

A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON IDENTIFYING PROBLEMS IN NORTH CYPRUS EDUCATION SYSTEM

Abstract: The purpose of this study is to determine the problems experienced in the North Cyprus education system, to evaluate them in the context of the opinions of the stakeholders (teachers, principals, assistant principals), and to determine the causes and possible solutions to these problems. Qualitative Research Method was utilized in this study. Maximum variation sampling method was used to determine the participants. The study group consisted of 37 people (20 teachers, 5 principals and 12 principal assistants) working in secondary schools located in Nicosia, North Cyprus. Semi-structured interview schedules were used as data collection tools. The findings revealed student-based, education-based and teacher-based problems in the education system. Regarding the student-based problems the participants stated that foreign students, whose number has increased in recent years, do not speak Turkish; also, the classes are crowded. For the education and teaching-related problems, teachers stated that they did not have enough time to cover the curriculum and there were insufficient examples in the textbooks. Regarding the teacher-based problems, the lack of in-service trainings, the insufficient number of the counsellors and special education teachers were stated. Participants emphasized the importance of planning, organizing, ordering and supervision so that problems would not arise.

Keywords: Education System, Educational Problems, Student, Teacher, Administrators

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INTRODUCTION

Today, the goal of all countries is to successfully realize quality in education in their own countries. Achieving quality education is among the goals of the North Cyprus Ministry of Education (MoNE), and this can only be possible by improving the education system. The current study was carried out in order to determine the flaws in the education system and to make suggestions. In addition, it has been thought that these and similar studies can contribute to the MoNE and universities in the North Cyprus in their future education projects. Many definitions of education have been made in the literature. In the most general sense, education is the process of raising people for certain purposes and must be of certain quality to meet standards, follow new innovations and technologies. (Fidan, 1996; Thangeda, Baratiseng and Mompati, 2016). Education is the totality of the processes in which an individual develops his / her skills, attitudes and other positive behaviours in the society they live in (Tezcan, 1992, 3). Education is the process of gaining knowledge, skills, habits and attitudes to the individual (Önder, 1992, 20). Education is important for all children, but even more so for children with disabilities, whose social and

economic opportunities may be limited. Avon and Loprest (2012) assessed how well the nation's education system is serving students with disabilities. (Avon & Loprest, 2012) From an individual point of view, education is the process of changing the behaviour, knowledge, ability and motivation of the staff in order to increase the success of reaching the goals. Education is a management tool that aims to improve the current success of the organization in terms of efficiency and productivity (Yüksel, 1990). Every society experiences the contradiction between the desire to renew the educational system and the tendency to maintain it as it is. The desire to renew the system arises from the pressure of contemporary developments; The tendency to protect the existing is the result of the desire to provide continuity and to give trust. As it is very difficult to resolve this contradiction, education systems change very slowly, although societies change rapidly. Efforts to innovate education often remain in reform projects, plans, not implemented. Contemporary educational discourses are constantly repeated in the literature, but they do not enter school and do not reflect on the life of the student (Onur, 1994).

Figure 1. The General Structure of the Cyprus Turkish Education System

Higher Education	Age	Doctoral Degree					Special Education
		Master's Degree					
Secondary Education	18-19	Bachelor's Degree					
	17-18	Fine Arts High School	Colleges	Multi-program Modern High Schools	Modern Vocational Technical High Schools	Apprenticeship Education	
	16-17	Anatolia High School					
	15-16						
Compulsory Basic Education	14-15	Basic Education Middle School Phase					
	13-14						
	12-13						
	11-12						
	10-11	Basic Education Primary School Phase					
	9-10						
	8-9						
	7-8						
	6-7	Pre-School class					
	5-6						
4-5	Play Class						
		Basic Education Pre-School Phase					

Source: (Department of Educational Planning and Program Development, 2005) (Yaratan & Kasapoğlu, 2012)

The number of researches on education problems in North Cyprus is limited. Günsel (1994) stated that the society in North Cyprus is in a constant state of change and has experienced wars. Therefore, education system was adversely affected. The second survey related to this subject is the Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV, 2012) report. According to the report, the problems of the North Cyprus education system are stated as follows: insufficient data on the immigrant children's attendance at school, insufficient use of information and communication technologies in management services and in the classroom, insufficient facilities such as libraries and laboratories in their institutions, employment of school principals and teachers by the Public Service Commission, and very little authority in terms of management and financing of primary and secondary schools.

