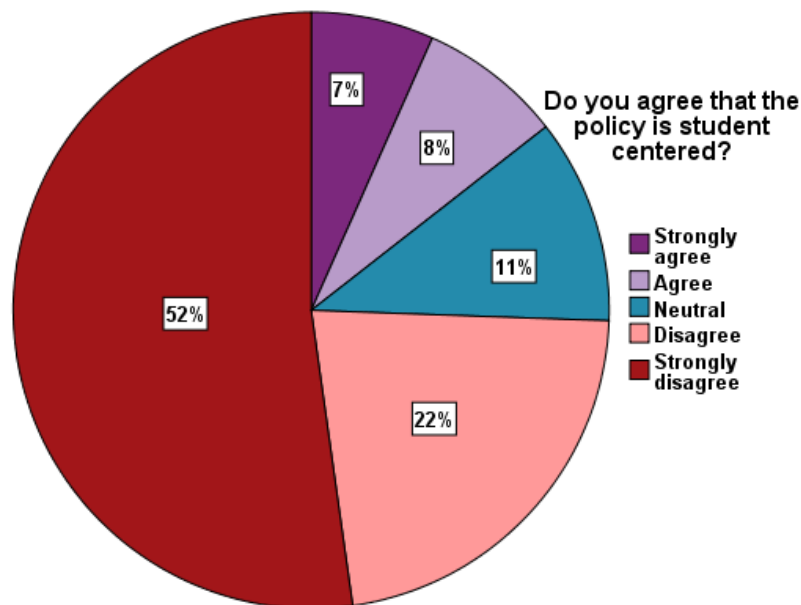


Figure 8: Student teachers' level of agreement with the statement 'the policy is student centered'

The results show that only 15% of the respondents agree that the policy is student centered, whereas the wide majority believe that age restriction policy is not a student-centered (74%). More than half of the respondents strongly disagree with the statement.

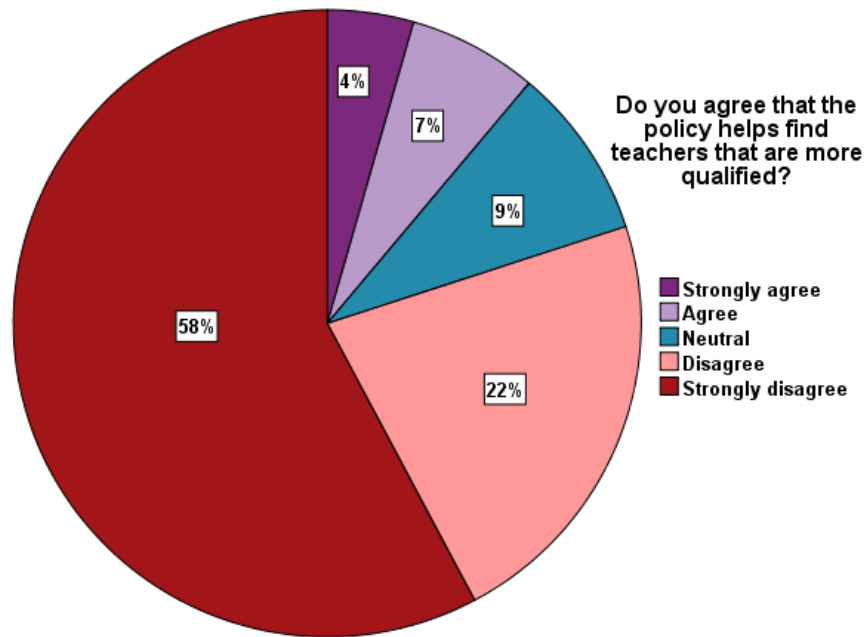


Figure 9: Student teachers' level of agreement with the statement 'the policy helps find teachers that are more qualified'

Findings demonstrate that only 11% of the sample agree that the policy helps find teachers that are more qualified. However, 80% of them disagree with the statement, including 58% strongly disagreeing.

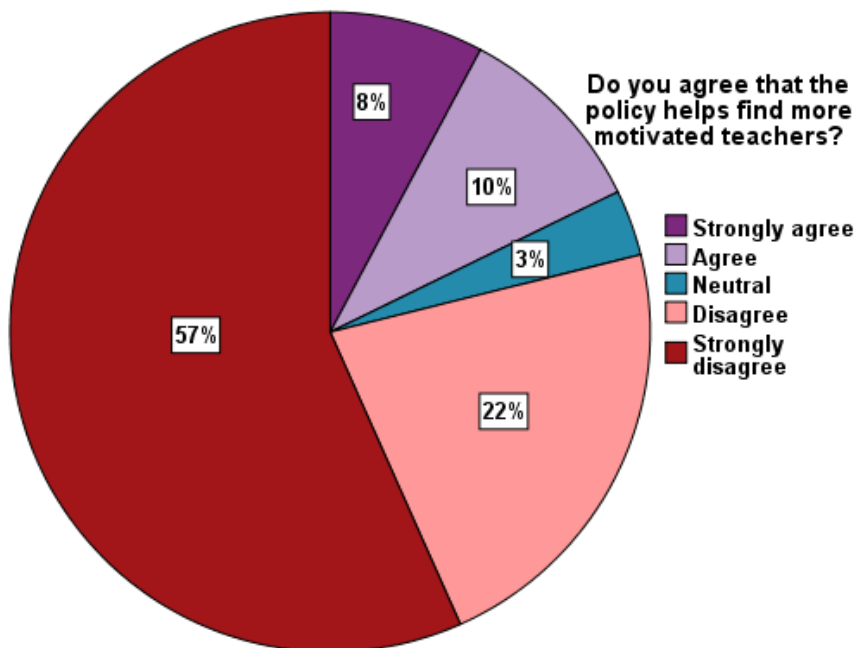


Figure 10: student teachers' level of agreement with the statement 'the policy helps find more motivated teachers'

The graph shows that only 18% of student teachers think that the policy helps find teachers who are more motivated, while most of the respondents do not agree with the statement (79%), including 57% in strong disagreement.

