Unveiling Factors Influencing Teacher Professional Alienation: A Qualitative Case Study*

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to unveil the factors that influence teacher professional alienation. The study included a group of 20 teachers and school administrators employed in a province located in the northwestern region of Türkiye. This qualitative case study involved this cohort working across various educational levels, including kindergartens, primary, secondary, and high schools. A semi-structured interview form was used to collect data. Content analysis was employed for data analysis. Results revealed four main factors that influence teacher professional alienation: (1) problems between district/school administration and teachers, (2) legislation, (3) students, and (4) parents. We discuss our results in line with the accumulated research findings and provide some implications for policy and practice.

1. Introduction

In the pursuit of educational effectiveness, schools are mandated to fulfill specific functions. Chief among these functions, which embody the technical core of a school, is the instruction role, principally executed by teachers (Hoy & Miskel, 2015). A teacher, being intricately involved in student interactions across all facets of the instructional process, is expected to embody specific attributes to perpetuate their profession effectively, serve as exemplars for their students, exert positive influence, and equip them for life's challenges (Özdemir, 2013; Hoy & Miskel, 2015). Notably, past research has underscored that effective teachers demonstrate elevated levels of professionalism (Karaca & Uras, 2016), job satisfaction (Altunkurt & Yılmaz, 2014), self-efficacy (Klassen & Chiu, 2010), organizational commitment (Sezgin, 2010), and organizational citizenship (Korkmaz, 2011), coupled with adeptness in conflict resolution (Köklü, 2012), interpersonal communication (Çetinkanat, 1998), and decision-making prowess (Filiz, 2011).

However, it is pertinent to acknowledge the existence of adverse circumstances that can impede the performance and success of teachers during their instructional endeavors within schools. One such challenge is teacher professional alienation. The phenomenon of a teacher undergoing professional alienation

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alienation can significantly undermine the quality of teaching within a school setting. It may also detrimentally impact their interpersonal communication skills, thereby potentially fostering a deleterious worldview overall (Elma, 2003). Indeed, grappling with professional alienation may lead teachers to perceive their profession as a monotonous endeavor beyond their sphere of influence, fostering negative dispositions toward their students and consequently diminishing the efficacy and efficiency of instructional activities (Yakut, 2016). Given these circumstances, it becomes imperative to elucidate the factors precipitating teacher professional alienation and their ramifications to enable teachers to function effectively and efficiently.

The experience of stress among teachers can precipitate work alienation by engendering diminished motivation and performance deficits (Elma, 2003). Various factors such as interpersonal conflicts with administrators, negative rapport with colleagues, lack of involvement in decision-making processes, and students' suboptimal readiness levels can similarly lead to teacher estrangement from their professional roles (Emir, 2012). Past research has underscored its adverse impacts on teacher creative prowess, their capacity for serving as role models for both students and society, their professional advancement, their societal contributions, the efficacy and efficiency of their instructional endeavors, and their collaborative synergies with peers (Mercan, 2006). Thus, the findings of this study hold promise in fostering the requisite conditions for teachers to discharge their professional duties more effectively, thereby augmenting the overall efficacy of the schools. Indeed, we expect that the insights gleaned from this study might furnish practitioners and policymakers with valuable guidance in endeavors aimed at bolstering educational efficacy, enhancing teacher performance and caliber, and endowing teachers with fortified professional acumen and competencies.

2. Literature

2.1. The Concept of Alienation

Fromm (2014) characterizes alienation as the passive and receptive perception of both oneself and the world. Within this framework, alienation denotes the incapacity to apprehend the interconnectedness between subjectivity and objectivity, thereby failing to grasp the world in its entirety. Weisskopf (1996) integrates alienation with repression, conceiving it as the neglect, exclusion, and suppression of essential facets of human existence. According to this perspective, alienation delineates the fragmentation of human existence, representing only a fraction of an individual's potential due to external pressures exerted upon them. Kongar (1979) regards alienation as a diminishing level of adaptation to one's social, cultural, and natural milieu. He posits that as a consequence of alienation, individuals relinquish control over their surroundings, consequently leading to feelings of isolation and helplessness. Similarly, Yeniçeri (2006) defines alienation as a state of detachment from one's self, values, and society, arising from the predominance of materialism over spirituality and the substitution of ends with means, resulting in acquiescence rather than autonomy.

2.2. Teacher Alienation

Bursalıoğlu (2016) characterizes teachers as the principal actors in the realm of education. They shoulder significant responsibilities, including guiding them in goal formulation and facilitating their development as contributing members of both self and society (Eryılmaz, 2010). To discharge these duties effectively, they must feel adequately equipped to impart educational services and exhibit high levels of motivation (Balci, 1988). However, various factors can impede teacher effectiveness, with experiencing professional alienation emerging as one such inhibiting factor (Elma, 2003; Eryılmaz, 2010).

