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Research Article

A Heuristic Inquiry into the Experience of Not Realizing Our Ideal Teaching[1]

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Abstract

Purpose: The inability of a teacher to realize their ideal teaching is a phenomenon that is obviously experienced but has not yet been clearly researched. Research on this topic has generally focused on teachers' working conditions, teacher identity change, autonomy, disempowerment, and deskilling. It is apparent that no research has yet been conducted to explain this phenomenon experienced by teachers based on their experiences without the limitations of theoretical frameworks. However, making this phenomenon, its experiences, and understandings visible from the perspective of those who experience it will make significant contributions to the literature. The purpose of our study is to understand and explain to the readers the essence and significance of the experience of "not realizing one's ideal teaching" based on the statements of a group of teachers, including the first author.

Method: The participants in this study, which was based on a heuristic research design, were 11 teachers, diversified by gender and teaching field, who felt that they could not realize their ideal teaching.

Findings: When the experiences of the participating teachers are analyzed, three themes emerge: "I feel blocked," "I lose motivation," and "I am in despair."

Implications: The results of the research provided data for a better understanding of the impact of the physical conditions, insufficient equipment of schools, and educational stakeholders on the teaching process, for planning measures to increase teachers' autonomy, for a better understanding and review of the impact of the examination system on the teaching process and for planning qualified training for teachers on the issues with which they have professional difficulties.

Keywords

ideal teaching, teachers, heuristic inquiry

[1]This research article is based on the heuristic research section of the first author's doctoral dissertation, supervised by the second author, entitled "Understanding and Describing Our Experience of Not Realizing Our Ideal Teaching: A Phenomenological, Phenomenographical and Heuristic Inquiry."

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Introduction

A review of the literature on the working lives of teachers shows that the increasing trend toward standardization in education systems has led to conditions that adversely affect teachers. Teachers have lost their autonomy, their notions of professionalism have changed, and they have been deskilled and disempowered. The conditions that have led to this have presumably developed in a social structure dominated by 21st-century free market ideals (Nunez, 2015). With the effects of increasing standardization and accountability criteria, teachers are working under conditions in which their work is more standardized and intensified (Ramirez et al., 2018). Education policies shaped by neoliberalism, the implementation of state accountability measures based on customer satisfaction and market expectations (Apple & Jungck, 1990), standardized curricula guiding instruction, instructional materials determined by central authorities, and the dominance of standardized assessment procedures in the education sector have driven teachers into a corner (Ömür & Bavlı, 2020).

In the last quarter of the 20th century, efforts were made to design education in line with the needs of the economy and designing education policies in line with the labor needs of industry became part of the strategies to achieve countries' development goals (Lundahl, 2006). It is common and desirable for education to supply the labor market with qualified workers and to serve the development of the country by educating people to become citizens (Apple, 1982). However, demands for better education, a safe educational environment, and accountability have led to a trend towards standardization of the educational process (Ramirez et al., 2018), as young people seek documents that prove their competencies and achievements in the knowledge that this competitive new order, in which increases in production and higher profits are sought (Lakes & Carter, 2011). This trend toward standardization of both the teaching process and assessment methods has transformed education into a task-oriented enterprise in which students are forced to learn more information to earn more, are in constant competition with each other, and must acquire the skills and competencies to meet the changing workforce demands of countries (Apple & Teitelbaum, 1986).

Believing that education plays a role in training a workforce that can make the country more competitive in the international marketplace, key policymakers have developed ready-made teaching materials, a detailed planned and prescribed curriculum, and standardized tests based on the measurement of behavioral skills to verify that they are optimally implemented by teachers (Apple & Jungck, 1990). This drive to increase productivity has been compared to the Taylorist management model in industry which provides for greater control over workers to achieve higher profits (Nunez, 2015). Taylorist management model requires that a complex job be broken down its simplest components by management experts in order to increase productivity, reduce inefficiency, and keep both cost and efficiency under control (Apple, 1982). Aforesaid control model is an existing but less visible control practice where the control mechanism is implanted within the physical structure of the work.

In technical control, the control mechanism is embedded in the work process to ensure that employees maintain a high level of performance. For example, the work of a worker in an automobile factory is controlled by the uniform and repetitive sequence and speed of the

production line (Pratte & Rury, 1988). The basic limits of the workers in the factory are set by the production process itself. In this way, the worker has become part of the functioning machine (Baumann, 1992). In educational systems dominated by technical control, teachers do not determine their curricula, the classrooms in which they teach, or the content of their lessons. Furthermore, educational goals are set by central administrations, and teachers have no say in matters that determine the quality of the educational process, such as standardized tests and high-stakes examinations. For this reason, teachers have been likened to assembly line workers (Gitlin, 2001; Pratte & Rury, 1988).

