


## Teaching in Neoliberal Times: Unraveling Teacher Voices at Basic High Schools in Türkiye<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

This paper seeks to contextualize the profound impact of neoliberal policies on the teaching profession. Employing an intrinsic case study design, this investigation delves into the intricate dynamics experienced by educators in five different Basic High Schools (BHSs) located in Ankara, Türkiye. A comprehensive understanding was gained through semi-structured interviews with 21 teachers and three school counselors at BHSs, supplemented by observations of various processes at the research sites. The qualitative data were content analyzed by coding meaningful segments, generating initial themes related to teachers' classroom and school practices and their engagement with the curriculum, as well as their perceptions of working conditions. After consulting two professors for feedback, the final coding identified two main themes: 'teacher responsibilities' and 'teachers' working conditions.' The study uncovers that the core of teacher responsibilities revolved around preparing students for university entrance examinations, emphasizing the cultivation of test-taking skills. Despite this primary objective, BHS teachers had to implement the national formal curricula, resulting in extended working hours and responsibility overload. Paradoxically, these educators find themselves in a predicament of being inadequately compensated and grappling with issues related to employment rights. In essence, the convergence of extensive workload, insufficient remuneration, and problems regarding employee rights cause the deskilling of teachers and hinders BHS teachers' ability to fulfill their vital roles as transformative and reflective educators.

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## Introduction

The ascendancy of neoliberal doctrines has wielded a profound and far-reaching impact on a global scale, shaping diverse socio-economic landscapes since the 1970s. This paradigm shift has engendered a metamorphosis in the fabric of public governance, predominantly manifesting through the commodification of public services. This transformation has precipitated the transference of erstwhile public prerogatives into the hands of profit-driven private entities, catalyzing a restructuring of traditional administrative frameworks.

The marketization of public services has become the linchpin of neoliberal agendas, a phenomenon where the once state-centric custodianship of essential services undergoes a reconfiguration into market-oriented models. This paradigmatic shift is not merely confined to a transfer of ownership; it is a systemic overhaul that transcends the public-private binary. The infusion of business-oriented methodologies into the public domain has resulted in a convergence of administrative practices, with public spheres assimilating the ethos of corporate efficiency and profit-driven calculus. This neoliberal renaissance, marked by a confluence of economic liberalization and the recalibration of state-citizen dynamics, has given rise to a multifaceted landscape where governance and market forces interlace intricately. By definition, neoliberalism is "a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (Harvey, 2005, p. 2).

According to Ball (2016), global neoliberal reforms comprise three fundamental components: market, management, and performance. The market element involves both internal and external privatization, driving the marketization of public sectors and generating complex effects across structural, relational, ethical, and discursive dimensions. Management entails integrating various market-driven processes to reshape organizational culture. Finally, performativity refers to a system utilizing judgments, comparisons, and displays to incentivize, regulate, and induce change through rewards and sanctions (Ball, 2003, p. 216). In this new mode of acculturation, a new language has been adopted to describe relationships and roles where "educational organizations are now 'peopled' by human resources which need to be managed; learning is re-rendered as a 'cost-effective policy outcomes'" (Ball, 2003, p. 218). Parents and students are positioned as consumers and teachers as the sellers of educational services by implementing one-size-fits-all curricular practices (Golden, 2017). Put differently, "creation of quasi-markets built on notions of school choice, the deregulation of the teaching profession, a shift away from democratic governance, competition for resources and production of educational outputs (e.g., high test scores)" are observed (Au, 2016, p. 41).

As an indicator of productivity, high-stakes tests have been used as accountability measures to legitimize the attack on public schools and teachers (Bhattacharyya et al., 2013; Schneider, 2017). Inherent to this notion, public schools are labeled as failing businesses whose success is arguably measured by student scores on high-stakes tests (Ravitch, 2013). Such an illusion caused classrooms haunted by ghosts, borrowing the term from Meighan (1981), and excluded autonomous teachers from classrooms (Au, 2011a). Furthermore, the re-interpretation of teaching and learning within the realm of neoliberal and conservative policies have also altered teaching as a profession. Teachers are attributed a subordinated role in which they transmit demanded skills of the marketplace (Giroux, 1994). This not only influences teachers' instructional decisions (e.g., devoting more time to the topics that are included in high-stakes tests) (e.g. Neumann, 2013) but also alters the development of teacher identity. In this regard, corporate reformers aim to marginalize "the teaching profession by replacing teachers with corporate experts who

are taking control of curriculum development and distribution, and privatizing student and teacher assessment via standardized tests.” (Hursh, 2017, p. 391).

Embedded in the backwash effect of high-stakes testing (Prodromou, 1995), teachers spend more time on subjects, content, and skills tested centrally (Diamond & Cooper, 2007; Smith & Rotenberg, 1991) and neglect other aspects of curriculum delivery (Shepard & Dougherty, 1991). Consequently, teachers are self-alienated by new quality mechanisms which prioritize measurable and improved performances over certain principles of education (i.e., neglecting children with special needs for the sake of increasing overall performance on external targets). Ball (2000) manifests that performativity and fabrications in the education economy bring about a kind of “schizophrenia” as “there is a ‘splitting’ between the teachers’ own judgments about ‘good practice’ and students’ ‘needs’ on the one hand and the rigors of performance on the other” (p. 8).

All these washback effects of teaching-to-test have caused deskilling of teachers (Apple & Teitelbaum, 1986; Au, 2011a; Hargreaves, 1992; Luke, 2004), a process that transforms teachers into industry workers; puts them in an economically disadvantaged position; increases their workload; and causes teachers to lose control over even the essential elements of teaching (Au, 2011b). Focusing on the way teachers are deskilled, Giroux (2010) stresses that teachers are now perceived as technicians whose classroom and school governance autonomy is replaced with teaching to the test by corporate reformers. Hargreaves’ (1992) critical analysis of the literature on teachers’ work is worth quoting here:

“...teachers’ work is portrayed as becoming more routinized and deskilled, more and more like the degraded work of manual workers and less and less like that of autonomous professionals trusted to exercise the power and expertise of discretionary judgment with the children. Teachers are depicted as being increasingly controlled by prescribed programs, mandated curricula, and step-by-step methods of instruction” (pp. 87–88).

As a corollary, teachers and teaching as a profession have been altered with the adaptation of neoliberal educational policies. Teachers are transformed into “flexible technicians” who have “little space for collective, professional, and systematic sense-making of pedagogical practice.” (Golden, 2017, p. 12). Put differently, under this understanding of “new professionalism”, teachers prioritize acquiring certain competencies and skills that are measured through student test scores rather than values and ethics (Ünal, 2005). Therefore, teachers should be emancipated from the roots of banking education model that perceive teaching as the transmission of knowledge while providing them with autonomy to inculcate critical consciousness among students (Freire, 2018).