Teacher alienation can be delineated as a phenomenon wherein teachers experience feelings of inadequacy and powerlessness, perceiving their occupation as devoid of significance, withdrawing from school and collegial interactions, and fostering negative sentiments towards their profession (Elma, 2003). For a teacher entrenched in alienation, the act of teaching assumes a mundane quality, seemingly beyond their sphere of influence, thereby impeding the generation of efficacious pedagogical practices (Soysal, 1997). This sense of alienation is palpable in teacher detachment from the teaching-learning nexus, a gradual waning of interest over time, and a burgeoning perception of their vocation as unrewarding (Eryılmaz & Burgaz, 2011). Such a scenario precipitates a decline in teacher productivity and efficacy, disrupts educational endeavors, and compromises the attainment of educational objectives.

Drawing from extant scholarship, factors contributing to teacher professional alienation can be classified (e.g., Elma, 2003; Yapıcı, 2004; Kılınç, 2011). Bureaucratic structure and excessive centralization, for instance, significantly lead to teacher alienation. This is evidenced by hierarchical school structures where decisions are made centrally, often without soliciting input from teachers. The delineation of teachers' roles through administrative directives and the imposition of new regulations from central administrations exacerbate this issue, fostering a sense of powerlessness among teachers (Yapıcı, 2004). Furthermore, the inefficacy of central bureaucracies in addressing teachers' needs, coupled with concerns regarding adherence to predetermined curricula and regulations, might increase professional alienation (Yapıcı, 2004).

Institutional factors also play a pivotal role in fostering teacher alienation. Substandard school infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, excessive curriculum demands, and a
lack of participatory management structures all lead to a negative school climate. Indeed, the absence of teacher input in curriculum design, coupled with low academic performance among students, exacerbates feelings of alienation. Additionally, institutional disregard for professional development opportunities, the commodification of education, and a dearth of inter-institutional collaboration further compound this issue (Kılıç, 2011).

Economic factors serve as another significant reason for teacher alienation. Inadequate salaries relative to the cost of living and the societal devaluation of the teaching profession contribute to feelings of disillusionment among teachers. When teachers struggle to meet their basic needs due to low wages and perceive teaching as undervalued by society, their sense of professional prestige diminishes, leading to alienation (Kılıç, 2009). On an individual level, unmet professional expectations, feelings of monotony and fatigue, challenges in adapting to the profession, and interpersonal conflicts with colleagues and students all cause teacher alienation. Additionally, personal issues and family-related stressors can further exacerbate these feelings (Yapıcı, 2004).

The ramifications of teacher alienation are profound, adversely affecting the quality of teaching and learning. Teachers experiencing alienation may perceive their work as mundane, resulting in a lack of investment in teaching activities and a decline in pedagogical quality. Consequently, important aspects of teaching, such as catering to individual student needs and fostering a conducive learning environment, may be compromised (Bayındır, 2002). Moreover, alienation stifles teacher creativity, hindering their ability to innovate and adapt to the dynamic demands of the profession (Aslan, 2008).

Alienation poses a significant obstacle to teachers’ role modeling capacity. It engenders negative perceptions toward society, exacerbates communication challenges, and hampers effective engagement with the external milieu (Kasapoğlu, 2015). Moreover, alienation encumbers teacher professional advancement, an essential facet of the teaching profession necessitating perpetual adaptation to societal difficulties and technological advancements. In instances of alienation, teachers may develop a cynical outlook toward their vocation, impeding their receptivity to professional growth opportunities (Elma, 2003).

Furthermore, alienated teachers may exhibit reluctance to invest additional effort in their duties, manifesting a disposition of non-participation in tasks beyond their designated roles. Such dispositions, stemming from feelings of alienation, detrimentally impact their contributions to societal progress (Kılıç, 2009). Finally, teacher alienation erects barriers to collaborative endeavors with school administrators and peers, fostering a sense of detachment from their professional milieu and impeding fruitful engagement with managerial and collegial spheres (Eryılmaz, 2010).

3. Method

3.1. Design

This study was conducted using a qualitative research method and a case study design. A case study is employed for the in-depth examination, description, and interpretation of one or more cases (Büyüköztürk et al., 2016). Notably, Yin (2017) underscores the capacity of case studies to elucidate complex social phenomena across diverse research domains. According to Yin, case studies are particularly suited to contexts where the differentiation between factual evidence and contextual considerations is ambiguous. The adoption of a case study design in this research was driven by the imperative to conduct an in-depth exploration of the factors influencing teacher alienation from the vantage point of teachers themselves. Hence, the identified case concerning teacher alienation was subjected to meticulous analysis and interpretation within the predefined parameters.