The primary purpose of the central administration's step-by-step preparation of curricula and the central administration's establishment of instructional materials and standardized assessment procedures is to prevent individual or institutional maverick behavior by providing teachers with step-by-step guidance and holding schools and teachers accountable for achieving performance standards established for students. The instructional practices prescribed to teachers are designed to ensure that they maintain a high level of work performance at all times and to ensure synchronization among all educational institutions (Kauffman, 2005). However, this restricts teachers' instructional freedom and causes them to lose control over the teaching process (Apple, 1982). Focusing the instructional process on competencies, planned step by step by central administration and measured by standardized tests, alienates teachers from their work as they implement the plans of others and do not know what they are doing and why (Apple & Jungck, 1990). Unforeseeable problems can arise in the teaching process. A teacher who has a high level of professional competence can continue the teaching process by analyzing the conditions and restructuring the process according to the needs and characteristics of his or her students in a way that is beneficial to them because his or her work is different from that of a mechanic who follows a fixed procedure (Pratte & Rury, 1988). However, since teachers who are prescribed step-by-step prepared curricula and held responsible for their students' high-stakes test results, are disempowered in the dimension of planning, and structuring the teaching process, they lack the necessary flexibility (Apple, 1982).

Another factor that has a major impact on teachers' work is high-stakes examinations. These are examinations whose results are used to make important decisions for students' lives, such as assessing their learning outcomes and determining their conditions for admission to higher educational institutions. These examinations also influence the updating of educational decisions and the formation of educational policy (Wong, 2006). Large-scale testing has been used for more than a hundred years to hold teachers accountable for their student's learning, to ensure that students have acquired certain desired skills, or to set better performance standards of performance. Since then, education policymakers recognizing that they have limited ability to intervene directly in the classroom used state-mandated tests to hold students and schools accountable and responsible for the functioning of the learning process (Madaus & Russel, 2010). Since all the teachers who participated in the present study work in secondary schools, the most important exam that affects their professional life is the high school entrance exam (LGS). In order for students to be enrolled in these high schools that accept students with LGS exam scores, they must take the exam and achieve a sufficiently high score according to the schools' quotas. The qualitative differences between secondary

educational institutions lead to the expectation that studying at a high school that accepts students with high scores is a pathway to a good degree program in higher education (Özkan & Turan, 2021).

High-stakes examinations also have an impact on the teaching process and learning practices, as they can affect the future of candidates. The fact that the priority is to achieve high scores on the tests means that teaching methods are designed accordingly (Abrams et al., 2003). Teachers teach according to the test technique by focusing on the exam topics (Çetin & Ünsal, 2019) and resorting to lecture-based methods rather than time-consuming practices that they consider worthless in their exam preparation efforts. The school administration's desire for students to achieve high scores on the exam (Büyüköztürk, 2016) and the expectations of students' parents along the same lines make teachers feel pressured by these exams (Acar & Buldur, 2021).

When pre-service teachers begin a teaching degree program, they have pedagogical beliefs based on their own experiences as students. Their teaching practices are shaped by their perceptions arising from these beliefs, by what they learn during their student teaching, and by the experiences they have while practicing their profession (Hollingsworth, 1989). Even when teachers design instruction in line with their perspective, their beliefs about education, and their goals, there can be discrepancies between what they plan and what is implemented. It can be demoralizing for teachers when the teaching they envision and the teaching they are able to implement differ (James, 2002).

The inability of a teacher to realize his ideal teaching is a phenomenon that is obviously experienced but has not yet been clearly researched. Research on this topic has generally focused on teachers' working conditions, teacher identity change, autonomy, disempowerment, deskilling, and teacher empowerment. A review of the literature that can be used to explain teachers' inability to realize their ideal teaching reveals a clear problem. It is apparent that no research has yet been conducted to explain this phenomenon experienced by teachers based on their experiences without the limitations of theoretical frameworks. To make this phenomenon more relevant in educational research, the first step could be to make visible the experiences and understandings of this phenomenon from the perspective of those who experience it. Therefore, the aim of our study is to understand and explain to the readers the essence and significance of the experience of 'not realizing one's ideal teaching' based on the statements of a group of teachers, including the first author. Since the first author, myself (A.Ö.), was also a teacher who could not realize her ideal teaching, we considered the heuristic research design, which falls within the scope of qualitative research methodology as a research design, to be the most appropriate research method to provide an in-depth understanding of the topic.

Method

Before I go into the details of the research methodology, I would like to clarify one point. In this study, as a qualitative researcher with a post-positivist orientation and following the heuristic tradition, I have used the pronoun "we." On the other hand, the pronoun "we" in

this paper does not refer to the second author of the study (Ö.B.) but to the participants of the study, including myself. Although we conducted this research together, the second author (Ö.B.) is not a participant who provided data for the research, but the author who made it possible to write the research in its current form by supervising the research process and providing the necessary guidance and corrections.