## Teaching Profession in Türkiye

Education in Türkiye is provided by public and private education institutions, all of which are under the centralized control of the Ministry of National Education (MoNE). Three categories are identified to classify teachers who work at education institutions: public school teachers, private school teachers, and dershane<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Dershanes were private tutoring centers in which students and adults were prepared for the standardized exams in Türkiye. Starting from the early 1930s, these institutions functioned in the Turkish education system until the enforcement of a law amendment in 2014 that regulated the closure of dershanes and their transformation into private schools (Basic High Schools). Nevertheless, dershanes continue their activities with their new name, Private Teaching Courses (Özel Öğretim Kursu). However, different than dershanes, these centers are supposed to provide private tutoring for only one scientific groups (Turkish language and literature, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, history, geography, and philosophy scientific groups) determined by the Board of Education and Discipline.

teachers. To begin, the responsibilities and rights of public school teachers are regulated by Public Servants Law No. 657, Article 4A. Nevertheless, with a law amendment in 1978, contracted teachers<sup>3</sup> (4B) and substitute teachers were introduced as new forms of teacher employment for public schools. These forms lacked many of the employee rights that are critical to them, such as job security and retirement fund contributions.

Apart from public school teachers, some teachers work at private schools. Like public school teachers, private school teachers are also subjected to Public Servants Law No. 657. However, mainly the disciplinary actions of those teachers are regulated by this law; their conditions of employment are regulated by Private Education Institutions Law No. 5580. This duality causes conflicts in securing jobs and determining the working conditions of private school teachers. Put differently, leaving regulations to the market owners causes the deterioration of many of the employee rights of those teachers. An insecure job environment, lower wages, and an intensive workload are some of the central problems private school teachers struggle with.

At the other end of the spectrum, there are *dershane* teachers, a different form of teacher employment, who are also subjected to Private Education Institutions Law No. 5580. The disproportion between the number of education faculty graduates and appointed teachers Disproportion between the number of education faculty graduates and appointed teachers leaves teachers no choice, but to work at *dershanes*. This handicap enabled the capital owners to have control over the working conditions of teachers. As a result, *dershane* teachers lacked job security and were underpaid despite long working hours. Ulutaş (2014) and Yücel Yel (2014) report that *dershane* teachers worked much more than was specified in their annual contracts. The researchers further disclose that two contracts were signed with *dershane* teachers: one for the official records and the other for the 'unofficial' record between the owners and the teacher. While the former contract included working conditions as secured by Social Insurance and General Health Insurance Laws, the latter forced teachers to accept longer working hours and underpayment. *Dershane* teachers had to accept this dual contracting not to be unemployed. A more nefarious impact was that unregistered employment was observed in those institutions. According to the annual report published by the Social Security Institution (SSI, 2007; cited in Salcan, 2014), almost 70% of the staff working at *dershanes* were unregistered.

Given the different categories of teacher employment, it can be concluded that these different categorizations of teacher employment aimed to "create wage flexibility and reduce the financial burden for education in the government budget" (Ertürk, 2012, p. 235). It also damaged organized teacher labor

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<sup>3</sup> Contracted teachers work under the MoNE. They are appointed after being successful in the Public Personnel Selection Exam (a national standardized exam first prepared and implemented by the Student Selection and Placement Center in 2002 with this name, based on the Council of Ministers Decision No. 2002/3975, dated 18/3/2002). Teachers and teacher candidates take the two-staged exam. The first stage includes General Aptitude Test and General Culture Test while the second stage contains field-specific questions. Teachers who get the determined specific score for their field are invited for the oral interviews. Oral interviews aim to measure knowledge about educational sciences and general culture: comprehending and summarizing a topic, ability to express and judgment, communication skills, self-confidence and ability to persuade, openness to scientific and technological developments, ability to represent in front of the community and educational qualifications. Contracted teachers are obliged to fulfill the duties and responsibilities stipulated for permanent teachers in their educational institutions. This type of employment is claimed to deteriorate the job security and organized actions of public servants (Kablay, 2012). That is these teachers did not have the right for being a member of any union (Aydoğan, 2008); most recently, they gained this legal right.

(Salcan, 2014). Kablay (2012) asserts that teacher solidarity and cooperation are damaged at the hands of the market, which demands competition. Under neoliberal siege, she argues, collective actions are rarely observed, particularly among contracted teachers and private school teachers. In sum, low unionization rates among teachers impair their political power, resulting in less control over their work and working conditions. Ironically, this situation ameliorates the implementation of neoliberal policies that exacerbate the conditions of employment.

Starting in the early 2000s, the assault on unions caused a sharp decrease in the number of members of dissident unions while accelerating the number of members in pro-government unions. By 2021, 47 unions for public employees operate in the field of education (T.C. Official Gazette 4<sup>th</sup> July, 2023, Vol.: 32238.) One union, Eğitim-Bir-Sen (Union of Unity of Educators) (a union known for its agenda that overlaps with the ruling powers, see Göktürk, Güvercin, & Seçkin, 2012), has the largest share with 34.90%. It is followed by Türk Eğitim-Sen (Education, Teaching, and Science Professions Public Employee Union of Türkiye) (17.46%) and Eğitim-Sen (Union of Education and Science Laborers) (a union that opposes particularly the current neoliberal education policies of the ruling power, see Göktürk, Güvercin, & Seçkin, 2012) (5.85%).

These numbers urge rigorous interpretation to best capture the impact of neoliberal policies on teachers and teaching as a profession. In their analysis of trade unionism in Türkiye, Göktürk and her colleagues (2012) conclude that neoliberal policies altered public employment regulations that caused insecure employment models of teaching employment. Thereby, more teachers have become members of pro-government unions. In this regard, teachers, particularly contracted, substitute, and private school teachers, are afraid of losing their jobs or not being hired, at all; henceforth, they are either not members of any union or members of pro-governmental unions (Ertürk, 2012). The hidden pressure on these teachers has acted as an impediment to teachers' solidarity.

The last, but not least, critical policy on the teaching profession includes the enforcement of the Teaching Profession Law No. 7354, which was introduced on February 14, 2022. This act was important as it takes teaching as a specialist profession while regulating "the appointment, professional development, and career progression of teachers responsible for delivering education and training services" (Aksoy & Taşkın, 2023, p. 1302). Nevertheless, the issue of career steps defined in the law has led firm debates among teachers. While some teachers support the Teaching Profession Act as it is believed to result increase in salary and the reputation of the teaching profession while some argue that career steps will cause injustices among teachers (İş & Birel, 2022). Other discussions center upon the arguments that defining teachers as experts based on experience year may cause negative attitudes toward the profession among novice teachers and deteriorate labor peace (Altan & Özmuşul, 2022), as well as affecting parents' perceptions of teachers (Demir, Ulukaya Öteleş, Zırhlı, & Şahin, 2022). There are also criticisms that address chronic problems of teachers such as preventing violence and mobbing, supporting teachers in disadvantaged regions, and upholding providing additional opportunities for those working in disadvantaged areas, and supporting the social status of the profession. Bearing on these arguments, it is concluded that the Teaching Profession Law does not provide solutions to the problems of teaching profession; on the contrary, it may result in the alienation of teachers to the profession.

### **Basic High Schools**

The focus of this study is on BHS teachers' voices. BHSs were private high schools that had been transformed from dersane with the amendment in Law No. 5580, in 2014. BHSs operated in the Turkish education system until the 2018-2019 school year. Since then, the ones that meet the private school

requirements as set by the MoNE have continued their activities as private schools. Some others provided private tutoring, while the rest closed down.