3.2. Participants

The study included a group of 20 teachers and school administrators employed in a province located in the northwestern region of Türkiye. This qualitative case study involved this cohort working across various educational levels, including kindergartens, primary, secondary, and high schools. Convenient and maximum variation sampling methods were employed to determine the study group. Convenient sampling prioritizes saving the researcher's time, effort, and financial resources (Büyüköztürk et al., 2016). However, convenient sampling has been criticized in the literature for its tendency to limit the researcher's access to individuals within their immediate surroundings (Baltacı, 2018). To minimize this limitation, the researchers utilized their personal relationships across different social circles. Thus, 20 participants were selected from the identified 63 teachers and school administrators, whom the researcher believed would be easily accessible and provide candid responses.

Maximum variation sampling is used to capture the heterogeneous nature of individuals capable of contributing insights into the research inquiry to the fullest extent feasible (Merriam, 2015). Hence, the participant cohort in this study was drawn from varied demographic strata, including diverse age cohorts, seniority, subject areas, roles within schools, and educational attainment levels. Specifically, the participant pool consisted of 14 males and six females, with 10 holding Bachelor's degrees and the remaining ten possessing Master's degrees. Furthermore, to enrich the dataset with nuanced perspectives from individuals capable of offering comprehensive insights, the sample encompassed four school principals and six assistant principals. This strategic inclusion aimed to procure an exhaustive array of data from participants embodying distinct attributes. To uphold the confidentiality of participant identities, a coding system denoted by identifiers.
such as P1, P2, and P3 corresponding to the sequential order of their interviews was implemented. Table 1 provides a comprehensive overview of participant demographics.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
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<td>Age</td>
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<td>51 and above</td>
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<td>30 and above</td>
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<td>Subject area</td>
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<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>Turkish Language and Literature</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>Information Technologies</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guidance Counselor</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>RCMK</td>
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<tr>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>Turkish</td>
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<td>Mathematics</td>
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<td>Physical Education</td>
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<td>History</td>
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<td>Preschool</td>
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<td>Roles within schools</td>
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<td>School Principal</td>
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<td>Vice Principal</td>
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<td>Bachelor's Degree</td>
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<td>Master's Degree</td>
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Note: RCMK= Religious culture and moral knowledge.

### 3.3. Data Collection

Data were collected using the interview technique. Interviewing is an effective data collection technique (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). The interviews were structured around a semi-structured interview protocol meticulously crafted by the researchers. Prior to its formulation, a comprehensive review of the literature on alienation, specifically teacher alienation, was undertaken. Subsequently, the draft interview protocol underwent scrutiny by expert evaluators to ascertain its alignment with the research objectives. In the selection of these experts, a criterion emphasizing expertise in the realm of "teacher alienation research" was established. Consequently, the draft protocol was disseminated to four experts affiliated with diverse universities, soliciting their insights and critiques. Drawing from the feedback garnered from these experts, the interview protocol underwent refinement, culminating in the development of its final form.

Appointments were arranged with all participants for the interviews, and they were asked to choose a comfortable location for the interviews. All participants expressed their willingness to conduct the interviews during their free periods at their own schools. Interviews with principals, vice principals, and guidance counselors were conducted in their offices, while interviews with teachers were conducted in the teachers’ room. With the permission of all participants, the interviews were recorded using a voice recorder device. Additionally, the researcher took necessary notes related to the research during each interview using the interview form.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

The data collected for the study were analyzed using descriptive analysis and content analysis methods. In descriptive analysis, the data were analyzed and interpreted based on predetermined themes (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). In content analysis, the data were classified by the researcher into codes and themes and interpreted in a way that could be understood by the reader (Saban & Ersoy, 2017). Yin (2017) argues that the data analysis process in qualitative research consists of five cyclic stages: compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding. Accordingly, in the present study, the data obtained from audio recordings during the data collection phase were arranged according to the sequence of interviews and associated with the notes taken by the researcher during each interview. The raw data were read three times, with two-day intervals, from start to finish, and during this process, any notes that came to the researcher's mind were written next to the data. In the compilation stage, jotting down notes next to the data during readings facilitates the researcher in viewing the data as a whole. A thematic framework for data analysis was created by categorizing the interview questions prepared based on the theoretical framework of the concept of alienation. The obtained data were then organized to form a meaningful whole according to the thematic framework.