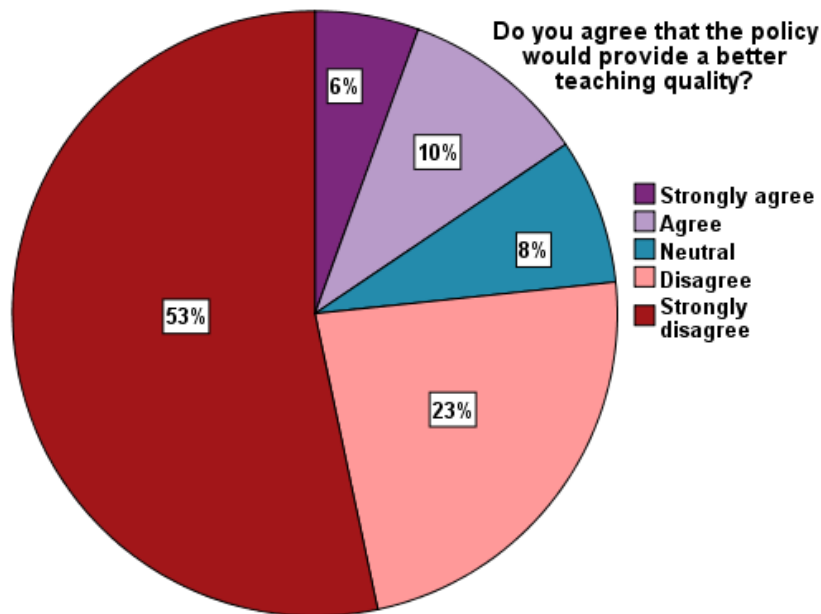


Figure 11: Student teachers' agreement with the statement 'the policy helps provide a better teaching quality'

The pie chart demonstrates that the minority of respondents (16%) agree that the age limit policy can provide a better teaching quality. The majority of the respondents, representing 76% of the sample, disagree with the statement, including 53% expressing a strong disagreement.

1.4. Opinions About Future Teaching Job Opportunities

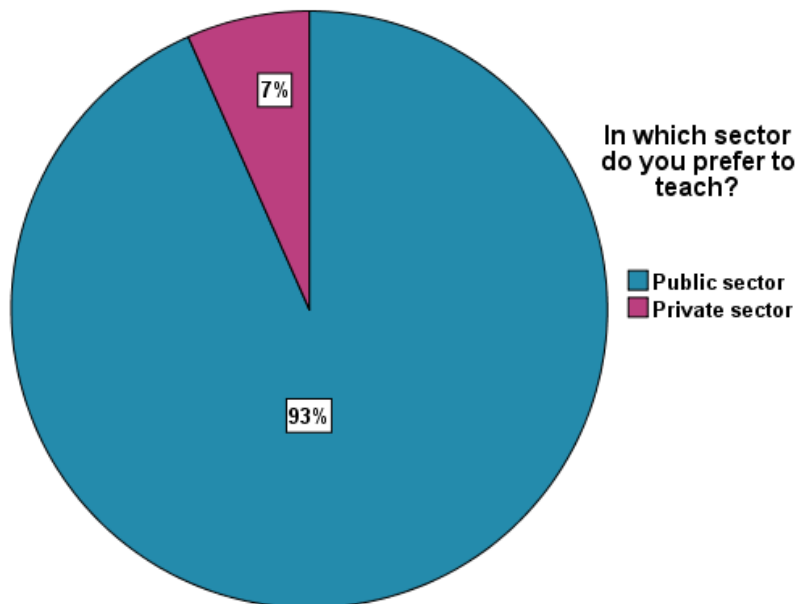


Figure 12: Student teachers' preferred teaching sector

According to the graph, most of the students prefer to teach in the public sector (93%). Thus, most of the student teachers hope to teach in public schools and are directly concerned with this policy.

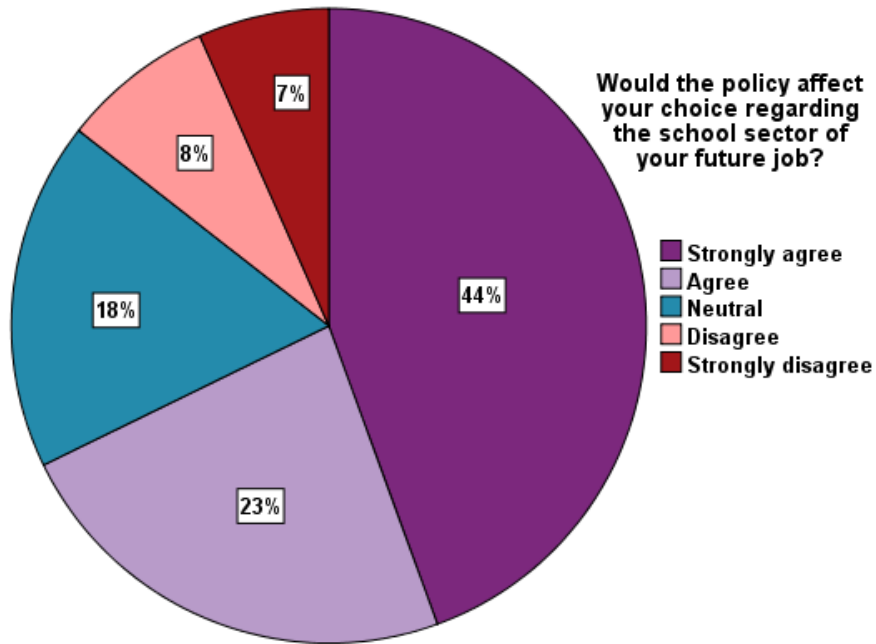


Figure 13: Student teachers' opinions about the influence of the policy on their choice regarding their future teaching job sector

The majority of respondents think this policy would influence their choice regarding their future job sector (67%), including 44% strongly believing so. Only 15% do not consider the policy as influencing their choices regarding their future school sector.