It is contended that BHSs created a new market in the field of education as a new form of dersane that presents itself in the form of formal schooling (Karlıdağ-Dennis, 2017). This dual mission of schooling at BHSs was reflected in the responsibilities of teachers. To elucidate the complexities inherent in this transformation, it becomes imperative to delve into the perceptions and experiences of BHS teachers regarding their responsibilities and working conditions. Through teacher accounts and contextual observations, a deeper understanding can be gained regarding the extent to which neoliberal ideologies shape and govern the educational dynamics (Grant, 2001; Rex & Nelson, 2004) within BHSs. By exploring these dimensions, this paper seeks to unravel the intricate interplay between educational privatization, high-stakes testing, and the experiences of BHS teachers. Such an investigation promises to shed light on the broader implications of neoliberal policies on educational systems and the professionals operating within them. Accordingly, the following research questions guided the present research:

1. What are the perceptions of teachers working in BHSs on their responsibilities at school?
2. What are the perceptions of teachers working in BHSs on their working conditions?

## Method

This qualitative research is designed as an intrinsic case study (Yin, 2009). 21 BHS teachers and three school counselors working at five different BHSs in Ankara were interviewed. Purposeful sampling strategy was employed in the selection of both the schools and participants (Patton, 2002). Five BHSs in Ankara, Türkiye were selected considering their district (high socio-economic status, middle socio-economic status, and low socio-economic status), location (Çankaya, Yenimahalle, and Altındağ), institution type (chain, franchised, or boutique school), building type (apartment building, within a commercial building, single building designed as a school), school size (100-150, 150-200, >200), and the number of teachers (15-25, >25).

### Participants

In this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 21 teachers and three school counselors considering their field, years of experience, experience at other school types, and gender. Among the 21 teachers, six were male and 15 were female. Their years of experience ranged from 1 year to 16 years (see Table 1 for more detail). Additionally, among the three school counselors, two were females with less than five years of experience in the profession.

**Table 1**

*Participant Characteristics.*

Demographic Information of the Participants		
Gender	Female	18
	Male	6
Discipline	Physics	4
	Turkish Language and Literature	4
	School Counselor	3
	Mathematics	3

Table 1 (Cont.)

	History	3
	Biology	2
	Visual Arts	2
	Chemistry	1
	Geography	1
	English	1
Years of experience	0-5 years	12
	5-10 years	7
	> 10 years	5
Previous experience*	<i>Dershane</i>	18
	Public school	5
	Private school	3
	Higher Education Institution	1
Member of Union	Member	24
	Non-member	0

\* Some teachers had working experience in more than one educational institution types.

As complementary, observations were conducted at each designated research site. These observations encompassed a comprehensive examination of the diverse learning environments present within each school, encompassing classrooms, recitation sessions, teacher meetings, teachers' room, breaks, and lunch periods. In total, 42 classes were observed over the course of at least one week at each school, accumulating an extensive dataset through the documentation of field notes, amounting to over 200 hours of observation in aggregate.

### Data Collection Instruments

The primary data collection instrument employed in our study was an interview protocol, supplemented by an observation form to enhance the comprehensiveness of our data. Prior to implementation, both instruments underwent rigorous evaluation by two professors at a well-known public university, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, who are experienced in qualitative research, also the authors of recognized qualitative books in Türkiye, to ensure their face and content validity. Subsequently, a pilot study was conducted within one of the BHS chains situated in Ankara, enabling us to refine and finalize the instruments for use in the main study. The interview protocol comprised inquiries such as, "How do you conceptualize your role as a teacher within this educational institution?" and "Could you provide a detailed depiction of a typical classroom session under your instruction?" All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim in the original language, which was Turkish. The observation form encompassed three principal components: contextual data, including information on teaching materials; formal structure, delineating roles and responsibilities; and instructional aspects, encompassing teaching methodologies and the flow of instructional sessions.

## Data Analysis

The qualitative data were content analyzed, drawing upon the framework outlined by Miles et al. (2014). Consistent with the recommendations of Bogdan and Biklen (2007), our analytical process commenced with a thorough and meticulous examination of all data, with particular emphasis on aligning our analysis with the study's overarching objectives. This examination was guided by the theoretical model proposed by Shih (2009), which delineates the washback effect of high-stakes testing. Shih's model delineates various dimensions of the washback effect, encompassing contextual factors such as national, social, or broader educational influences, as well as factors at the school and course levels. Additionally, the model includes test-related factors and teacher-related factors. The washback effects identified within the model involves alterations in various aspects of instruction as: the content of teaching, modifications in teaching methodologies, adaptations in teacher-made assessments, shifts in teacher discourse, adjustments in the allocation of time for test preparation, variations in teacher-assigned homework, fluctuations in levels of nervousness and anxiety among students, and alterations in the overall atmosphere of the classroom environment. These dimensions served as the foundation for our content analysis, enabling a comprehensive exploration of the multifaceted impacts of high-stakes testing within the context of BHSs.

Bearing the reference model in mind, the data were analyzed by using the qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA 2018 (VERBI Software, 2017) to easily follow an iterative process during the data analysis. First, all the transcriptions and field notes were uploaded to the software. Then, a separate file was formed for each school. Next, codes were assigned to pertinent segments within the qualitative data. Initially, distinct themes emerged, encompassing teachers' practices at both the classroom and school levels, as well as their engagement with the curriculum, alongside considerations of their working conditions.

Following the initial coding phase, two professors, distinguished experts in qualitative data analysis were consulted to validate and refine these themes. The professors analyzed 10% of the whole data (as suggested by Lombard, Snyder-Duch, and Bracken, 2002). Subsequently, through a process of negotiation aimed at achieving consensus, known as "inter-coder agreement" (Campbell et al., 2013), the initial themes were consolidated and revised. Here, it is important to note that the aim of qualitative analysts is to maximize the degree of agreement among independent coders. However, unlike most quantitative research, it is not centered on obtaining a set statistical coefficient. Instead, the emphasis is on enhancing the coding quality in a useful way. This is the reason why finding a coefficient is not the end of the process. To proceed with more precisely coded data, qualitative researchers would prefer to address and change the code assignments that do not match. For instance, following deliberation, the categories of BHS teachers' curricular and examination-oriented practices were consolidated into a broader theme termed "teacher responsibilities." Through iterative discussions and revisions, the final themes emerged as: "teacher responsibilities" and "teachers' working conditions." These themes encapsulate the key dimensions of BHS teachers' roles and experiences, providing a nuanced understanding of their professional context within the broader framework of high-stakes testing and educational privatization. Considering these changes, the inter-coder agreement was calculated as .85.