According to Yin (2017), coding consists of two cycles. In the first cycle, the researcher performs the coding. As coding progresses, the researcher completes the second cycle by aligning similar or related codes with more inclusive concepts. The generated codes were reviewed again, and more comprehensive concepts were identified for similar or related codes. After the completion of coding and the establishment of themes, the data were merged. Following the completion of coding and theme formation, the data interpretation phase commenced. During the interpretation phase, the researcher engages in a comprehensive interpretation of the codes and themes to provide a broader understanding. In this regard, the generated themes and codes were interpreted by the researcher in conjunction with the literature and presented in the discussion section of the study. Subsequently, the factors influencing teacher professional alienation were addressed in
3.5. Credibility

The first method utilized to enhance the credibility of this study is prolonged engagement. Yıldırım and Şimşek (2016) noted that participants tend to be influenced by the researcher at the beginning of an interview, and as the duration of the interview increases, trust in the researcher grows, leading to the establishment of a sincere atmosphere and the acquisition of more reliable data. Therefore, the interviews were conducted at times convenient for the participants, in locations of their choice, and efforts were made to prolong the interviews within the available resources. Another method used to increase credibility is expert review. For expert review, four domain experts who were well-versed in the study problem and specialized in qualitative research were consulted regarding the determination of codes and themes during the preparation of the interview form and the analysis of the data. Their suggestions were taken into account, and necessary adjustments were made accordingly.

4. Findings

4.1. Factors Influencing Teacher Professional Alienation

Participants’ opinions about the factors influencing teacher professional alienation were categorized under four sub-themes: problems between district/school administration and teachers, legislation, students, and parents. We then provide findings related to each sub-theme and codes under each sub-theme.

4.2. Problems between District/School Administration and Teachers

The codes identified under the sub-theme of problems between district/school administration and teachers include (1) autocratic management style, (2) unfair rewards and punishments, and (3) excessive rule-orientedness.

4.2.1. Autocratic management style

Participants commonly conveyed the notion that the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) lacks democratic governance. From the interviews, it became evident that the perspectives of teachers are often disregarded, particularly concerning issues directly affecting them. One participant's statement regarding the perception of education as a tool of politics and the assertion that the regulations are implemented not according to the views of teachers but in line with the political authority is as follows:

“I have been a teacher for 18-19 years. I don’t think any of the arrangements made so far in the education community have been based on the opinions of teachers.” (P13)

The MoNE practices emphasize the importance of hierarchy to the extent that even school administrations cannot freely convey their views to the upper management, and teachers are deprived of the opportunity to express their opinions on matters that concern them. The following statement by a participant, who is a school principal, supports this finding:

“Of course, we can’t discuss everything with the provincial management. You can’t straightforwardly tell a provincial director, a deputy director, or a branch director what you want and what needs your school has. When you propose something to them, they come up with excuses. You end up bowing your head and coming back; you can’t resist. Of course, you can’t speak completely freely.” (P9)

4.2.2. Unfair rewards and punishments

All participants have underscored the absence of an equitable system for rewards and sanctions within the educational system. Teachers lamented the perceived lack of fairness in the distribution of rewards, noting a deficiency in distinguishing between diligent performers and those who are less committed. Administrators further elucidated that the power to dispense rewards rests with governing bodies, suggesting a shortage of autonomy in their capacity to administer commendations. Moreover, administrators highlighted the pervasive disparity in reward allocation, even among schools, exacerbating the overarching issue of inequity within the system. One participant expressed the following statement regarding the unfair distribution of rewards to teachers in schools:

“When it comes to merit-based rewards, I cannot say much because it is entirely dependent on one’s relationship with those at the top rather than their skills. I have seen rewards given to those who deserve it, and I have also seen rewards given to those who flatter.” (P10)

From the setting of weekly class schedules to the distribution of exam duties, it is evident from participant views that unfair practices are prevalent in schools. One participant described the injustice in setting weekly class schedules, emphasizing that one side is constantly being disadvantaged:

“When it comes to arranging the weekly class schedules, there is favoritism towards those who are on good terms with the school administration. Even if it is not happening, teachers now approach this situation with suspicion because many teachers are severely affected, even experiencing mobbing. When classes are distributed across all five days, it leads to mobbing. In such situations, even the
administrator does not want to face issues. As an administrator, you may have distributed everything equally to everyone, but then that person goes directly to the principal, and the principal says to fix it. To avoid facing such situations, you also become cautious. Generally, the management can be more ruthless towards those who are less likely to cause problems. Teachers demand justice.” (P1)

In addition to the injustice in rewarding, it is noteworthy that a participant also highlighted the lack of fairness among different types of schools, indicating that some types of schools are privileged by provincial administrations or even the MoNE:

“We feel that schools are not given equal importance; there is no fair treatment. I believe this is the case not only in our province but also nationwide. Currently, some types of schools are enjoying significant privileges. Even the simplest artwork they put up on the walls becomes a big deal across the province, whereas we achieve rankings in robotics competitions. Yet, it seems like no one cares about it.” (P13)