Alibaba, Erden & Ozer (2013) in their study had the aim of verifying the proposed professional teaching standards for teacher development in North Cyprus using Rasch model analysis. In another study, Karahanoğlu (2015) found out that the problems of the North Cyprus education system arouse from school administrators, teachers, parents and students. Problems with school administrators addressed issues such as not improving oneself, not being open to innovations, not being able to use information and communication technologies effectively, and not having communication skills. Also, problems with teachers are issues such as the choice of the profession due to economic concerns, not taking into account the developmental characteristics of students, not being able to improve oneself, experiencing burnout, having communication problems with parents. In the problems related to students, he also addressed the issues of students' lack of motivation, absenteeism of students, negative effects of students by their families and purposelessness. Apart from these, he also stated the problems caused by parents.

In another study, Erden (2014) mentioned the pre-service teachers' qualifications of computer use in

education, and the evaluation of the teacher candidate education programs. Erden (2016) emphasized the importance of determining the development process, dimensions of vocational education standards and draft vocational education standards as the first step to propose a national framework for vocational education standards in North Cyprus.

Erden & Erden (2019), sought the opinions of administrators and teachers working in primary, secondary, general high schools and vocational schools on the problems of the North Cyprus education system. In these studies, private tutoring by teachers, teacher attitudes, low motivation, loss of reputation of the profession, unnecessary reporting, lack of special education and counselling services in primary schools, lack of teachers in schools, inability of teachers to apply contemporary teaching methods, teachers not using tools and equipments in schools.

Karahanoğlu (2015) also mentioned the problems caused by student parents in the North Cyprus education system. It has been observed that problems such as parents 'not taking care of children adequately, not being open to communication and not spending quality time with their children, being far away from cooperating with teachers, and parents' intervention in the teacher's work more than necessary were mentioned.

The problem statement of the study is "What are the problems of the North Cyprus secondary education level from the perspective of the stakeholders? And what suggestions could be made to improve the education system?" In this study, the problems in the North Cyprus secondary school level in education system were examined under the three main themes, which emerged from the findings.

These are:

- Student-based
- Education and teaching-based
- Teacher-based

METHOD

RESEARCH MODEL

The study is a qualitative study. In qualitative research studies, the aim is not to generalize, but to obtain a holistic picture. Qualitative research aims to examine the subject matter in depth and detail. (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005)

The study group consists of 37 people. It was conducted in 5 secondary schools in Nicosia region affiliated to the General Secondary Education Department, MoNE. These forms were sent to 5 principals and 12 assistant principals and 20 teachers in schools.

Semi-structured interview schedules were used as data collection tools. The interview questions were sent to the participants by e-mail and the answers were taken back with the same method. The results obtained from the participants were analysed by grouping them under certain headings in the Excel program. (Table 5. and Table 6.)

In this technique, the researchers prepared the interview schedules that included the questions planned to be asked beforehand. While preparing the interview schedules used in the study, in order to establish a more effective and efficient communication with the interviewees, a special care was taken to ensure that the questions were as clear as possible, easy to understand, to provide explanations and detailed answers, and not to be multidimensional in order not to create an unnecessary question burden on the interviewee (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005).

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The interviews were held in Nicosia, between September and January in the 2019-2020 Academic Year. The opinions of 20 teachers, 12 Assistant Principals and 5 Principals from different schools were sought. For this purpose, the interview schedule that contained 7 questions under 3 headings, was sent to the relevant participants by mail and the answers were also received by mail. A total of 50 pages of data were obtained from the participants in the study. The study is a qualitative study. The "descriptive analysis method was used to analyse the data collected in the study. The data obtained according

to this approach were summarized according to the predetermined themes. The data were analyzed considering the questions used in the interviews and presented in the study group section. The identified problems were presented within the framework of sub-problems (themes).

The maximum variation sampling method from purposeful sampling was used to determine the participants from different gender, age, seniority, subject, education level etc. The purpose of maximum variation sampling is to create a relatively small sample and to maximize the diversity of participants who may be a party to the problem studied in this sample (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). In this study, demographic information was obtained from the participants as shown in Table 1., Table 2., Table 3. and Table 4. in the study group section.

The problems listed by the stakeholders regarding the education system were analysed descriptively. During the analysis process of the data obtained from the study, the responses of the participants to the interview questions were grouped by the researchers under some certain titles and sub-themes. The purpose of this kind of analysis was to present the findings to the reader in an organized and interpreted form (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005).