## Trustworthiness of the Study

The terms validity and reliability have been attributed to positivistic paradigm; however, either quantitative or qualitative, all types of inquiries require presenting authentic results (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). Lincoln and Guba (1985) (cited from Golafshani, 2003) define reliability and validity in qualitative research as trustworthiness. The authors set four criteria to ensure trustworthiness: i) conformability, ii)



dependability, iii) credibility, and iv) transferability. First, confirmability refers to objectivity in qualitative research. "The concept of confirmability is the qualitative investigator's comparable concern to objectivity" (Shenton, 2004, p. 72). As suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994), the following strategies can be employed to ensure confirmability: 1) data quality, 2) looking at unpatterns, 3) testing explanations. In this regard, in the present study, following strategies were employed to ensure conformability of the findings: checking for representativeness, triangulation, and checking out rival explanations. For representativeness, purposeful sampling method was employed. The schools were selected considering various aspects such as their mission and vision, location of the school, and school size. The teachers, on the other hand, were selected to represent different subject-matters, years of experience, and gender. Last, classroom observations were made considering different grade levels and subject-matter. Moreover, the data were triangulated by both conducting interviews with teachers and making observations. Lastly, while reporting, in order to increase the conformability of the study, rival explanations were examined and relevant quotations were presented.

Second, dependability refers to the consistency of the results (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982; Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this context, the researchers analyzed and reported the findings together to eliminate researcher bias. Also, low-inference descriptors were used during our observations. For instance, instead of writing "There is a teacher-centered teaching approach in the class", the teaching environment was described as:

The classroom was designed in rows. The students were sitting in their chairs, which are placed in front of the teacher's desk. The teacher was using the classroom board to take some notes, and the students were listening to the teacher.

Third, internal validity -credibility- refers to whether interpretations of the events the researchers observed or the meaning making of the phenomenon objectively represent the real situations. For credibility, prolonged engagement enabled the researchers to portray data that represent the natural context. In this study, each case was observed during whole school days in a week. This allowed the researchers to contact members with different backgrounds at each case. In addition, various observe different processes at selected cases. Member checks (as suggested by Miles and Huberman, 1994) were used so that two teachers and one of the school counselors checked the transcripts of their interviews and commented on them. For instance, one of the teachers asked the researchers to quote his arguments on top-down policies, and the researchers directly quoted his words below in the findings section. Lastly, peer debriefing was utilized (as suggested by Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998). Two Curriculum and Instruction professors, who are experienced in qualitative research, were consulted for their feedback during each phase of the study.

Lastly, transferability refers to external validity: the generalization of the findings to the other contexts (Merriam, 1998). In order to establish transferability, purposive sampling was employed while selecting the cases and the participants to be interviewed, as well as the incidents to be observations. While doing so, maximum variation sampling strategy was utilized to represent different perceptions and school activities. In addition, thick description of each case was provided.

## **Findings**

The findings are presented under two main themes: teacher responsibilities and their working conditions.

## Teacher Responsibilities

BHSs implemented the national formal curricula and prepared students for the UEE, placing particular emphasis on the latter, thereby endowing BHS teachers with dual obligations encompassing both curriculum delivery and examination preparation. While delineating these as discrete duties proves challenging, our discussion herein concentrates on the exam-based responsibilities. The dual responsibility of BHS teachers was evident in most of the interviews and observations as one of the physics teachers at Case 3 noted that:

*The logic of both schools and dershane is intertwined here. Therefore, we focus on exam preparation, but at the same time, there is a curriculum to follow. We have to cover certain content included in the formal curriculum. We try to accomplish both of our responsibilities simultaneously.*

In this regard, the teachers reported a variety of exam-based practices which are presented under: content alignment, measurement and evaluation, recitation hours, and practices tests.

## Content Alignment

One of the exam-based duties involved arranging the curriculum in alignment with the content prescribed by the UEE. The history teacher from Case 1 expressed:

*We prepare our yearly plans and lesson plans by giving precedence to the content highlighted in the university examination. We dedicate additional time to topics that receive greater emphasis in the university exam. Moreover, the sample questions we provide during our classes closely resemble those encountered in the university examination.*

The math teacher at Case 1 highlighted that 12th graders had eight class hours, with half dedicated to recitation to review previous grade content, allowing for flexibility in content sequencing and increased focus on drill activities for exam preparation. Similarly, during the class observations in Case 2, the math teacher noted that he allocated 26 weeks for derivatives and integrals but covered it in 14 weeks, spending the remaining 12 for exam readiness.

Additionally, in certain instances, the teachers imparted knowledge beyond the prescribed curriculum, focusing on topics requested in the UEE. For example, while observing a 12th-grade chemistry session, the teacher disclosed to the researcher her emphasis on exam readiness, especially in her 12th-grade level classes. Consequently, she occasionally dedicated class time to revising material not officially included in the 12th-grade curriculum. In this regard, a salient finding of this study is that the prioritization of exam preparation varied across grade levels, with formal curricula emphasized in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades, shifting to exam preparation in 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades, as exemplified by the math teacher in Case 1:

*It is not in the same structure at the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade levels. We teach them the content covered in the curriculum. While doing so, we support student participation. For instance, at the beginning of the class, we implement warming activities, or we review the content by asking questions to the students. I give homework. I sometimes implement group-work activities. But, at the 12<sup>th</sup> grade level, we mainly rely on exam preparation.*

### **Measurement and Evaluation**

Another critical finding of the study was that the teachers were expected to measure student achievement considering their grade level and the UEE. For instance, one of the physics teachers at Case 3 exemplified that:

*We ask open-ended or essay-type questions to the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders. The 11<sup>th</sup> graders take exams that include different question types, including multiple-choice items, in order to prepare them for the next year. In contrast, we ask mainly multiple-choice questions to the 12<sup>th</sup> graders. The questions are similar to those asked in previous years' university exams. They will take the university exam this year. They are quite stressed. We are supposed to help them overcome their anxiety.*

Also, it is mentioned that unlike teachers working at other types of schools, BHS teachers regularly assigned homework and strictly monitored it as part of their exam-based responsibilities. They claimed that rather than curricular homework, they assigned homework to facilitate the students', particularly the 12<sup>th</sup> graders' exam preparation. The language and literacy teacher at Case 5 contends that:

*The purpose of the assignments is actually to make the students study for the exam. For instance, I ask students to complete at least 75 questions about paragraph comprehension every week because this is one of the question types they have difficulty with in the exam. In addition, paragraph comprehension questions improve their general comprehension skills.*

As part of their exam-based responsibilities, the teachers also emphasized the importance of maintaining records of assignments, which were reported to the school counselor, principal, and sometimes parents. The Turkish language and literacy teacher at Case 3 provided insight into her record-keeping practices, where each class had its own file containing students' names and assignments with corresponding due dates, marked with ticks upon completion. The school counselors acknowledged the significance of diligently monitoring assignments as part of their core duties.

### **Recitation Hours**

BHS teachers also bear the responsibility of organizing recitation hours, conducted after regular class hours. During these sessions, teachers remain available at the school to address students' inquiries or occasionally deliver supplementary lectures on specific topics. The physics teacher at Case 5 explained how the recitation were run:

*Different from other schools, basic high schools implement recitation hours as part of their exam-oriented mission. During these hours, we answer students' questions or distribute tests to students. The students can also complete their homework during these hours.*

Meanwhile, the math teacher at Case 3 echoed similar sentiments, emphasizing the obligation to address students' questions, predominantly focused on exam-related queries. She added that the teachers distribute tests and offer assistance during these hours, ensuring comprehensive coverage of potential exam questions by drawing from various test books in the market. This exhaustive approach aligns with the school's dedication to thorough exam preparation.