In terms of professional alienation, the lack of fair recognition and reward for teacher efforts might lead to a decrease in the motivation of dedicated teachers. This situation may also make them feel like their efforts are in vain and perceive their work as monotonous. In this regard, the opinion of one participant is quite meaningful:

“When I first started teaching, I was energetic, dynamic, and tried to innovate. As a result, students generally loved my classes. However, when I saw that my efforts were not effective or appreciated in the environments where I realized that this profession could be carried out without much dedication. I also noticed a decline in my motivation.” (P12)

4.2.3. Excessive rule-orientedness

Some participants have indicated that one of the difficulties encountered in the teaching profession is the excessively rule-oriented attitude of administrators. The lack of tolerance shown by district and school administrators towards teachers and their immediate application of laws and regulations is emerging as a disturbing issue for teachers. An example highlighting the participant's view that the strict rules and procedures implemented by managers are the most challenging aspect of the teaching profession is noteworthy:

“In terms of management, procedures are strictly adhered to; even if you go to donate blood for 10 minutes, you need to obtain permission. If you want to attend your child’s performance, you need to get permission to obtain a report. This is the most challenging aspect of the teaching profession.” (P1)

The overly rule-bound behavior of school administrators may lead teachers to conduct their lessons within certain patterns, refrain from stepping outside boundaries, and consequently results in the monotony of teaching. Additionally, it is evident from the analysis that administrators displaying excessively rule-bound attitudes are meticulous about documenting all activities. If the documentation for a particular activity is not prepared, they tend to believe that the task was not completed and resort to immediate disciplinary measures. A participant's statement highlights this perspective:

"Previously, there was a heating department, and coal was burned. At the beginning of the year, they used to come and ask, 'Is the school's heating system working safely?' We would say, 'Yes, it's working.' 'Did you have the chimney cleaned?' they would ask. 'Yes, we did. Come and see if you want.' We would say, and the chimneys were spotless. 'Provide the documentation.' If there is no documentation, they say, 'You haven't cleaned the chimney.' This is just a simple example, but these kinds of things bother people.” (P19)

4.3. Legislation

Under the theme of factors influencing teacher professional alienation, the sub-theme of legislation was established, including codes such as rigid bureaucracy, excessive paperwork burden, and inflexible curriculum.

4.3.1. Rigid bureaucracy

All participants expressed dissatisfaction with the rigid bureaucratic practices within the education system. The participants commonly agreed that bureaucratic tasks and procedures, such as obtaining written permissions and approvals for every activity, result in teacher alienation. One participant expressed the following sentiments regarding the issue:

"Sometimes procedures take a long time and can be frustrating. For instance, when you want to take students on a trip, and you want to do it quickly, yes, you face problems. It can be challenging to bypass the procedures.” (P18)

Another participant expressed concerns about being burdened by bureaucratic tasks and not being able to devote time to their students, stating:

"The rigid bureaucracy should be kept a bit more distant from teachers, and things should be made easier. This should be done not only by school administrators but by the entire education community. I mean, a document should not be
requested in ten different ways. This should be stopped as soon as possible. Currently, schools are more concerned with bureaucratic tasks than with students. Sometimes, I rebel against being so entangled in bureaucracy, and the saddest part is not being able to spend enough time with my students.” (P1)

4.3.2. Excessive paperwork burden

All participants expressed that excessive paperwork burden constitutes a significant obstacle to quality teaching. They stated that many of the documents prepared by teachers are unnecessary and that dealing with excessive paperwork prevents them from allocating time to instructional practices. A participant's perspective on this issue may provide insight:

"In general, excessive paperwork in schools, excessive and perhaps unnecessary administrative tasks, regulations that could cause problems in terms of time, and being assigned tasks outside of the teacher's field or responsibility disrupt the learning process of students and lead teachers to deviate from their primary duties." (P15)

Another participant mentioned having to allocate most of their energy to paperwork, leaving them with no energy for instructional practices, which led to a negative attitude towards their profession:

"I love the act of teaching. I love being a teacher. I enjoy being in class. However, due to the excessive paperwork in our country, I think I have to allocate most of my energy to them, which makes me think I am getting tired of the profession." (P7)

Excessive paperwork is perceived as unnecessary by participants and is seen to make teachers find their work meaningless. Many participants expressed dislike for filling out paperwork that they knew would serve no purpose and would not be read by anyone. One participant emphasized that paperwork is one of the most challenging aspects of teaching:

"Being asked for documentation for everything I do bothers me. Dealing with bureaucratic tasks like sending paperwork back and forth bothers me. The only thing that could alienate me is bureaucratic tasks." (P3)