VALIDITY

The collected data were transcribed in detail and the results were explained in a clear and understandable way. The answers by the interviewed stakeholders were analysed by grouping them under certain headings in the Excel program. Research findings are consistent and meaningful. The emerging concepts are of a nature to form a whole.

The researchers questioned themselves and their research processes with a critical eye; checked whether the findings and the results of these findings reflected the reality. In order to generalize the research results to similar environments, the researcher informed the reader in detail about all the stages of the research. The reader may not be able to generalize directly to his / her environment based on research results; however, s/he can draw some lessons or experiences that may apply to

her/his environment. (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). The study also provides necessary explanations for the findings to be tested in other studies.

In the study, "semi-structured interview" technique was used as data collection method. Interview questions were sent to 37 participants from different schools in the Nicosia region. The data were transcribed in detail and transferred to the Excel program. The validity check was also made by explaining how the results were reached in a clear and understandable way.

RELIABILITY

For reliability, the data were kept with an Excel program so that the data could be viewed by anyone. The reliability of the study was calculated using the formula above (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

$$\text{"Reliability} = \frac{\text{Agreement}}{\text{Agreement} + \text{Disagreement}} \times 100\text{"}$$

Some of the questions in the interview form were shown in Table 5. in the findings section. The interview schedule prepared by the researchers was first shown to four field experts, one of whom was curriculum development, one was education management, one was Turkish Language and one was assessment and evaluation. The researchers avoided directing the interviewed participants and tried to make the teachers speak in line with the subject and purpose of the study. The individuals who were the data sources in the research were clearly defined so that other researchers doing similar research can take these definitions into account when creating samples. The data were stored so that they could be reviewed by others (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005).

Later, the researchers reached a consensus by discussing the opinions they determined under different themes. The reliability of the study was calculated using the formula "Reliability = Agreement / (Agreement + Disagreement) x 100" (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The reliability rate among researchers was found to be 86%. The responses given by the participants were grouped under certain headings and descriptive statistical frequency (n) and percentage (p) tables and values

were used for the analysis. All tables were shown in the findings section (Table 5. and Table 6.).

STUDY GROUP

The opinions of 37 participants from different five schools in Nicosia were sought. For this purpose, interview schedules including 7 questions collected under 3 headings were prepared. A section of the questions in the interview schedule was shown in Table 5. According to the answers given by the participants to the interview questions, the findings were grouped under 3 main themes by the researchers. In addition, all demographic information of the participants in the interview form was shown in Table 1. Table 2., Table 3. and Table 4. in the study group section. Table 1. Distribution of the Participants by Age

Gender	Age	Frequency (n)	Percentage (p)
Female	< 40	9	24.32
	> 40	11	29.73
Male	< 40	8	21.62
	> 40	9	24.33
Total		37	100

When Table 1. was examined, it was seen that the majority of 37 people who participated in the interview were women and over 40 years old (n = 11; p = 30%). In the data obtained from the interviews, it was observed that men over 40 years old were in the minority (n = 9; p = 24%). Table 5 shows that women over the age of 40 participated in-service training more than the other woman participants.

Table 2. Distribution of the Participants by Years of Seniority

Gender	Year of Seniority	Frequency (n)	Percentage (p)
Female	< 12	9	24.32
	> 12	11	29.73
Male	< 12	10	27.03
	> 12	7	18.92
Total		37	100

When Table 2 was examined, it was seen that among 37 people who participated in the interview, there were more women with a year of seniority over 12 years (n = 11; p = 30%). In the

data obtained from the interviews, it was observed that men with a seniority of over 12 years were in the minority (n = 7; p = 19%). When we associated this table with the data in Table 5 and Table 4, it was seen that women with a seniority year of over 12 years were Guidance and Psychological counseling and English teachers, and they wanted more in-service training in their fields.

Table 3. Distribution of the Participants by their Education Level

Gender	Education Level	Frequency (n)	Percentage (p)
Female	Degree	12	32.43

	Master Degree	6	16.21
	PhD	3	8.11
Male	Degree	10	27.03
	Master Degree	4	10.81
	PhD	2	5.41
Total		37	100

When Table 3 was examined, it was seen that among 37 people who participated in the interview, the education level of women was higher than that of men. It could be said that female teachers spent more effort to increase their education level than male teachers.