Design

Heuristic inquiry, whose name derives from the Greek word heuriskein (to find, to discover), is a design in which the researcher explores their own experiences of a phenomenon together with the participants (co-researchers) in a flexible research framework and attempts to discover the essence of these experiences together (Sultan, 2018). The special feature of this research design developed by Clark Moustakas is that it is not possible for the researcher to completely exclude themselves from the topic under investigation. Researchers cannot pretend that they are not part of what they are researching (Sultan, 2020), but they can position themselves within the research by clearly defining their role (Moustakas, 1990).

Beginning with an inner quest for discovery, an intense thirst for knowledge, and a desire to investigate a problem that the researcher has experienced, heuristic inquiry is the process of discovering the truth about the phenomenon that is the subject of research by combining the experiences of others with the researcher's own experiences (Moustakas, 1990). There is not just one reality. There are several realities. The goal of the heuristic researcher is to uncover the reality and essence of the phenomenon from the perspective of each member of the research team (Sultan, 2018). Heuristic research is a research process in which the researcher lives with the research question at every stage of the process (Hiles, 2001) and engages fully with the phenomenon being researched by keeping their senses and intuitions open and ready to learn at all times (Moustakas, 1990). It requires co-researchers (in this design, participants are referred to as co-researchers) to share knowledge with others and the world in a warm, non-judgmental, empathic, and authentic interaction.

Heuristic research is a design developed based on phenomenology. They differ in that a phenomenologist suspends all their values, opinions, feelings, and assumptions about the subject during the research process, which is called "epoche," whereas a heuristic researcher embraces their own experiences without isolating themselves from the research. This should not lead to the misunderstanding that heuristic research is weak in terms of the objectivity of the researcher. Heuristic researchers extend the boundaries of their transparency when trying to understand the experiences, knowledge, thoughts, and feelings of their co-researchers, and they do not privilege their own experiences over those of others (Sultan, 2018).

Heuristic research begins with the discovery of a problem, the so-called initial engagement phase, in which the researcher feels interest and the desire to uncover the underlying meanings. This encounter is followed by the immersion phase, in which the research question haunts the researcher every moment of the day, and almost everything relevant becomes data or information that can help the researcher. The phase in which knowledge, which expands over time, is distilled and intuition gradually clarifies understandings is called

incubation. This is followed by the illumination phase, in which experiences are thoroughly understood and essences and themes are discovered. The research is concluded with explication, i.e., the elucidation and the complete and detailed description of what has been aroused in consciousness, and finally with creative synthesis, which is the reporting phase (Moustakas, 1990). In all these six phases, the researcher can sometimes have the feeling that he or she is getting lost in the process and that he or she will never be enlightened. At such moments, it makes sense to take a step back, take a break, and let their thoughts steep (Sultan, 2018).

Heuristic research does not follow a linear process; it has a cyclical structure, which Sultan (2018) likens to a labyrinth. During the time we spend in this labyrinth, during the six phases of research mentioned above, we need some methods to get to the result. These are self-dialog, the lead author's reflection on their relationship to the phenomenon; tacit knowing, the knowledge he or she uses to bring together the different dimensions of research; indwelling, turning inward to gain insight, looking at one aspect of the experience with intense attention and concentration; focusing, the researcher's constant reflection on the experience to see something as it is and to maintain insight and awareness; internal frame of reference, intuition and understanding of the experience from another's perspective (Moustakas, 1990). Intuition is important for the researcher to develop a deeper understanding by weaving together both their own experiences and those of co-researchers. It is also valuable for knowledge that is not verbalized but revealed through symbols, allusions, sayings, and images that are perceived through the senses. Intuition makes it possible to see things as a whole (Sultan, 2018).

I, the lead author (A.Ö), am a twenty-three-year experienced teacher who could not realize her ideal teaching practice, and the second author (Ö.B.) is a faculty member who has trained many teachers. We both knew from our conversations with teachers that there were others who could not realize their ideal teaching practice for various reasons. Since I, have personally experienced the phenomenon that is the subject of the research, we used my own experiences as data for the research, which is one of the characteristics of heuristic design.

Participants in the Study

A prerequisite for the heuristic research design is that the researcher and co-researchers are people who personally experience the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1990). A participant group of 10-15 people is sufficient for heuristic research (Sultan, 2018). To diversify the co-researchers' experiences of the phenomenon we focused on in our research as much as possible, we used maximum variation sampling by selecting each co-researcher from a different teaching field by considering gender balance. In addition, we thought that a teacher can clarify the experience of not being able to realize the ideal teaching in their mind by gaining professional experience in their profession. Therefore, we preferred to interview teachers with at least five years of teaching experience in their teaching field by including the practice of criterion sampling. Thus, the study group consisted of 10 teachers, 5 female, and 5 males, each from a different teaching field, who volunteered to participate in the study, and a total of 11 teachers, including me (A.Ö.), all of whom believe that they cannot realize their

ideal teaching. As a delimitation, we would like to note that we did not include teachers from schools at other educational levels such as elementary or high schools, as well as private middle schools and Imam Hatip middle schools, because we had to conduct the study with participants working under similar conditions to the school (public middle school) where I worked according to the research design. All participants were from a different teaching field, except for English, in which I was involved. Table 1 shows the distribution of co-researchers on the dimensions of variation.