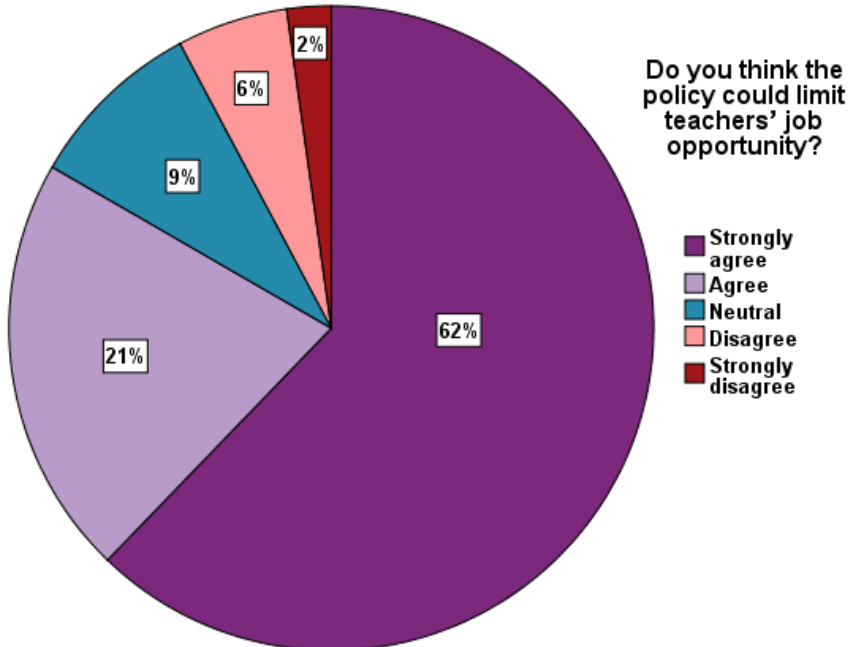


Figure 14: Student teachers' opinions regarding the influence of the policy on teaching job opportunities

Finally, regarding student teachers' opinions about the possible influence of the policy to limit teachers' job opportunities, 83% of the respondents agree with the statement, including 62% in strong agreement, while only 8% of the respondents do not agree that this policy would hinder teaching job opportunities.

2. Student Teachers' Open-Ended Question

Among 90 student teachers, 61 expressed their opinions, among which 56 disagreed with the policy, while five respondents gave positive feedback about it.

Regarding the few student teachers who support the policy, here are examples of their responses: “this policy would give fruitful results since it can select teachers who really want their jobs. It can help recruit teachers who are closer to students since they are young, which would bring more understanding between students and teachers”; “good policy, providing young competencies”; “this policy is very good because it will provide a better quality in teachers' investments”. Finally, “appointing professors at a young age guarantees a greater efficiency, and a successful investment in the human resources. Whoever wants to enter the teaching profession must determine his orientation and specialization during the baccalaureate. Teaching is not the profession of one who does not have any.”

The majority of responses reflected opinions against the age restriction. The analysis of 56 comments could highlight some key words repeatedly stated. The terms “unfair” or “unjust” were highlighted 14 times. The terms “nonsense” and “no logic” were used five times. Six participants suggested or hoped for “reconsidering” or “revisiting” the policy. Nine responses highlighted that competence has nothing to do with age. Three respondents expressed that “age is just a number”. Seven student teachers mentioned that the policy is against “equality” or “equal opportunities”. Five respondents expressed their opinions about the policy as “shattering dreams” or “hindering ambitions”. Three answers highlighted the terms “exclusion” or “marginalization” of a category of people. Three respondents emphasized that the decision is “not right” or “not wise.”

Furthermore, three opinions mentioned some negative consequences of the policy, including the limitation of job opportunities or the increase of unemployment. Two respondents argued that the policy is arbitrary and improvisational. Three responses mentioned that age is not related to quality or motivation, and that the policy has nothing to do with the educational reform. Finally, within five responses, it was stressed that in teaching, age comes as an advantage as the older one gets; the wiser, more competent, more experienced, and more responsible he becomes.

Among interesting opposing opinions are as follows:

- “The policy does neither aim for the interest of students, teachers, nor the system. Many bachelor holders are competent and don't have the right to pass the teachers' examination”;
- “The policy is unfair, contradicts all legal references and pedagogical perceptions, and has nothing to do with quality or education reform”;
- “Age has never been and will never be a reason to impede teaching”;
- “It is a policy that puts the student's interest as a front only, but its goal is to exclude the largest number of candidates. There is no equality or logic in excluding those over 30 years old. This is not the right way to promote education”;
- “Age has never been a criterion for a better selection; the most important thing is to look for people who are competent and who can teach with love.”