4.3.3. Inflexible curriculum

Nearly all participants have expressed that imposing a specific curriculum on teachers and restricting their freedom is not appropriate in the teaching profession. This restriction is perceived as an intrusion into the teacher's freedom and a limitation of their autonomy, as evident from the interviews. One participant articulated this issue as follows:

"The teaching profession actually has a mold; it is a profession where they try to fit you into that mold. Despite being a profession that should be free and democratic, it is a profession where they try to fit you into molds. Your curriculum is predetermined, what you will teach is predetermined, which teaching methods you will use are predetermined, and you are required to be accountable for all of these to parents, students, and everyone else." (P1)

Participants highlight that inflexible curricula excessively shape the teaching profession and hinder teacher freedom by defining their roles too rigidly. One participant's perspective on this issue is particularly insightful:

"For example, in our current curriculum, they basically give orders like 'You will teach this topic in 6 hours, and that topic in 4 hours.' You don't have room for alternatives. And you try to comply with it as much as possible. If it were up to me, it could vary depending on the school environment. More emphasis could be placed on a certain topic." (P7)

4.4. Students

According to the participants’ views, under the student sub-theme, the codes of low student motivation, negative student behaviors, and differences in academic achievement levels have emerged.

4.4.1. Low student motivation

According to some participants, low student motivation negatively affects teachers' using their professional capacity. Other potential characteristics of students with low motivation, such as reluctance to learn, negative attitudes toward school, and attending school solely to obtain a diploma, have also been highlighted. Particularly in subjects where questions are not included in centralized exams, this issue seems to be more profound. One participant expressed the following:

"I sense that a student does not feel the need to learn, does not feel the necessity to learn. I do not think the students in the school where I work have a passion for learning. They do not value my lesson much because they know they can become police officers or soldiers after obtaining their diplomas. This is the biggest problem." (P12)

4.4.2. Negative student behaviors

Some participants mentioned that negative student behaviors disturb them and other students and adversely affect the quality of instructional practices. One participant expressed the following:

"...the current generation of children is becoming increasingly challenging every day. They may be learning faster, but in terms of behavioral
adaptation to the general society, they become more individualistic and selfish. Children's self-centeredness, their desire to do everything themselves, not wanting to share, and individualistic behavior make teachers' jobs more difficult.” (P16)

Some participants expressed discomfort with disciplinary incidents among students, stating that they lack authority in the face of negative student behaviors, and other students are also negatively affected by this situation. One participant thinks as follows:

"Children are raised to be free, but they cannot set the boundaries of freedom. Of course, we are against the punishment system, but sometimes, we have to give punishment helplessly to protect the rights of other students within the framework of guidance. However, the punishments we give don't hold any value for the children, so we want school administrations to be given more authority.” (P9)

4.4.3. Differences in academic achievement levels

Some participants mentioned that they could not conduct their lessons comfortably due to the differences in the academic achievement levels of students. A participant's direct quotation can serve as an example for this issue:

"The most taxing aspect for me is the significant divergence in academic performance among my classes. Within a single lesson, I encounter scenarios where one group declares completion, seeking further direction, while another group has yet to initiate the task, with some students even failing to bring necessary materials such as their notebooks. Managing such divergent progress within a single session makes it exceedingly challenging to conclude the lesson satisfactorily.” (P11)

Participant perspectives reveal that variations in academic achievement levels among classes and students pose significant obstacles to teachers in effectively delivering their lessons. This circumstance has the potential to detrimentally impact a teacher's efficacy, which might eventually lead to teacher alienation.

4.5. Parents

The perspectives shared by participants have prompted the emergence of a distinct sub-theme labeled "Parents," which encapsulates three distinct codes: not accepting teacher professionalism, overprotective parents and the lack of trust in the teacher.

4.5.1. Not accepting teacher professionalism

Some participants have mentioned that one of the difficulties in the teaching profession is parents who do not accept the professionalism of teachers. It is understood from participants’ views that parents excessively interfere with teachers’ work and often do not know their boundaries. The direct quotation below is significant in this regard:

"...some of our parents know everything. They are more teachers than teachers. They are more doctors than doctors. So, there are problems with such parents' intervention in our teaching process due to their know-it-all attitude.” (P17)

Participants have conveyed discomfort regarding parental interference in their professional domain, with one participant even expressing a willingness to switch schools if afforded the opportunity:

"At the beginning of the year, a couple of parents excessively interfered in the affairs of the 5th graders here, which made me cool off from the profession at that time. If they had given me the right to transfer, I would have left.” (P10)

4.5.2. Overprotective parents

Some participants have expressed discomfort with parents' overprotective parenting. It is understood from the interviews that parents' excessive desire to protect their children and do everything best for them hinders teachers from practicing their profession. While this situation is more prevalent in preschool and primary education, it is also partially experienced in secondary schools. One participant expressed this situation as follows:

"Since we are preschool teachers, parents' expectations from us are too much. Like, they want us to feed their child, to dress their child, to take off their clothes. Such expectations are too much. They cannot accept that we are teachers.” (P17)

According to participant views, parents' overprotectiveness towards their children hinders teachers from practicing their profession, restricts their freedom, disregards their opinions, and consequently weakens them in front of parents and students.