Table 1

An Overview of the Distribution of Co-researchers on the Dimensions of Variation

Teaching Field	Seniority	Gender
English	25	English
Turkish	16	Turkish
Social Studies	28	Social Studies
Mathematics	9	Mathematics
Science	26	Science
Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge	10	Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge
Music	17	Music
Physical Education	23	Physical Education
Information Technologies	20	Information Technologies
Visual Arts	18	Visual Arts
English (A.Ö.)	23	English (A.Ö.)

Data Collection

I collected the data for this study by conducting semi-structured interviews consisting of open-ended questions that allowed co-researchers to provide detailed descriptions. I started the interviews after obtaining permission from the Ethics Committee of Necmettin Erbakan University and Konya Provincial Directorate of National Education and completed the interviews in May and June 2023. Based on the research partners' preferences, I conducted nine interviews online via the Zoom platform and one in-person interview at the school where the research partner worked. I took notes during the interviews. In addition, as a participating teacher, I wrote down my thoughts to clarify them. Before the interviews, I sent consent forms and interview questions to the participants so that they could clarify

their thoughts before the interview. I recorded all interviews with the permission of the co-researchers and then transcribed them using the audio file transcription function in the online Word program Microsoft 365.

Data Analysis

I conducted the data analysis based on the analytical approach of Moustakas (1990) and used MAXQDA 2022 software for qualitative data analysis. I began the analysis with a detailed and repeated reading of the data set, which consisted of transcripts and notes that I had taken during the interviews and sorted them so that each participant's story became visible. This reading crystallized themes that emerged from the significant statements and perceptions of the participants. I finished writing the findings section after creating individual portraits of the co-researchers. After this phase, the second author (Ö.B.) checked my analysis by reading the coded sections, and so, as a validity measure, we conducted peer debriefing. As a further validity measure, we conducted member checking by sending our findings to each of our co-researchers so that they could assess whether our conclusions about their perceptions and understandings were accurate, indicating that they could make changes if necessary. None of our participants requested changes, confirming the accuracy of our analysis.

Findings

When we examined our research partners' experiences of not being able to realize their ideal teaching, we found that some of the experiences that shaped their perceptions caused teachers to feel frustrated, others reduced their motivation, and the common perception that emerged from all these experiences was the feeling of helplessness.

I Feel Blocked

Our first experience of this theme is the overcrowded classrooms in which we teach. Overcrowded classrooms interfere with the content of the lesson by preventing us from doing activities that require students to change their seating arrangements or that require open space. In addition, we do not have enough time to give each student an equal opportunity to participate in class.

> In other words, I must answer the students' questions about math. If they get stuck at any point, I should help them one-on-one. There shouldn't be a student who doesn't understand something, but I have problems here because the classes are too full. There are teaching methods that I would like to use, but the environment doesn't allow it. […] The environment is not good. The light is insufficient, and the ventilation is inadequate. (Mathematics/Female)

The high number of students in schools means that more classrooms are needed. Due to the high number of students, all suitable rooms are converted into classrooms, which has a negative impact co-researchers who need special art studios or classrooms for their subjects.

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> Most of the schools I've worked in didn't have an art studio, and this school doesn't either. I mean, the school administration says there's no space, and they are right; if there was space, they'd make a classroom out of it. The class size has gone up to fifty. Not having a painting studio is a big disadvantage because the child can't find a free environment in the classroom. It's difficult to work at the desk, painting is difficult in terms of cleanliness and order, the child spills, and the classroom gets dirty. If there was a painting studio, there would be a sink. (Visual arts/Male)

The experiences of some co-researchers show that economic conditions are another obstacle to the realization of their ideal teaching. The teachers stated that there are insufficient funds to purchase the materials needed in the school and to replace broken or missing materials on a regular basis and that this situation affects the content of the lessons. In addition, due to the low purchasing power of parents, teachers do not buy the materials they consider necessary and even avoid giving homework.

> Financial power is also effective in our classes. Some students don't have a computer at home. For example, I've problems with homework. Some children have a phone at home but no computer. […] I felt guilty and thought about not giving homework because those who wanted to do homework but couldn't were upset. That's why I don't give homework anymore, but the most important thing in our field is practicing. (Information technologies/Female)

In addition to the fact that physical conditions in schools make it difficult for us to realize our ideal teaching, we see other factors, such as high school entrance exam and exam-oriented educational policies, as obstacles. The expectations of school administrators and parents to teach in such a way that students prepare better for the exams and achieve high scores in the exams make us feel pressured. Although we are not satisfied with this situation, it is obvious that we cannot ignore the expectations of parents and school administrators.