3. Teachers' Questionnaire: Quantitative Data

The second questionnaire was divided into four parts as well, first demographic questions, including gender, school level, years of teaching experience, and age. The second part reflects the understanding of and support for the policy, including three items. The third part represents opinions about the aim of the policy; including four items, according to a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”. The last part is about opinions regarding the impact of the policy on future teaching job opportunities, using one item.

3.1. Demographic Information

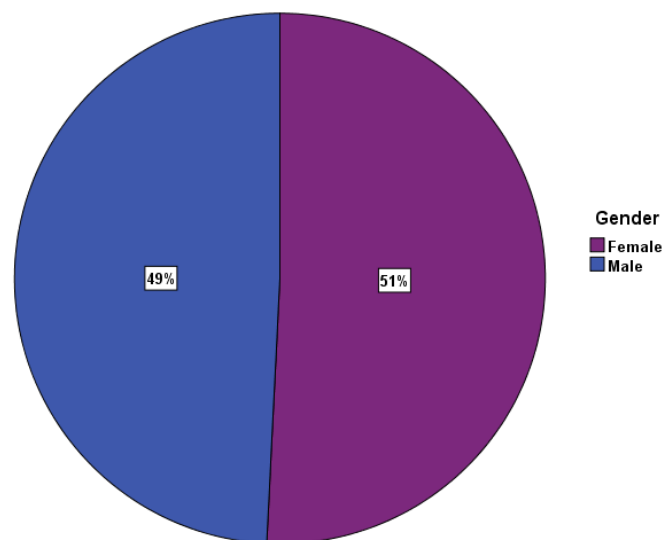


Figure 15: Teachers' gender

The pie chart representing teachers' gender shows balanced proportions of male and female teachers. The percentage of female respondents is slightly higher (51%) than the proportion of male teachers (49%).

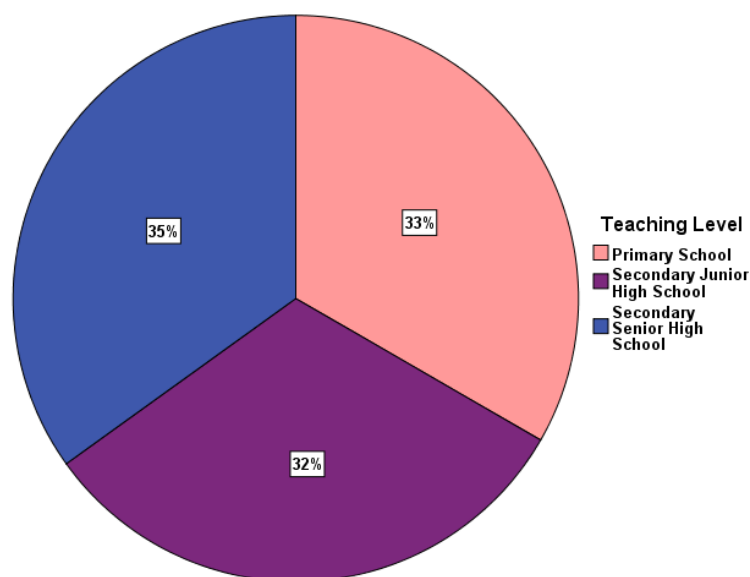


Figure 16: Teachers' teaching level

The proportions of teaching levels are balanced, with the highest percentage reflecting respondents teaching at secondary senior high schools (35%), followed by teachers from primary schools (33%), and finally teachers of secondary junior high schools, with a percentage of 32%.

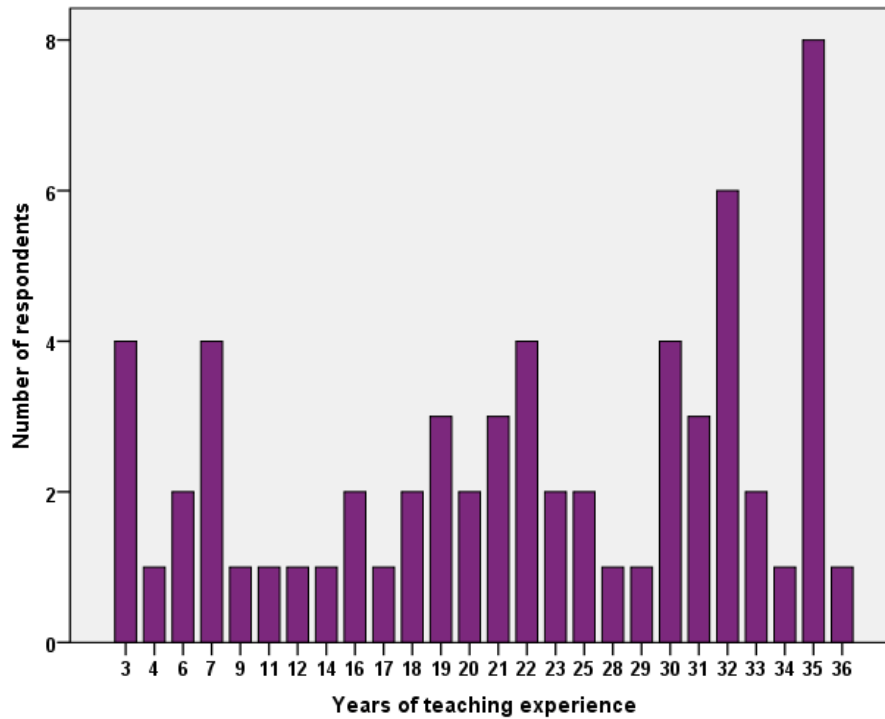


Figure 17: Teachers’ years of teaching experience

All teachers who participated in the study are experienced, with a teaching experience ranging from 3 years to 36 years. 8 respondents have 35 years of teaching experience, 6 teachers have 32 years of experience, followed by four teachers in each age category of 30, 22, 7, and 3 years of teaching experience.