## **Practice Tests**

Practice tests are reported as a vital aspect of BHSs. These tests typically consist of questions similar in format and content to those that appear on the actual UEE to familiarize test-takers with the types of questions they would encounter, assess their understanding of the material, identify areas of strength and weakness, and refine test-taking strategies. These tests were administered by the school at regular intervals. BHS teachers, in this regard, had two main responsibilities which mainly centered on writing test items for the practice tests and overseeing practice tests, and monitoring students' test results. First, the teachers were expected to write a certain number of test items for practice tests. Despite the differences in the process in each case, the teachers were mainly responsible for writing test items about the topics they cover at each grade level. Then a pool of questions was created. Experienced teachers had more responsibilities in the development and organization of the practice tests. Although experienced teachers typically played a central role in test development, novice teachers were assigned the role of invigilator, guiding students during practice tests, enforcing exam rules, and ensuring the smooth progression of the exam.

Second, the teachers were also responsible for monitoring the students' test scores and taking necessary measures (i.e., reviewing content, assigning extra homework, etc.), recording the students' test scores, and informing the school counselors, board, and parents about the test scores. Accordingly, the school counselors also had similar responsibilities, as they kept a record of students' practice test scores to interpret their progress and prepare a study plan for each student. The counselors also noted that those scores also provided them with evidence for career counseling. The school counselor at Case 5 noted that:

*I have a file for each student and keep a record of their scores on practice tests. I carefully examined their scores in each subject matter. If needed, I talk to the teacher and ask her to review the content for which most students could not find the correct answer. But sometimes, the problem is with the student. I talked to that student in person and made a new study plan. If I do not observe any progress, I talk to the school board and call the parents. These scores also help me in my career counseling studies. I try to make the students aware of their potential. I cannot tell a low-achiever that s/he will enter the top universities. It is a fact.*

Given the exam-based responsibilities of BHS teachers, it is also important to report critical voices. Most of the teachers said that the dual structure at BHSs inhibited them from raising the whole person. One of the language and literacy teachers at Case 3 bluntly reported that:

*We are not raising a whole person. We are neither a dershane nor a school. The aim of national education and schooling at BHS is contradictory. The purpose of education at BHS is to make the students keep studying for the university entrance examination. We are not shaping the future in these schools. Firstly, the educational philosophy is wrong. I mean, there is a problem in the Turkish education system.*

The biology teacher, on the other hand, delineated that even if they did not want to employ test-taking practices in their classes, the education system forced them to utilize such practices. He added that:

*The principals and parents expect us to increase student achievement in practice tests. Other aspects of schools and students are underemphasized. But we are part of this system. We have to work. We do not want to lose our jobs, so we accomplish what is expected of us.*

The physics teacher at Case 5 drew attention to the re-structured relations among stakeholders at Basic High Schools. She argued that private schools attribute "customer role" to the students while placing teachers as workers who had to be available all the time to meet the "customer" needs, as: "We are

expected to respond to all students. You see, we cannot sit in the teachers' room during breaks. It is tiring, indeed. Students think that since they pay for the school, we have to be available anytime."

### **Working Conditions of BHS Teachers**

Our interviews and observations unveiled information about the working conditions of BHS teachers. As they had both curricular and exam-based responsibilities, they had extended working hours and responsibility overload. Moreover, they were deprived of several fundamental benefits enjoyed by public school teachers.

Starting with the extended working hours, the teachers commenced their work early in the morning, starting at 8 A.M. Classes persisted until the afternoon, with a break for lunch. However, it's noteworthy that students were permitted to approach teachers with questions during the lunch break. Following the lunch break, classes resumed until nearly 4 P.M. Subsequently, recitation hours started, lasting for a minimum of 2 hours. During these hours, at least one teacher from each subject area remained either in the teachers' room or in the study hall of the school to address student questions or instruct groups of students on UEE material. Occasionally, they provided solutions to questions posed in practice tests.

Another significant finding is that students were permitted to contact teachers after school hours, even late at night, to address their inquiries. For example, history and math teachers at Case 1 noted that they established groups for each of their classes using an online messaging application, allowing students to ask questions after school hours within these groups. "Even at night, they text and expect us to respond," the math teacher remarked. An excerpt from the interview with one of the chemistry teachers (Case 5) enunciates the extended working hours of BHS teachers as follows:

*We used to work much harder at dersane, but the workload hasn't decreased after the transformation, especially when compared to teachers at other schools. We are tasked with teaching the national curriculum while also preparing students for university entrance exams. We split our time between teaching here and at the school's tutoring center. As you can see, we can't even relax in the teachers' room during break times. We feel like we're treated as testing machines!"*

Moreover, the teachers expressed that despite their unwavering dedication, their earnings were meager, often falling below the minimum wage in Türkiye. The school counselor in Case 5 argued:

*This is not pleasant at all. This is just labor exploitation. But I have to accept these working conditions. I have just graduated and could not be appointed as a public school teacher. Since I do not have any experience, private schools do not pay much. They perceive new graduates as interns. I earn minimum wage.*

A pivotal finding with regard to teacher wages was that teachers were compensated below the amounts specified in official documents. Teachers elaborated that as BHS operating under the centralized control of the MoNE, wages were disbursed as described in the official regulations. However, teachers were compelled to return a portion of their wages to the school owners. Teachers argued that they had no choice but to comply with this arrangement or risk losing their jobs. An instance of critique emanating from a history teacher (Case 4) pertained to the systemic pressures imposing such labor conditions upon them. She lamented that her relentless efforts to fulfill students' educational requirements left her with insufficient time to attend to her two children.

Furthermore, the teachers voiced concerns regarding the absence of several benefits typically enjoyed by public school educators. Foremost among these concerns was the lack of job security, attributable to their employment under 12-month contracts with compensation only provided for 9 months of the year. The biology teacher (Case 4) articulated, "We lack job security, a distinction from public schools. The workload is demanding, contributing to a highly competitive professional environment. Remember, this is a private institution!" Echoing similar sentiments, a history teacher (Case 3) highlighted the precariousness stemming from their 12-month contract, expressing uncertainty regarding contract renewals. She noted a notable turnover rate among teachers at BHSs, particularly among those with limited experience, attributing this to:

*Novice teachers may struggle to address students' needs due to their lack of familiarity with the examination system, including question formats commonly encountered in the UEE and the specific content emphasized in the examination. Consequently, students, viewed as consumers of education, possess the autonomy to select their instructors. If dissatisfied with a teacher's performance, students report their concerns to the school board. Subsequently, the school board may issue warnings to the teacher as a corrective measure, or in more severe cases, opt for termination of employment.*

The teachers further argued that they were deprived of certain benefits, such as lacking teacher identity cards and not enjoying equivalent pension rights compared to their counterparts in public schools. A biology teacher (Case 3), for instance, expressed frustration, stating:

*We board a bus and are unable to avail of the discounts provided to public school teachers. Do you understand what I'm saying? It's not merely about monetary savings; it's about acknowledgment. After all, I am also a teacher! Basic high schools are recognized as educational institutions in this country, correct? We are documented in the official records of the Ministry of National Education. Why then are we denied the same entitlements as public school teachers?*

The teachers also drew attention to the low rates of teacher absenteeism at BHSs. One of the math teachers (Case 1) complained that even if they got sick, they had to go to work since the private sector did not allow for such flexibility. A Turkish literature and language teacher (Case 3) emphasized a similar notion by saying:

*I am really afraid of getting sick! Even if we get sick, we have to come to school. Each of us has many duties, and finding a substitute teacher for all those tasks is not easy. Besides, the students complain about substitute teachers and underestimate them since they are young and less experienced.*

Lastly, the teachers delineated that teacher unions play a critical role in determining teachers' conditions of employee. They asserted that teacher unions often negotiate for job security provisions, such as tenure or due process rights, to protect teachers from arbitrary dismissal and ensure fair treatment in employment decisions. However, none of the participating teachers stated that they were union members. They attributed this to the lack of unions that specifically deal with deteriorated employee rights and problems at private education institutions<sup>4</sup>. The teachers also noted that top-down policies restrict teacher autonomy

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<sup>4</sup> After this study was completed, a teachers' trade union, the Private Sector Teachers' Union (PSTU) was founded in 2021 in order to help teachers who worked at private education institutions secure and improve working conditions. The union aims to empower teachers in their struggle against the neoliberal attack on the teaching profession. The members have made many legal gains against school owners who make teachers work on holidays and do not pay

and inhibit the effective implementation of policy decisions. The philosophy teacher condemned the educational policies that triggered such problems by asserting that: "politicians who have never touched chalk; have never shared the same environment with the students, and even do not have an educational identity, have made education a toy." In this context, they argued that teacher unions could enable their collective actions.

## Discussion and Conclusions

The pervasive influence of neoliberalism is evident globally. As Nina Bascia (1998, p. 551) highlights, the profession of "teaching is inherently a politically and bureaucratically subordinate occupation". Consequently, the ascendancy of neoliberal and neoconservative ideologies precipitates a paradigm shift across cultural, political, and economic domains, thereby exerting significant influence over curriculum and teaching (Apple & Teitelbaum, 1986). Within this context, the intricate labor processes involved in teaching become simplified under neoliberal governance (Laitsch, 2013), resulting in a transformation of teachers from intellectual agents to technical operatives. This shift entails a loss of autonomy over their labor, compelling educators to impart fragmented knowledge geared primarily towards standardized test performance (Yıldız, 2014). Recent research by Taylor (2023) further underscores the pervasive impact of neoliberalism on classroom dynamics. Taylor contends that neoliberal policies not only manifest through mechanisms of accountability but also through the dissemination of specific teaching and learning ideologies. Of particular note is the emphasis on high-stakes testing as a focal point of neoliberal educational policies.

High-stakes testing stands out as a prominent manifestation of neoliberal educational policies. Through the lens of neoliberal ideology, schools are conceptualized as enterprises wherein efficiency is gauged primarily by students' performance on standardized tests. Consequently, teacher accountability becomes intricately tied to students' test scores. This approach has deleterious effects on teaching and learning, as well as on the motivations of both educators and learners. Specifically, it leads to curriculum narrowing (Jones & Egley, 2004), compels teachers to tailor instruction to meet test requirements (Bhattacharyya et al., 2013; Neumann, 2013), gives rise to ethical dilemmas in teaching practices (Darling-Hammond & Wise, 1985), raises concerns about teacher job security (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000), perpetuates educational inequalities (Au, 2013; Darling-Hammond, 1991), and causes the deskilling of teaching professionals (Apple, 1982).

Entrenched in the problems regarding the teaching profession, in this study we aimed to situate the impacts of neoliberal policies on BHS teachers' responsibilities and conditions as employees. It is critical because, as Apple (2017) contends, what is happening at schools in their actual context is an undermined aspect of literature in critical pedagogy. Our findings revealed that BHS teachers had two interwoven responsibilities: delivering the national curricula and preparing students for the UEE, with an emphasis on the latter. They were not autonomous in their classes; rather, they were test machines whose teaching centered upon multiple-choice tests. In other words, BHS teachers do not have control over their work; rather it is the UEE that mainly shapes the work of BHS teachers. Teachers feel overloaded and under

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teachers' severance pay. The union has started a campaign for a base salary law to end the duality in teachers' wages mentioned above.

pressure, and many are at risk of leaving the profession (Towers et al., 2022). For instance, as reported by Ingersoll et al. (2018), almost half of the teachers (44%) in the U.S. leave the profession before completing five years of employment. This is the visible impact of market-based curricular practices that have taken away autonomy from teachers and transformed them into technical workers (Apple & Teitelbaum, 1986).

The impact of deskilling process has deleterious impact on teachers' working conditions. Our findings disclosed that despite their greater efforts to secure their position at the school, most of the BHS teachers' wages are below the minimum wage, and new beginners earn way less. Moreover, BHS teachers are considered on unpaid leave during summer breaks. The literature reports similar findings, particularly in developing countries (Harma, 2011). This not only disregards teaching as a profession but also has a detrimental effect on our education systems in the long run. On the one hand, less qualified, unlicensed, and less experienced teachers tend to favor the teaching profession in these economic times (James, 1991). In the long run, the generation trained by those teachers will lack certain skills, such as critical thinking, which is a sine qua non of being an active citizen in democratic societies.

Also, BHS teachers are offered a 12-month contract with no guarantee of renewal, causing high teacher attrition and turnover. Teacher attrition and migration are global problems experienced particularly by private school teachers (Ingersoll, 2003; Ndoye et al., 2010). For instance, charter school teachers are subjected to administrators' evaluations of their performance, which causes a higher dismissal rate than in public schools (Ni, 2017). Second, they do not have a teacher identity card given to them by the MoNE that offers many privileges to its owners, such as paying less for public transportation and shopping. Neglecting BHS teachers as part of the education system in Türkiye opens a room for market owners' exploitation of the teacher's work. On the other hand, it stands as a barrier in front of teacher empowerment, a way of increasing teachers' job satisfaction and commitment to the profession (Bogler & Somech, 2004). Last, but not least, teacher solidarity is weakened as teachers are afraid of being members of a union. Kablay (2012) puts it as follows:

In this competitive environment, teachers become objects of the market, and their labor becomes commodified, both in the public and private sectors. This is especially the case for teachers in private schools and private tutoring academies, but public school teachers, especially those in the substitute teacher category, are also affected (p.170)

Succinctly, all these problems diverge teachers from their role as transformative intellectuals who employ "forms of pedagogy that treat students as agents, problematize knowledge, invoke dialogue, and make knowledge meaningful so as to make it critical in order to make it emancipatory" (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985, p. 58) and "challenge the dominant view of teachers as technicians or public servants, whose role is primarily to implement rather than conceptualize pedagogical practice" (Giroux, 1997, p. 103). Giving a voice to teachers; in this regard is critical, as they play a vital role in educating future citizens of just societies.