Table 4. Distribution of the Participants by their Subjects

Teacher Subject	Frequency (n)	Percentage (p)
Information & Communication Technology	3	15
Guidance & Psychological Counselling	5	25
Science & Technology	2	10
Maths	3	15
English	5	25
Turkish	2	10
Total	20	100

When Table 4. was examined, it was seen that Guidance and Psychological Counseling teachers out of 20 people who participated in the interview were more than the teachers from other subjects. (n = 5; p = 25%). The least participation in the study was from Turkish and Science Teachers. (n = 2; p = 10%)

FINDINGS AND COMMENTS

In this study, the researchers tried to determine the problems experienced in the North Cyprus education system through the answers given by the participants. The responses were grouped, divided into 4 main themes and interpreted.

STUDENT-RELATED PROBLEMS IN THE NORTH CYPRUS EDUCATION SYSTEM

In the responses as shown in Table 5, it can be seen that the biggest responsibility in solving student-related problems is in the hands of the Ministry of National Education. In addition, due to the large number of students, teachers cannot allocate sufficient time to students. Another answer given by the participants is that the Ministry should provide necessary trainings for foreign students and their families regarding language and school adaptation problems.

EDUCATION AND TEACHING RELATED PROBLEMS IN THE NORTH CYPRUS EDUCATION SYSTEM

The participants said that The Ministry of National Education has a duty in solving the problems arising from education and training as shown in Table 5. Ministry directors, inspectors and experts

in the Ministry of National Education were required to check the textbooks, curricula and in-service training. The alignment of the curriculum with the textbooks, examples and the deadlines determined for the completion of the topics should be reviewed. The MoNE should impose certain sanctions for teachers' participation in in-service training. School principals and supervisors can provide this.

PROBLEMS CAUSED BY TEACHERS IN THE NORTH CYPRUS EDUCATION SYSTEM

The participants with regard to the problems caused by teachers (Table 5) said that the teachers were behind the educational-personal progress. They cannot adequately follow the developments in vocational and education and training. Teachers do not take students' developmental characteristics and individual differences into account, and this negatively affects the success.

The participants added that the inspectors should supervise and evaluate the inspected works, make suggestions to make these studies more efficient, help the personnel in the institution through their work and professional development. In our country, the inspection is not carried out because there are still no inspectors in certain subjects. Most of the teachers have not been able to find solutions to problems related to their subjects for

years, as they still do not have supervisors. Teachers from some branches are burdened by the administration. These branches are especially Information and Communication Technologies, Music, History, Painting etc. Due to the insufficient number of counsellors and special education teachers and shorter meeting hours in some schools, these teachers are assigned as assistant principals by the school administrations. Therefore, these teachers devote less time to their students. Table 4 shows the number of participants according to their branches.

THE PROBLEM THAT NEEDS TO BE SOLVED FIRST IN THE NORTH CYPRUS EDUCATION SYSTEM

In the current study, we asked the participants which of the problems in the education system they would like to be solved first. Most of the participants said that in service training should be increased and be compulsory (Table 6).

Undoubtedly, the school is the institution that will be most and rapidly affected by the changes in the environment. The teacher can never remain indifferent to these changes. The teacher must renew himself/herself, attend the courses and, as a teacher, always be ahead of his students in terms of knowledge.

Table 5. Participants' Responses to the Interview Questions

	Interview Questions	Most Given Answers
1	How can you solve the problems that the foreign students face while adapting the school?	“Language and orientation courses should be provided to these students and their families by the ministry or school” (T11) “The MoNE must arrange to give language course for foreign students” (T13)
2.	What do you think about the examples given in textbooks? What can we do to overcome these problems?	“Examples are insufficient” (T9). “Ministry directors, inspectors and experts in the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) were required to check the textbooks, curricula regularly” (T8).
3.	What do you think about the duties that you are assigned by the school administration?	“The school administration gives many additional tasks each year especially to Information and Communication Technology teachers” (T2) “The school administration gave us many school works. It was obvious that most of the school works made by the computer teachers in all school. And we must also attend in-service training This was compulsory to us” (T1)

4.	What do you think about the in-service training opportunities?	<p>“In service training should be compulsory and exam should be held at the end of each training. For teacher to participate, in these trainings, MoNE should impose sanctions on every teacher.” (T6)</p> <p>“The ministry of education should warn and follow that the trainings that will provide in-service trainings should follow technology and plan their education according to developments.” (T5)</p>
5.	What can you say about the presence of counsellors and special education teachers in your school?	<p>“In some schools there are not enough counsellor and special education teacher.” (T3)</p> <p>“The problems are the school gives additional strikes due to the shortage of teaching hours. It's like assistant manager on assignment. Also we need more service training to improve ourselves” (T4).</p>