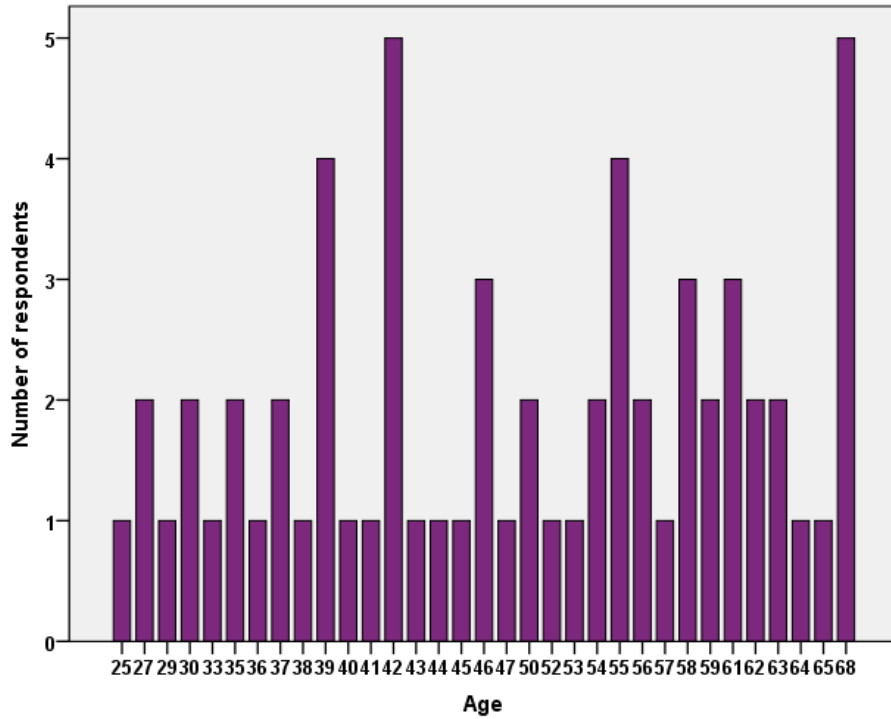


Figure 18: Teachers' age

Teachers who filled the questionnaire are aged between 25 and 68 years old. The highest percentage of participants refers to the ages 42 and 68. Followed by ages 39 and 55.

3.2. Knowledge About, Understanding of, and Support for the Policy

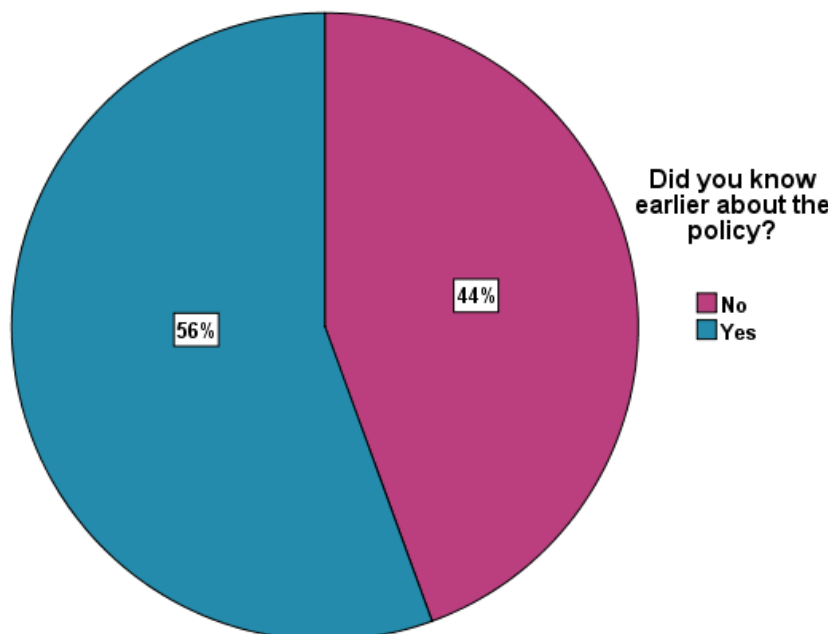


Figure 19: Teachers' prior knowledge about the policy

The majority of teachers knew about the policy (56%). However, there is still an important number of the respondents who were not knowledgeable about it.