4.5.3. Lack of trust in the teacher

Several participants have highlighted the challenge posed by parental mistrust towards teachers as an obstacle in their profession. Participants expressed frustration over their inability to convey to parents their genuine desire for the well-being and success of their children. One participant's remarks on this matter are indicative:

"Parents often perceive us as adversaries when we bring up concerns about their child, questioning whether some behaviors or issues exist at home. In reality, we are all working towards the same goal, and as teachers, we often invest significant thought and consideration into each student's well-being,
sometimes even more than the parents themselves.”  
(P19)

Another participant stated that parents' lack of trust in the teacher leads to teachers developing a negative attitude towards their profession:

"The attitude of parents is important here. Sometimes, their behaviors that they act like they know these educational matters better than the teacher or try to speak or act to emphasize that, behaviors indicating a lack of trust in the teacher, of course, cause cooling off, alienation, feeling excluded." (P15)

5. Interpretation of Findings

The first factor affecting teacher alienation is seen to be the problems between district/school administration and teachers. Participants believe that their managers exhibit an autocratic management style, leading them to be alienated. This finding concurs with past research findings (e.g., Elma, 2003; Aslan, 2008; Kesik & Cömert, 2014). Similarly, Göksoy (2014) revealed that teachers either did not participate at all or participated very little in decisions concerning them. As organizational management shifts away from democratic principles towards autocratic management, the experience of alienation might become more pronounced (Soysal, 1997).

Another point emphasized by the participants regarding the problems between management and teachers is unfair reward and punishment practices. Participants stated that they do not find the reward and punishment practices of school and district administrators fair. Similarly, Çelebi et al. (2015) found that teachers believed rewards were distributed unfairly and non-transparently, and being close to the administration was effective in receiving rewards. Unjust practices regarding salary, rewards, and disciplinary actions, identified as a catalyst for professional alienation (Özbudun et al., 2008), can foster negative sentiments among teachers towards their profession, potentially leading to feelings of alienation.

The results highlighted that school or district-level administrators who demonstrate inflexibility towards teachers, rigidly enforcing protocols and regulations while disregarding the human aspect, are more prone to engender feelings of alienation among teachers. This finding aligns with some previous research (e.g., Ada et al., 2013). Thus, it is reasonable to argue that excessively rule-bound administrative attitudes might decrease the work motivation of teachers, which, in turn, leads to professional alienation. The results also indicate that one of the factors influencing teacher professional alienation is legislation. Teachers have reported that rigid bureaucracy, excessive paperwork burden, and inflexible curriculum result in feelings of alienation. Participants have expressed discomfort with bureaucratic tasks and procedures such as performing every task according to procedures, writing letters for every activity, and obtaining approvals and permissions. Indeed, the literature suggests that the bureaucratic structure in organizations is one of the reasons for professional alienation (Soysal, 1997). Therefore, providing teachers with autonomy in instructional practices could prevent teachers from experiencing professional alienation.

Findings revealed that teachers find most of the paperwork they prepare while performing their duties unnecessary. They feel burdened by the excessive paperwork, as it consumes time that could be spent on instructional practices. This leads teachers to develop a negative attitude towards their profession. This finding is consistent with Gökçe and Özen (2019)'s observation that teachers perceive clerical and paperwork tasks as burdensome. The same study also found that tasks perceived as burdensome might lead to decreased motivation and performance, as well as feelings of fatigue, worthlessness, disappointment, and stress among teachers. Considering that these factors are also among the causes of professional alienation (Erjem, 2005), it is logical to suggest that reducing excessive paperwork is necessary to prevent teacher professional alienation.

Results indicate that another factor affecting teacher professional alienation is the inflexible curriculum. Teachers perceive the determination of the boundaries of the curriculum as an intrusion into professional autonomy, limiting their scope of action and creating a sense of mistrust. Erjem (2005) also identified the curriculum as one of the factors causing alienation among teachers. In the Turkish education system, the MoNE runs almost all system-wide procedures, such as determining the content of teaching programs, and textbooks of courses. This situation mandates teachers to follow a common curriculum. At first glance, this may be perceived as a positive practice ensuring equal access to education and instructional unity for everyone. However, assuming the same geographical conditions, socio-cultural characteristics of families, and readiness levels of students, and creating a common curriculum may prevent teachers from considering individual differences. The inflexible curriculum may lead teachers to perceive themselves as assembly line workers, causing them to feel pressured and stressed (Erjem, 2005; Akpinar, 2008). Moreover, the curriculum acting as a control mechanism may create pressure and stress on teachers, which might increase the likelihood of professional alienation among teachers.