> For example, I'd like to teach idioms and proverbs with a charades game, or I'd like to teach synonyms, homonyms, and homophones with a game. I've already done that, but I've gotten reactions from parents saying, "You didn't teach a lesson today. You played a game." Both parents and students think that this isn't the right way to prepare for exams. (Turkish/Male)

The restrictive attitudes and behaviors of school administrators regarding instruction are another obstacle cited by some co-researchers. For example, when the school administration hinders or even prohibits teaching outside the classroom, teachers feel restricted and hindered.

> Speed is one of our topics. I took the children to the schoolyard, had them run a certain distance one after the other, and calculated their speed. They were happy when they saw their speed. From then on, we would move on to calculating the speed of cars. I got a warning from the administration. They said, "What are you doing in the yard? Is this a physical education class?" For example, if there's an eclipse, they don't like it when we take the students outside either. (Science/Female)

I Lose Motivation

While it is not possible to completely remove the obstacles that stand in the way of realizing our ideal teaching, it takes motivation to look for solutions, to not give up, to explain to those involved in the teaching process what we are trying to do, and to be willing to move forward, even if only a little. After analysis of the data, we (A.Ö and Ö.B.) concluded that teachers'

relationships with students, parents, school administrators, and colleagues had an impact on their motivation. Students' unwillingness to learn is the most difficult and demotivating factor for the teachers involved in the study.

> The child finds it unnecessary to learn English. He thinks he doesn't need it. He hasn't built his life on it; he doesn't see the necessity. Especially in low-performing classes, I ask myself why I make such an effort. They don't know what it means to study or learn. They don't make the slightest effort. That demotivates me so much. (English/Female)

Another point that has a negative impact on our motivation is the attitude of parents towards the teaching process. We complain that parents do not support us enough in their children's academic processes and do not take our professional opinions into account.

> The parents' attitude lowers my motivation. The parents who are supposed to look after their children are causing us problems. Her child hasn't done her homework, she calls me in the middle of the night and says the homework is too much. They don't come to talk about their child's progress, but they are always ready to cause problems. (Mathematics/ Female)

In addition, parents' endless demands and attempts to intervene in lessons can be frustrating for us. For example, we often encountered parents who demanded changes in seating arrangements because their children had problems with every desk mate they sat with, who were irritable and threatening because their children were not being cherished, and who interfered with the materials to be used in class. We (A.Ö. and Ö.B.) have seen that this situation sometimes exhausts teachers' patience and makes our (A.Ö. and co-researchers) lose motivation.

> On April 23, a parent lodged a complaint with CİMER [Presidency's Communication Center in Türkiye] about the song I was teaching. It was "Sanki Her Tarafta Var Bir Düğün". You know it's a very well-known children's song thought in schools since our childhood. That parent was unhappy with the words in the song about the expulsion of the sultan after the establishment of the republic. This complaint was made solely because of his own political views. I didn't do anything wrong. Many parents complain about teachers at the school with unfounded accusations. It's demotivating. (Music/Male)

The fact that the school administration does not provide sufficient support also reduces our motivation to make efforts to realize our ideal teaching.

> I told the school principal that we had come third in the province. I said, "We've made it to the Turkey final, can we use the hall more?" He said, "No need, you didn't come first." Is it easy to be one of the thirty-two best in Turkey? Your success doesn't matter to him. He only cares about academic success. (Physical Education/Male)

It turns out that the judgmental and critical attitude of the colleagues with whom we work also reduces our motivation.

> If you do something different, something special, you fall out of the system in the eyes of your fellow teachers. If you try something new, it's like committing a crime. They immediately say: "What's the point? We'll see you in a few years." (Turkish/Male)

In addition, the perception of not being financially self-sufficient, not being seen as such by others, not receiving enough financial reward for our efforts and not being able to participate

enough in social and cultural activities outside of our work life, which we believe will improve ourselves and become better role models for our students, also has a negative impact on our motivation.

> Teachers should be able to go to the theater, to the cinema, or a concert. They should be able to take vacations to stay motivated. They should be able to attend courses to improve themselves, but our salaries are not enough. I haven't been going to these courses for years. We barely cover our compulsory expenses. (Mathematics/Female)

I am in Despair

We (A.Ö. and Ö.B.) have seen that the physical conditions that co-researchers cannot change, the limited economic opportunities, and some chronic problems resulting from the functioning of the school system leave teachers with a very narrow margin of maneuver. We (A.Ö. and co-researchers) do not feel free and are trapped in a monotonous and uncreative work routine. In the words of one research partner, the ongoing "fabricated education" makes it difficult for us to bring creativity to our work, reduces the meaning we attach to our work, and leaves us dissatisfied. The factors that cause our motivation to decline keep us from trying harder and looking for other solutions to realize our ideal teaching. In the picture that emerges from our experiences, the common meaning of not being able to realize our ideal teaching is helplessness. The despair is underlined by the fact that we know that we cannot do anything on our own under all these conditions, feeling powerless, thinking that our hands are tied, and believing that we are not free.