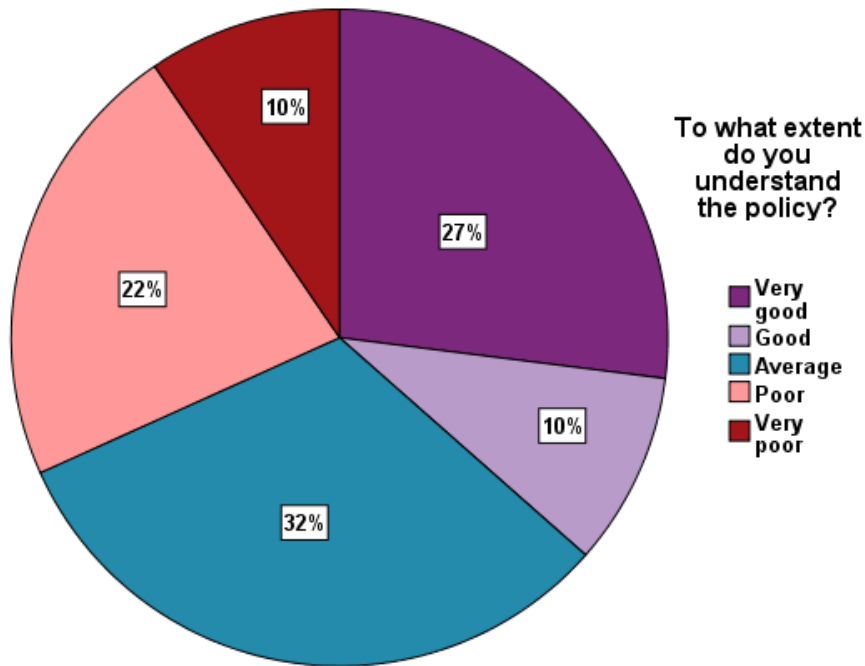


Figure 20: Teachers' understanding of the policy

The majority of teachers have an average understanding of the policy (32%), followed by the proportion of teachers who have a very good understanding of the age limit policy (27%). Still, there is a total percentage of 32% of respondents with only a poor understanding.

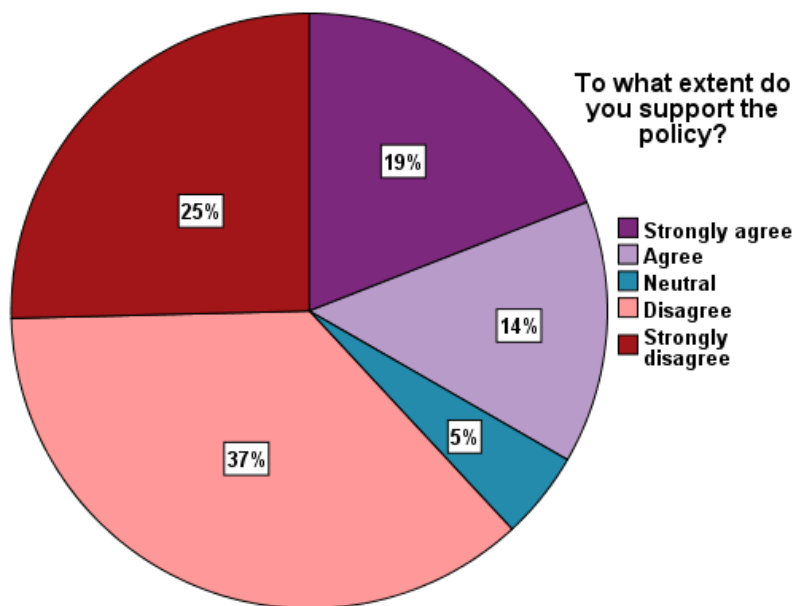


Figure 21: Teachers' support for the policy

The answers of teachers are assumed to be more objective than those of student teachers who face the pressure of passing the national teaching examination. Even though teachers do not have such kind of pressure, they do not seem very supportive of the age restriction policy neither. About the third of the respondents support the policy (a total percentage of 33%), while the majority of the respondents do not support the age limit policy (a total percentage of 62% disagreeing), including the quarter of teachers strongly disagreeing.

3.3. Opinions About the Aim of the Policy

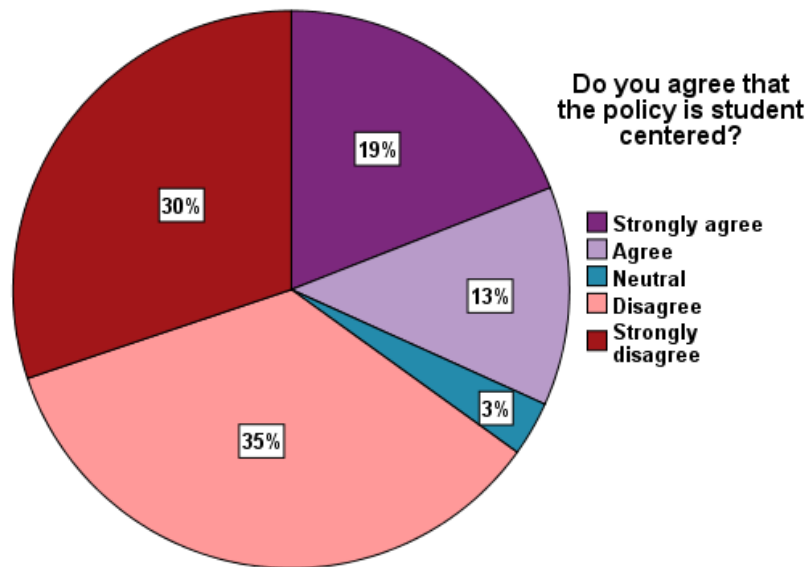


Figure 22: Teachers' agreement with the statement 'the policy is student-centered'

According to the graph, almost third of the teachers agree that the policy is student centered (a total percentage of 32%), whereas the majority and almost two thirds of teachers (a total percentage of 65%) disagree with the statement, including 30% in strong disagreement.