Table 6. Distribution of the Suggestions Given by the Participants

Suggestions	Frequency (n)	Percentage (p)
Increasing in service training	7	18.92
Mandatory in service training	6	16.22
Compliance of curriculum textbooks & course books	4	10.81
Increasing the quality of service training	4	10.81
Reduction of additional duties in some subjects	3	8.11
Turkish language course for foreign students	3	8.11
Increasing the number of counselling and special education teachers	3	8.11
Taking an exam at the end of in service training	3	8.11
Increasing the examples in textbooks	3	8.11
Increasing the number of inspectors	1	2.69
Total	37	100

When Table 6 was examined, it was seen that the most desired problem to be solved is inadequate in service training opportunities (n = 7; p = 18.92%). “In (MoNE) the number of in service training and the quality should be increased. “(T12). Some participants said that in-service training should be mandatory (n = 6; p = 16.22%). “In service training should be compulsory and exam should be held at the end of each training.” (T6). Participants suggested the harmonization of curriculum-textbooks-course hours and increasing the quality of in-service training (n = 4; p = 10.81%).

“Ministry directors, inspectors and experts in the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) were required to check the textbooks, curricula regularly.” (T8). Some participants suggested the reduction of additional tasks in some subjects, giving Turkish language courses to foreign students, increasing the number of counselling and special education teachers, increasing the examples in textbooks and having exams at the end of the in service trainings (n = 3; p = 8.11%). Also it was observed that the least desired solution was increasing the number of inspectors (n = 1; p = 2.69%).

CONCLUSION

Education systems with today's needs to transform into a structure that values every person in accordance with new social, political and cultural developments, new skills (Desjardins 2015), teaches ways and methods of accessing information, and observes equal opportunity (Chand and Karre, 2019). An intense effort is being made to reach quality education in North Cyprus. For this purpose, it is aimed to develop a model based on teaching to increase and disseminate the quality in education, disseminating the education programs based on innovation and research throughout the country, encouraging students to scientific research and entrepreneurship, establishing a quality assurance system in educational institutions, determining and disseminating quality standards, increasing the authorities and institutional capacities of educational institutions. In this study, which we conducted in order to share some important findings about the current state of the North Cyprus Education System and to make some suggestions for improvement, it has been revealed that these problems are student-oriented, education-based and teacher-oriented. These results can be summarized as follows:

According to the findings obtained from the interviews, it was seen that the biggest task in solving these problems caused by the students falls to the Ministry of National Education. In addition, teachers cannot allocate sufficient time for each student due to crowded classes.

- North Cyprus MoNE has the biggest share in solving the problems arising from education and training. Inspectors, ministry directors and experts in the relevant subjects are required to regularly check the relevant textbooks, curricula, annual lesson plans and in-service training. In our country, inspection is not carried out in certain subjects because there are still no inspectors. The teachers should definitely renew/update themselves and attend in-service training courses.
- When the education and training based problems are handled, the lesson hours shown in the annual plans and the practice in daily life are not the same. At the end of

the year, most subjects in the curriculum cannot be completed. The reason for this is the inconsistency between the lessons taught and the time allocated for the curriculum, and the textbooks.

- In our country, inspection is not carried out because there are still no inspectors in certain subjects. The needs in this area must be met urgently. In addition, teachers should definitely update themselves in line with the benefits of technology and go to in-service courses.
- The participants stated teacher-related problems that teachers cannot take students' developmental characteristics and individual differences into account and this negatively affects the success. There are not enough counsellors and special education teachers in every school. Moreover, the fact that the school administration sometimes gives additional tasks to the teachers in this subject due to the low number of courses (such as Assistant Manager of Assignment) limits their time and sometimes they cannot provide the students with the necessary attention and care. These need to be checked by the ministry.

SUGGESTIONS

Depending on the results of the study and the suggestions made by the participants themselves, the following suggestion could be made.

- Foreign students and their families should be provided help in their adaptation to a new culture. They should be given a Turkish language course.
- Teachers should be allowed to improve themselves and their attendance should be checked by the North Cyprus Ministry of Education and necessary in-service training should be provided.
- Guidance and Information and Communication Technology teachers should not be assigned additional duties other than their academic responsibilities.
- All stakeholders have a role in solving the problems in the North Cyprus education system. For this purpose, the Ministry of National Education, administrators,

teachers, parents, students, teachers' unions and all other stakeholders should come together for common purposes and fulfil their duties.

- Educational programs should be reorganized, certain budgets should be allocated to schools to achieve their goals, and if necessary, the learning and teaching process in the entire education system should be radically changed.

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