Among the above reasons for the formation of thoughts and beliefs that reinforce the perception of helplessness, the one most emphasized by the co-researchers was the high school entrance examination awaiting their students. Both the existence of this examination and the practice examinations that regularly take place in schools lead to an examination-oriented understanding of education in schools and influence teaching practice in this direction. We, the teachers, are also expected to teach in such a way that our students can achieve high scores in examinations. This situation forces us to teach for the test, even if we do not want to or do not think it is appropriate. The fact that teachers whose students achieve high test scores are considered good teachers leads us to fulfill expectations. In addition to the expectations of school administrators and students' parents, the resulting competitive atmosphere can make us feel angry, unhappy, frustrated, and stressed.

> Your hands are tied, and you feel helpless. You don't want to be condemned to having only four choices, but you must. If you don't, you're a bad teacher, a bad teacher who does nothing. That's helplessness, I feel helpless. (Turkish/Male)

> I feel that I've not taught as well as I should have. I do tests and exams and the students do well. That's good, but there's still something missing. I feel that it has become a routine and that creates boredom in me, but I can't do anything about it. (Science/Female)

Out of despair that we could not realize our ideal teaching, we developed different attitudes. Some of us were not pessimistic despite the negativity we experienced in our working environment. However, it should not be understood that we were trying with all our might

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to realize our ideal teaching and overcome the difficulties we encountered. These co-researchers, including myself, seem to have accepted the obstacles to fulfilling our potential as teachers, but we are happy and content to do as much as we can, even if the number of our students who benefit and improve from our current performance is small. The fact that we have lowered our expectations prevents us from being constantly disappointed.

> I've lowered my expectations. There are things the children can't overcome, and there are things we in the system can't overcome. What can I do? I think if I can plant a seed here in a classroom, that's already a win. That's what I focus on so that my motivation doesn't wane too much. (English/Female)

Some of the co-researchers took a defensive stance. This was due to expectations, and the attitude of the school administration, but also because they were trying to avoid potential problems with the parents. A defensive attitude manifests itself in not being able to afford to give homework as the teacher sees fit, abandoning educational activities outside the classroom, ignoring undesirable student behavior by not warning them, assessing, and grading according to the high-grade expectations of the school administration and parents rather than as the teacher sees fit, and abandoning efforts to improve instruction.

> We can do great things. We can go to great places, but we have shackles on our feet. These shackles aren't exclusively due to external factors but also a little bit to ourselves. I can take them off if I want to, but if I ignore what's being said, that neighborhood pressure, those comments, I can break them, but I can't. That's my fault. (Turkish/Male)

Some of the co-researchers have expressed that they have lost some of their teaching skills due to the working conditions and exam-oriented school policies they face. In addition to all the factors that they perceive as obstacles and factors that cause their motivation to decrease, teachers say that some of their professional skills have atrophied due to the relatively low expectations of them in the work environment. These co-researchers explain that they are stunted in using different teaching methods and techniques and designing original course content, mainly due to the dominance of the examination-oriented teaching approach in schools.

> The activities I mentioned, debates, and drama activities, for example, that I did with my students, have also helped me move forward. But now, what I'm expected of and the path I am on is to be a good test specialist. I feel that my ability to think differently and my ability to create creative teaching environments have been weakened. (Turkish/Male)

While some of the co-researchers said they were deskilled professionally, others said they had acquired new skills. We (A.Ö. and Ö.B.) heard from co-researchers who were uncomfortable that they could not realize their ideal teaching at school, that they developed themselves in various subjects to do international project work, produced content for the digital material platform, and acquired new skills to be useful to their students outside their classroom practice. To achieve this, they learned English, took part in various training courses for project work, and learned how to use various computer programs to make better use of technology, in short, they improved themselves.

Those of us who had acquired new skills reported that although they initially felt they were losing their professional skills, they felt happier and more productive, and their confidence

was boosted by the work mentioned above. They felt happier when they were reaching a wider range of students, not just those in the classes they were teaching, and they felt happier when they were doing work that they believe will be useful to them in a way that they found meaningful.

Discussion

Our perception of teachers who are not able to realize our ideal teaching is that we feel frustrated, demotivated, and helpless. We found that we felt frustrated and helpless when we could not teach the way we wanted to because of the conditions in the school we worked in. We have found that our motivation wanes when we do not receive the necessary support from our colleagues and administrators in our professional lives, when our parents do not respect our professional abilities and interfere in our work, when they behave in a threatening way and, above all, when our students are not willing to learn. In our interviews, we realized that our work has become a monotonous, colorless routine because we cannot freely plan our teaching process due to the LGS exam, which is a high-stakes exam. However, we know that we cannot change anything by our own efforts, we consider ourselves powerless and feel that we are not free. We have concluded that this is driving us to despair.