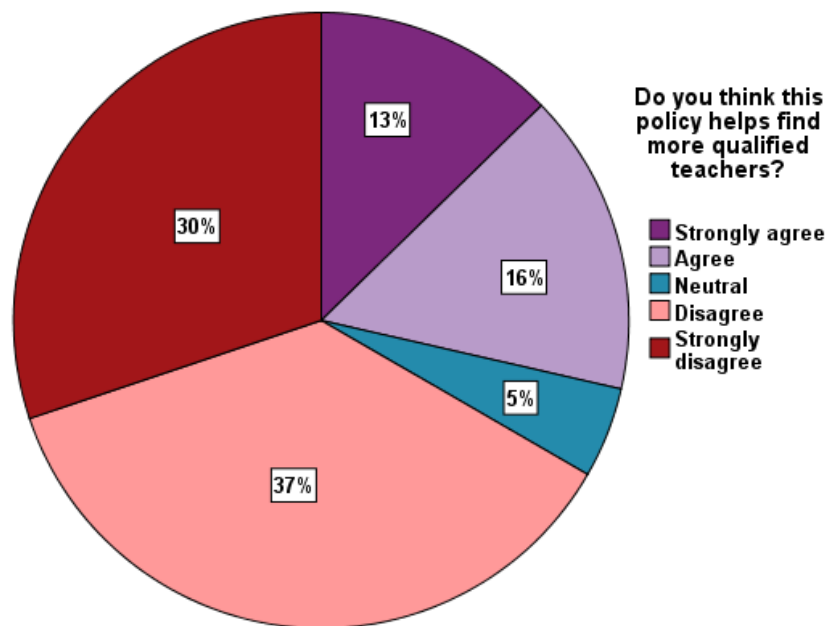


Figure 23: Teachers agreement on the statement ‘the policy helps find teachers who are more qualified’

The pie chart shows that less than a third of respondents believe that the policy helps find teachers that are more qualified (29%). On the other hand, almost two thirds of teachers do not agree with the statement (67%), including 30% in strong disagreement.

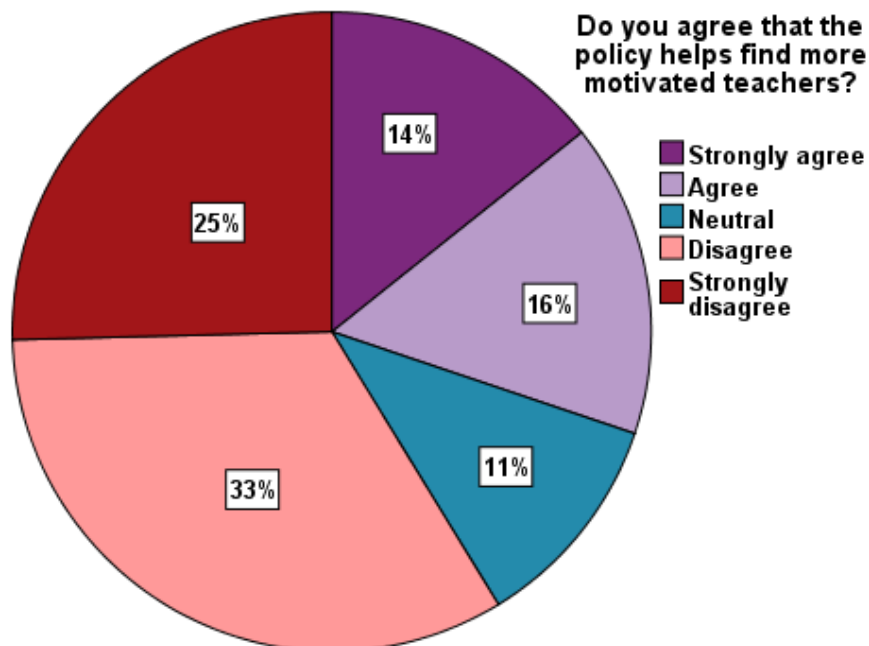


Figure 24: Teachers’ agreement with the statement ‘the policy helps find more motivated teachers’

30% of respondents believe that the policy aims to recruit more motivated teachers. However, 58% of them do not agree with the statement, among which 25% are in strong disagreement.

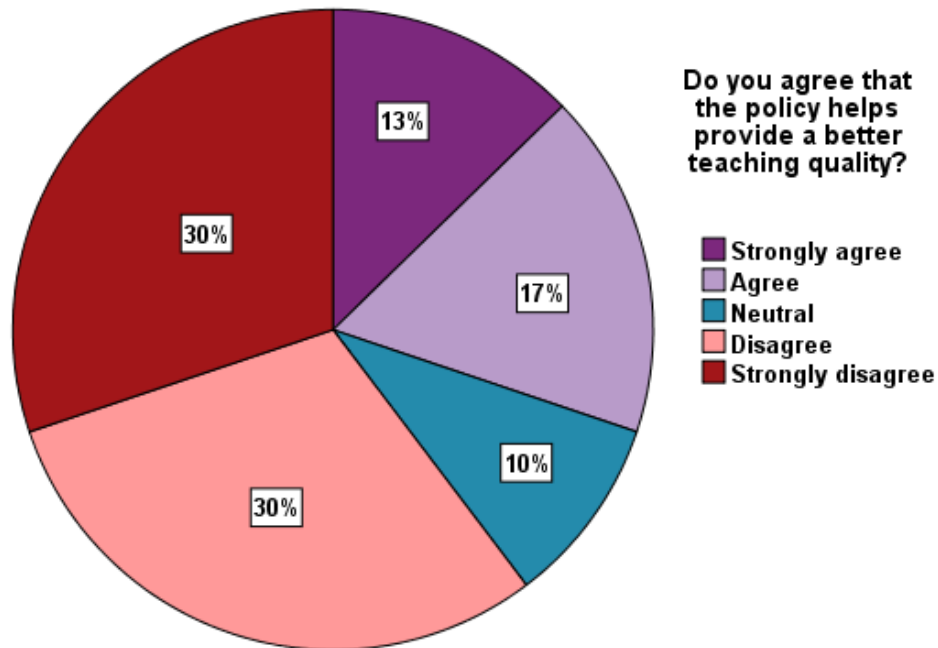


Figure 25: Teachers' agreement with the statement 'the policy helps provide a better teaching quality'

The graph shows that 30% of the teachers agree that the policy aims for a better teaching quality, while 60% believe the opposite, including 30% strongly disagreeing with the statement.