## **Implications**

Critical researchers in different countries aim to empower teachers to handle the neoliberal attack on the teaching profession. Chief among the alternative remedies is the collective action of teachers (Apple et al., 2022; Govender, 2015; Gutstein & Lipman, 2013; Marianno, 2015). It is reported that teachers'



solidarity contributes to the re-setting of teachers' working conditions, such as improved employee rights conditions (Schirmer, 2016; Zwerling & Thomason, 1995) and increased autonomy (Apple et al., 2022). There is evidence that improvements in teachers' working conditions have a big impact on their feelings, opinions of their own efficacy, and commitment to sticking with the profession. (Bascia & Rottmann, 2011).

Nonetheless, organized teacher resistance is weakened by neoliberal policies (Gavin, 2019; Mercille & Murphy, 2015). Neoliberal education reforms exclude teachers' voices from educational decision-making processes, including, but not limited to, curriculum implementation (Ali, 2017) and setting the working conditions for the teaching profession (Mercille & Murphy, 2015; Schirmer, 2015). Despite all these obstacles, there are cases that demonstrate teacher agency still plays a pivotal role in improving teachers' working conditions (Hoxby, 1996).

Bearing these critical recommendations in mind, we have suggestions for further research and practice. First, and foremost, teachers should be empowered with a certain level of autonomy in their classes. They should be able to decide on the activities to be implemented and the resources to be used, for instance. Such empowerment should be facilitated through robust support mechanisms from school administrators and, on a broader scale, from policymakers. By fostering a climate of autonomy, educators can avoid feelings of alienation engendered by the dominant influence of neoliberalism and high-stakes testing. Moreover, this approach nurtures teachers' capacity to function as transformative intellectuals, cognizant of teaching as an active and reflective profession (Giroux, 1988).

Furthermore, our research underscores the detrimental impact of top-down policies on the successful implementation of educational reforms. It is imperative to recognize teachers as pivotal stakeholders within the educational system and integrate their perspectives into decision-making processes. Specifically, teachers ought to play an active role in shaping curricular decisions, encompassing considerations such as the content to be taught, pedagogical approaches, and overarching educational objectives (Giroux, 2002, p. 3). This participatory approach ensures that educational reforms align more closely with the realities of classroom practice and the needs of students, thereby enhancing their effectiveness.

Third, as we found that under the siege of neoliberalism, BHS teachers face substantial workloads amid the pervasive influence of neoliberalism, with compensation levels approaching the minimum wage in Türkiye. In response, we advocate for policymakers to establish standardized working conditions for teachers, ensuring equitable treatment across both public and private educational sectors. Specifically, we propose extending the same employee rights enjoyed by public school teachers to their counterparts in private institutions. Additionally, our research highlights the erosion of solidarity among teachers, particularly within the private education sector. Addressing this issue necessitates the provision of enhanced support mechanisms to foster solidarity among teachers. Lastly, while our study sheds light on the pedagogical and working conditions shaped by neoliberal policies, there remains a critical need for scholarly inquiry into the psychological and social ramifications of these policies on teachers. Delving into this "black box" will provide valuable insights for developing interventions to mitigate adverse effects on educators' well-being.

### **Author Contributions**

The first author collected the data and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Both of the authors equally contributed in the analysis of the data and then wrote the final version of the manuscript.

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## TÜRKÇE GENİŞ ÖZET

### **Neoliberal Zamanlarda Öğretmenlik: Türkiye'deki Temel Liselerde Öğretmen Seslerinin Çözülmesi**

#### **Giriş**

Neoliberal doktrinlerin yükselişi, 1970'lerden bu yana çeşitli sosyo-ekonomik alanları şekillendirerek küresel ölçekte derin ve geniş kapsamlı bir etki yaratmıştır. Bu paradigma değişimi, ağırlıklı olarak kamu hizmetlerinin metalaştırılmasıyla kendini gösteren kamu yönetimi dokusunda bir metamorfoza yol açmıştır. Bu yeni kültürleşme biçiminde eğitim alanında da ilişkileri ve rolleri tanımlamak için yeni bir dil benimsenmiştir: Veliler ve öğrenciler tüketici, öğretmenler ise herkese uyan tek tip eğitim programları uygulamalarının hayata geçirilmesinden sorumlu eğitim hizmetlerinin satıcısı olarak konumlandırılmaktadır (Golden, 2017). Yüksek riskli test sonuçları ise üretimin ve hesap verebilirliğin bir göstergesi olarak kullanılmaktadır (Bhattacharyya et al., 2013; Schneider, 2017).

Öğretme ve öğrenmenin neoliberal ve muhafazakâr politikalar çerçevesinde yeniden yorumlanması, bir meslek olarak öğretmenliği de değiştirmiştir. Bu bağlamda, öğretmenlere piyasanın talep ettiği becerileri aktardıkları ikincil bir rol atfedilmektedir (Giroux, 1994). Bu durum sadece öğretmenlerin öğretim kararlarını etkilemekle kalmayıp öğretmen kimliğinin gelişimini de değiştirmektedir.

Bu çalışmada özel olarak Temel Lise öğretmenlerinin seslerine odaklanılmıştır. Temel Liseler, 2014 yılında 5580 sayılı Kanun'da yapılan değişiklikle dershaneden dönüştürülen özel liselerdir. Temel Liseler 2018-2019 eğitim-öğretim yılına kadar Türk eğitim sistemi içinde faaliyet göstermiştir. Temel Liselerin araştırma sahası olarak belirlenme sebebi, en temel olarak bu okulların dershaneden dönüşmüş olma sebebiyle öğrencileri üniversite yerleştirme sınavına hazırlamak ve resmi öğretim programlarını uygulamak üzere ikili bir öğretim amaçlarının olmasıdır (Karlıdağ-Dennis, 2017).

Bu söylemler ışığında öğretmenlik mesleğinin neoliberal politikaların etkisinde yaşadığı dönüşümler ve Temel Liselerdeki ikili öğretimin amaçları göz önünde bulundurulduğunda Temel Liselerde görev yapan öğretmenlerin sorumluluklarına ve çalışma koşullarına ilişkin görüş ve deneyimlerinin incelenmesinin önemli olduğu düşünülmüştür. Bu çalışma; eğitimin özelleştirilmesi, yüksek riskli standart testler ve Temel Lise öğretmenlerinin deneyimleri arasındaki karmaşık etkileşimi çözmeyi amaçlamaktadır.