We have concluded that the overcrowded classroom is one of the most important obstacles to realizing our ideal teaching. An overcrowded classroom is a common problem that causes difficulties in teaching practice (Deveci & Aykaç, 2018). Teachers cannot get to know their students better (Kara, 2020), and the time they can spend per student is very limited (Sabancı & Gök, 2015). The high number of students in the classroom causes concentration problems and reduces students' motivation to learn (Özmat & Senemoğlu, 2020). Cemaloğlu and Şahin (2007) found a significant correlation between the average number of students in classes taught by teachers and their level of emotional burnout. Overcrowded classrooms are more physically demanding, and teachers expend more energy in such classrooms and become emotionally exhausted. The fact that they are less able to deal with their students due to overcrowding desensitizes teachers over time, and they begin to see themselves as failures when they cannot achieve the desired efficiency. Our results are in line with those of the researchers mentioned above. The number of students in classes is a problem over which teachers have no control. We found that this situation, in which they are not involved in the decision-making process but have to deal with the consequences and the resulting problems, creates a feeling of frustration and helplessness among teachers.

We have seen that the high number of students in schools leads to a shortage of classrooms. Overcrowded classrooms lead to a need for classrooms. For this reason, we have heard from co-researchers that all suitable rooms in school buildings are being converted into classrooms and that music, painting studios, and IT classrooms are being closed due to the need. For us, the question of classrooms is an insoluble problem characterized by a sense of despair. The study by Deveci and Aykaç (2018) also shows that the lack of classrooms is one of the most important problems in education. The closure of art studios and IT classes due to the need for classrooms has a negative impact on education (Akbaba & Turhan, 2016).

This research is consistent with other research on the effect of the closure of music, painting and IT classes on teaching. The point that our research wants to emphasis is the effect of this situation on teachers' perceptions.

The lack of materials is one of the obstacles to the realization of our ideal teaching. The problems mentioned by the co-researchers are that the teaching materials that should be available in schools at all times cannot be provided due to the financial hardships of the school and that parents do not buy the necessary materials due to their economic circumstances or lack of interest. Insufficient, old, or unusable teaching materials and technical equipment disrupt teachers' work. This situation causes stress among teachers (Sabancı & Gök, 2015), and our findings are consistent with the results of this study.

We have concluded that the quality of our relationships with parents influences our motivation. Teachers' motivation is also negatively affected by parents' excessive involvement or lack of interest in their children's and teachers' education. Parents' excessive interference is manifested by their meddling in teachers' work, giving them advice, adopting an accusatory attitude towards teachers, and making special requests. Their indifference, on the other hand, is defined by their lack of interest in their children's educational process, their inability to teach their children responsibility, and their disregard for their children's expectations (Ünsal & Görücü, 2023). The results of Akıncı et al., (2015) are not consistent with our findings, as they show that excessive parental interest is not a challenging factor for teachers' work. The statements of the teachers who participated in the study by Sabancı and Gök (2015) revealed that parents were not sufficiently interested in the general needs and learning situations of their children and that healthy relationships could not be established between them and the teachers. In the above-mentioned study, it was found that parents can display biased, hurtful, and oppressive attitudes towards teachers. These results are consistent with the results of our study.

It is the wish of all those involved in education that students are admitted to schools that accept students with good examination results. If a large number of students achieve high scores and gain the right to enroll in these schools, the school, its administrators, and teachers are considered successful. To better prepare the students at the schools where we work, practice tests for the LGS (high school entrance examination) are held at the schools at regular intervals. These exams are like rehearsals for students, teachers, parents, and school administrators, reminding them of the existence of the LGS exam. This constant focus on testing leads teachers to reinforce curriculum subjects with tests during lessons. This is also the expectation of parents and school administrators. It is also evident from the narratives of the co-researchers that students have also become accustomed to this type of teaching and are skeptical and averse to any other practice. I have also heard from the teachers of these teaching fields that the students and their parents consider the lessons that are not included in the examinations as unimportant. One of the most important problems of the Turkish education system is the excessive focus on academic performance and an examination-oriented approach to education. Schools do not give enough importance to activities that promote students in social, sporting, and cultural areas (Kara, 2020). Exam results have almost become the ultimate goal of education. School administrators and parents hold

teachers directly or indirectly responsible for students' exam results. Therefore, teachers focus on exam content and exam-oriented teaching practices instead of spending time on teaching knowledge and skills that they consider necessary and useful for their students, but which fall outside the scope of the exam (Wong, 2006). School administrators pressure teachers to get students to perform well on centralized exams (Abrams, 2004). Although we do not think it is right to emphasize test-based instructional practices, we feel safer that way. Because we do not have enough autonomy in our teaching practice, we feel that our hands are tied.