3.4. Opinions About Future Teaching Job Opportunities

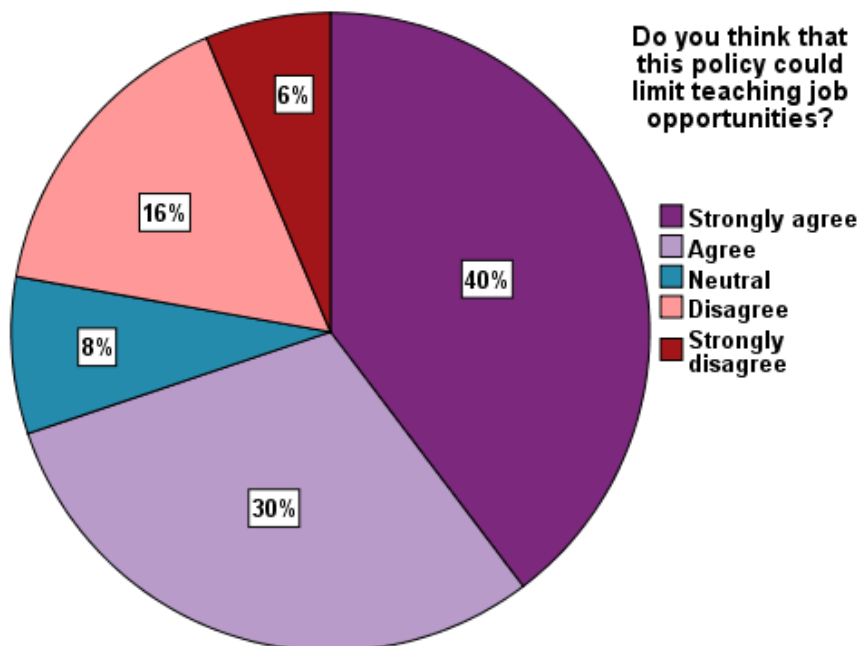


Figure 26: Teachers' opinion about the influence of the policy on teaching job opportunities

Even for teachers, the majority (70%) agree that age restriction would limit teaching job opportunities, including 40% of them in strong agreement. Only 22% of respondents disagree with the statement.

4. Teachers' Open-Ended Question

Within 63 questionnaires, 49 teachers expressed their opinions regarding the policy. Among 49 responses, 31 teachers showed disagreement with the policy, 14 teachers expressed their agreement, and the four remaining teachers revealed their agreement with the policy under certain conditions, such as raising the age limit to a higher number.

Concerning teachers who agree with the policy, one teacher stated that the policy “serves teachers’ interest as well as students’ interest”. Another respondent stated, “The policy aims to give value to the teaching profession...” Among responses were that the policy “enables the recruitment of more motivated teachers”, and permits “more renewal, while benefitting the learners.”

Among terms that were highlighted are “young energies”, which was stated twice; “long” period or effort that teachers can endure was mentioned three times. Finally, one respondent stated, “I think that limiting the age benefits the sector in terms of ability and novelty. Through previous experiences, those who entered the sector at a later age seemed to have weak capabilities in dealing with the students and to lack sufficient experience.”

As for teachers who are against the policy, some respondents expressed their opinions regarding the decision as “a fatal mistake”; “having no reasonable or logical foundation”; “an improvisational policy that does not relate to reality”; “non-sense”; and as “a random decision”. Two teachers suggested waiving the policy. One teacher stated that the policy is about “messing around instead of solving the real problems”. Some respondents do not consider age limit as a condition to reach teaching positions. Among their sayings are “age is not a criterion”; “age is not related to teaching quality”; “age is not related to efficiency”; “competency is not about the age”; and “competence should be considered in terms of the educational level and skills acquisition.”

One teacher mentioned that the policy does not help improve teaching, and three other teachers stressed that the policy limits access to teaching positions and increases unemployment among young people. Among interesting comments are the following: “I do not think that restricting the age will contribute to the quality of education, because according to my own experience, there are teachers who entered the education system after the age of thirty and their performance was good. The government should look for the real reasons for the low level of education...” Another respondent stated “The greater the age, the greater the experience...”

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to explore the opinions of public sector student teachers as well as teachers about a new policy adopted in Morocco. No similar study was found to express about this issue, though results reflected an important interest from respondents. Among the limitations of the study is the sample size. It is important to consider a larger sample population to be able to generalize the findings to the Moroccan population of student teachers and teachers in the public sector. Another limitation is about conducting the

questionnaires online; results were limited to a certain population who has access to internet and social network. Thus, it is suggested to conduct physical questionnaires and interviews. Among challenges faced was the sensitivity of the topic, which could be a reason for not being able to collect many responses, though participants showed great interest regarding the issue of age restriction. The nature of the topic might discourage concerned people from expressing their opinions freely and openly.

As a conclusion, the study provided interesting insights and viewpoints regarding the age restriction policy. Its aim was to investigate the opinions of Moroccan student teachers as well as teachers, within the public sector, regarding the new age limit policy set by the Ministry of Education in the Moroccan context. Answers show that both student teachers and teachers hope for a better education system and a better teaching quality all over the country, no matter the difference in their opinions and ideas. The majority of student teachers, regardless of their age, as well as teachers, do not really support the policy and do not believe in its aims as highlighted by the government. However, even if minor, there are also some positive viewpoints from students teachers regarding the policy, and teachers' responses and opinions are slightly more positive, compared to those expressed by student teachers. The idea of including teachers' opinions does not only aim to get perspectives of other stakeholders but also to get more objective opinions, assuming that teachers could be less subjective, since they already hold their teaching positions.

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