Participants also reported that low student motivation, negative student behaviors, and differences in student academic achievement levels are reasons for alienation. According to the participants' views, students' unwillingness to learn, their negative attitudes towards school, and perceiving school only as a place to obtain a diploma result in teacher alienation. Similarly, Akpinar (2008) identified low student motivation as a factor causing stress and excessive anxiety among teachers.
Low student motivation may lead to a decrease in teacher motivation, attempts to teach students, feeling weak and worthless professionally, and consequently experiencing professional alienation.

Participants expressed that negative student behaviors might result in teacher alienation. They also feel they lack sufficient authority to prevent these incidents. The finding that student indiscretion negatively affects teacher motivation, as suggested by Can and Ermez (2017), aligns with the results of this study. Our findings indicate that unresolved challenges pertaining to students' negative conduct not only disrupt instructional efficacy but also induce job-related stress for teachers. Furthermore, students' adverse behaviors detrimentally impact teacher self-assurance and their overall perception of the teaching profession, potentially precipitating feelings of alienation.

Findings indicate that the academic achievement gap among students results in teachers not being able to meet the expectations and needs of all students. When a teacher spends time assisting a student with learning difficulties, other students may feel neglected. Similarly, when a high-achieving student progresses at a faster pace, it may leave behind students who struggle with learning. This dilemma can become a source of stress for teachers, potentially leading to their professional alienation.

Finally, our study illustrates that the refusal of parents to accept the professionalism of teachers, overly protective parental attitudes, and the lack of trust in teachers emerged as issues originating from parents that might increase the likelihood of teacher alienation. More specifically, our results suggest that parents often intervene in teachers' work. Similarly, Şenaras and Çetin (2018) examined teacher views on parental pressure and found that parents intervene in various aspects of teachers' work, from classroom management to discipline. The tendency of the media to generalize individual teacher errors to all teachers may legitimize parental intervention in the minds of parents. This situation may lead teachers to act not in line with educational needs and student requirements, but rather to please parents, leading to feelings of powerlessness and a decrease in the respectability of the profession. Accordingly, Atmaca and Öntaş (2014) found that parental violence negatively affects teachers' professional lives, leading to loss of morale and motivation, negative attitudes towards the profession, professional burnout, organizational silence, and loss of trust in the school.

6. Implications

Our results yield several implications for policy and practice. In terms of policy, it is recommended that policymakers develop effective policies conducive to fostering democratic management models. This would facilitate the amelioration or mitigation of conflicts between district or school administration and teachers. Moreover, effective programs and training initiatives should be developed to enhance communication channels between these stakeholders. To alleviate alienation stemming from legislative constraints, regulations ought to be formulated to streamline bureaucracy and alleviate the burden of paperwork. Additionally, policymakers are encouraged to devise policies aimed at fostering collaboration among students, parents, and schools. Supportive programs should also be instituted to cultivate trust in teachers among parents. On the practical front, school principals can play a pivotal role in mitigating teacher professional alienation by fostering a more supportive school environment. Initiatives such as regular meetings can be instituted to enhance communication and collaboration between school management and teachers, ensuring that teachers' perspectives are factored into decision-making processes. Furthermore, school principals can adopt a democratic and inclusive approach to school management, thereby fostering a sense of ownership and inclusivity among teachers.

7. Limitations

Our study has some limitations that warrant further attention. The first one is related to the selection of participants. Although maximum variation sampling was utilized in selecting the participants, all of them work in the same province. Due to the centralized structure of the Turkish education system, the identical rules and working principles are valid for school principals and teachers throughout the county. However, gathering data from a broader sample might have revealed different results. Additionally, focusing on individuals easily accessible to researchers may have restricted the diversity of the sample, potentially leading to the perspectives of different groups not being fully considered. Second, it is likely that the topic of alienation has had emotional effects on the participants. This may have hindered the full expression of their true thoughts. Although researchers acted carefully in adhering to ethical principles (e.g., maintaining participant confidentiality), in some cases, participants may have struggled to reflect their true thoughts due to feeling pressure, resulting in the data obtained being incomplete or inadequate. Recognizing these limitations, future research endeavors should prioritize engaging with a broader and more diverse cohort of participants, which might facilitate the acquisition of more comprehensive and in-depth insights into the phenomenon under investigation. Additionally, using methods to make participants feel more comfortable during data collection can improve data quality.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.
References