The negative effects of high-stakes tests on the instructional process are that high-stakes tests limit teachers' instructional creativity, cause them to spend more time preparing for exams, and begin to emphasize breadth rather than depth of instruction (Clarke et al., 2003). The widespread exam-oriented approach in education causes teachers to feel pressured (Acar & Buldur, 2021), and teachers teach by emphasizing exam subjects and exam techniques (Çetin & Ünsal, 2019). Teachers must work within the curriculum set by the central administration and use a limited range of instructional materials set by the administration. This type of accountability deprives teachers of the creativity and flexibility they need to do their jobs better, leading to demotivation (Ingersoll, 2007). High-stakes testing does not encourage teachers to use new teaching methods but rather puts pressure on them, which stifles their creativity and reduces the quality of instruction (Au, 2010). Teachers apply the knowledge, values, and attitudes emphasized in the curriculum, which is particularly important for examinations, without questioning them or developing alternatives (Pratte & Rury, 1988). In such an environment, teachers have become practitioners alienated from their work (Giroux, 2010).

This situation, which is referred to in the literature as deskilling, was first addressed by Apple (1982). Deskilling is a situation in which employees who lose control of their own work processes atrophy over the years and gradually lose some of their skills. Over time, employees whose ability to grasp the entire work process is taken over by management perform simple tasks over and over again. Some of the partners in this study reported that some of their professional skills atrophied as they taught in a repetitive routine. For example, one science teacher said that he was no longer able to set up and run a laboratory from scratch but could only conduct experiments with simple materials.

The other part of our research partners acquired new skills due to the problems they faced in their professional lives, their working conditions, and some of their experiences. For example, one social studies teacher learned to use new computer programs to create content for the Ministry of National Education's Education Information Network (EBA) in order to reach and encourage more students and continuously improve his skills in this area. This so-called reskilling is, resulting in many different classes of skills. This means that employees develop new specializations and learn new skills while performing their tasks (Apple, 1982). Deskilling and reskilling are situations that occur together (Gitlin, 2001). Our research findings confirm this statement.

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Research Article

Implications

Overcrowded classrooms prevent teachers from devoting equal and sufficient time to their students and make it difficult for them to respond to students' individual learning needs. It has also been observed that overcrowded classrooms affect the teaching methods used by teachers. As there is not enough space in the classrooms, teachers avoid interactive, fun activities and group work and tend to lecture. Reducing the number of students per classroom can, therefore, bring good results.

The statements of some co-researchers indicate that the necessary equipment is not available, especially in the science laboratories and IT rooms, and that worn or broken materials and equipment are not replaced. To ensure better quality educational conditions, more funding should be provided for the material needs of education, and it should be ensured that teaching materials are fully and continuously available in schools.

One of the factors that shape parents' expectations of schools and their relationships with teachers is the high school entrance exam. The existence of this exam has a significant impact not only on the relationship between parents and schools but also on secondary education as a whole. It shapes the content and quality of teaching and puts a certain amount of pressure on teachers and students. We understand that parents' desire for their children to attend a high school that admits students with high test scores puts pressure on teachers of the subjects that are included in the exams, while the subjects that are not included in the exams are relegated to the background and considered unimportant. This is an obstacle to the holistic development of students. Furthermore, the inequality created by the creation of quality gaps between schools and the resulting disadvantage for students with insufficient financial means to access quality education contradicts the principle of equality in education. The current system should be revised, and a solution found where all students can receive a quality education under equal conditions in a fair system where students are not segregated.

What the co-researchers see as problematic and express their dissatisfaction about is the students' lack of motivation to learn. Although the co-researchers are experienced teachers, it was difficult for them to motivate the students sufficiently to achieve their learning goals. This situation also has a negative impact on their motivation and becomes a vicious circle. This vicious circle can be broken by providing teachers with well-planned motivational training to arouse students' curiosity and encourage them to ask questions, research, and learn. Regardless of their service seniority, providing teachers with qualified in-service trainings with scientific content on developing motivation in students will be useful in overcoming this problem.

The expectations of parents and school administrators for student success, the measurement of that success through test scores, and the impact of expectations for success on the instructional process are multidimensional issues. What needs to be clarified, however, is how success is perceived. A phenomenographic study of how many different ways success is understood by teachers, parents, school administrators, and students could be helpful in closing the knowledge gap in this area.

Research Article

The issue of deskilling and reskilling is worthy of further investigation. In the research data, we found that under the current conditions, teachers lose some of their professional skills while acquiring new ones. Under the conditions of the Turkish education system, it can be investigated which skills of teachers are most atrophied and which skills they gain. The results will provide data for planning more qualified and interesting in-service training.

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