#### **Yöntem**

Bu nitel araştırma içsel bir vaka çalışması olarak tasarlanmıştır (Yin, 2009). Ankara'da beş farklı Temel Liselerde görev yapan 21 öğretmen ve üç rehber öğretmenle yarı-yapılandırılmış görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Bunun yanı sıra okul içi ve sınıf içi gözlemler yapılmıştır. Hem okulların hem de öğretmenlerin seçiminde amaçlı örnekleme yöntemi kullanılmıştır (Patton, 2002). Nitel veriler içerik analizi yöntemi kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Analiz sürecinde Shih (2009) tarafından önerilen ve yüksek riskli



standart testlerin etkilerini tanımlayan teorik model dikkate alınmıştır. Analiz sonucunda 'Temel Liselerde çalışan öğretmenlerin sorumlulukları' ve 'çalışma koşulları' olmak üzere iki ana tema ortaya çıkmıştır. Çalışmanın güvenilirlik ve geçerliği için şu unsurlara dikkat edilmiştir: okulların, öğretmenlerin ve gözlemlerin amaçlı örnekleme yöntemi kullanılarak belirlenmesi, gözlem ve görüşmelerle veri çeşitliliğinin sağlanması, birden fazla kodlayıcının analiz sürecinde kodları ve temaları belirlemesi, kodlayıcılar arası uyumunun hesaplanması, katılımcı teyidi ve son olarak araştırmacının her bir araştırma sahasında en az iki hafta gözlem ve görüşmeler gerçekleştirmesi.

## Bulgular

Araştırma bulguları, Temel Liselerde görev yapan öğretmenlerin sorumlulukları ve çalışma koşulları olmak üzere iki başlık altında sunulmuştur. İlk başlığa ilişkin bulgularda öğretmenlerin sorumluluklarının temel olarak öğrencileri üniversite yerleştirme sınavına hazırlamak ve resmi öğretim programını uygulamak olduğu görülmüştür. Bunları, birbirinden bağımsız sorumluluklar olarak ifade etmenin mümkün olmadığı sonucu araştırmanın göze çarpan bir bulgusudur. Öğretmenlerin öğretim programının uygulanmasına ilişkin günlük rutinlerinde sınav hazırlığını ön plana çıkardığı göze çarpmaktadır. Açıklamak gerekirse öğretmenlerin içeriğin belirlenmesi ve sıralanması, ödevler, ölçme ve değerlendirme ve kullanılan materyaller gibi program öğelerinin işe koşulmasında ağırlıklı olarak sınava hazırlığı öncelikli sonucuna ulaşılmıştır. Sınıf içi bu uygulamaların dışında, soru çözüm saatleri ve deneme testleri gibi uygulamaların diğer okullarda görev yapan öğretmenlerden farklı olarak Temel Liselerde görev yapan öğretmenlere fazladan bir sorumluluk yüklediği, kendi ifadeleriyle onları test çözme makinesine çevirdiği bulgusu dikkat çekmektedir.

Bu ikili öğretim yapısının öğretmenlerin çalışma koşullarının belirlenmesinde de etkili olduğu göze çarpmaktadır. Uzun çalışma saatleri ve iş yükünün fazla olması öğretmenlerin çalışma koşullarına ilişkin vurguladıkları olumsuz durumlardır. Bunun yanı sıra özlük haklarına ilişkin maaş ve sigorta prim ödemeleri gibi durumlarda da öğretmenlerin çalışma koşullarına ilişkin söz hakkına sahip olmadıkları görülmektedir. Daha da önemlisi bazı durumlarda öğretmenlerin resmi sözleşmelerinde belirtilen haklarının uygulamada farklılık gösterdiği bulgusudur. Bu bağlamda öğretmenler sendikalaşmanın önemine dikkat çekmiş ve çalışma koşullarının iyileştirilmesine duyulan ihtiyacı dile getirmiştir.

## Tartışma

Yukarıda paylaşılan bulgular ışığında neoliberal politikaların öğretmenlik mesleğini dönüştürdüğünü ve öğretmenlerin özerkliğini kısıtladığını söylemek mümkündür. Bir diğer ifade ile öğretimle ilgili karmaşık emek süreçleri neoliberal yönetim altında basitleşmekte (Laitsch, 2013) ve öğretmenlerin entelektüel aktörlerden teknik operatörlere dönüşmesine neden olmaktadır. Bu değişim, eğitimcileri öncelikle standartlaştırılmış test performansına yönelik parçalı bilgi aktarmaya zorlayarak emekleri üzerindeki özerkliklerini kaybetmelerine yol açmaktadır (Yıldız, 2014).

Neoliberal eğitim politikalarının odak noktası olarak yüksek riskli standart sınavlara yapılan vurgu özellikle dikkat çekicidir. Bu araştırmada sınava hazırlığın, öğretmenlerin sınıf içi ve sınıf dışı uygulamalarında ağırlıklı belirleyici olduğu sonucuna ulaşılmıştır. İlgili alan yazında da bu sınavların öğretim programlarının daralmasına yol açtığı (Jones & Egley, 2004), öğretmenleri test gerekliliklerini karşılamak için öğretimi uyarlamaya zorladığı (Bhattacharyya et. al., 2013; Neumann, 2013), öğretim uygulamalarında etik ikilemlere yol açtığı ((Darling-Hammond & Wise, 1985), eğitim eşitsizliklerini tetiklediği (Au, 2013; Darling-Hammond, 1991) ve öğretmenlik mesleğini vasıfsızlaştırdığı (Apple, 1982) öne sürülmektedir.

Öte yandan tüm bu karmaşık yapı ve süreçlerin öğretmenlerin çalışma koşulları ve mesleki özlük hakları üzerindeki etkisine ilişkin bulgular araştırmanın bir başka önemli sonucuna işaret etmektedir. Elde edilen bulgular; düşük ücret, uzun çalışma saatleri, iş yükünün fazla olması ve özlük haklarına ilişkin temel hakların göz ardı edilmesi gibi öğretmenlerin çalışma koşullarına ilişkin olumsuz durumların altını çizmektedir. Uluslararası alan yazın da bu sorunların özel okullarda çalışan öğretmenleri daha olumsuz etkilediğini göstermektedir (Ingersoll, 2003; Ndoye et al., 2010). Bu durumun, öğretmenlerin mesleki aidiyetini ve mesleki doyumunu olumsuz etkilediği belirtilmektedir (Bogler & Somech, 2004). Öte yandan öğretmenlerin örgütlü etkinliklerinin neoliberal politikalar tarafından sınırlandırıldığını ortaya koyan çalışmalar da mevcuttur (Kablay, 2012).

### **Sonuç ve Öneriler**

Araştırma bulguları ve uluslararası alan yazın dikkate alındığında ileride yapılacak araştırmalar ve uygulamalar için öneriler mevcuttur. Öncelikle öğretmenlerin sınıflarında ihtiyaç duyduğu özerkliğin sağlanması için gerekli çalışmaların yapılması kanaatindeyiz. Bunun için öğretmenlerin politika üretim süreçlerindeki karar alma mekanizmalarına dâhil edilmesi gerektiğini düşünüyoruz. Böyle bir durumda, öğretmenlerde mesleki yabancılaşmanın yerine aidiyet hissinin gelişmesini öne sürmek mümkündür.

Bir başka önemli öneri ise özel okullarda çalışan öğretmenlerin mesleki özlük hakları ve çalışma koşullarının düzenlenmesine ilişkindir. Kamu ve özel sektör öğretmenlerinin özlük hakları ve çalışma koşullarının eşitlenmesine yönelik atılacak politika adımlarının, öğretmenlik mesleğinin yeniden yükselişine katkı sağlayacağı ve öğretmenleri güçlendireceği düşünülmektedir.