


## Teachers' Silent Scream: Quiet Quitting

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### Abstract

*The aim of the study is first to discover if quiet quitting (QQ) act exists among teachers at schools, and then, if there are teachers who are a part of this movement, to disclose the indications of QQ act and the reasons that push them to quiet quit. The study was designed in accordance with the qualitative phenomenology pattern and carried out with 13 teachers selected by the snowball sampling method, which is one of the purposive sampling methods. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted to collect data and the data was analyzed by content analysis technique. In the light of the analysis, "indications of QQ among teachers" and "reasons for QQ among teachers" themes emerged. The result of the study reveals that teachers are part of the QQ act. Teachers' ending their psychological contract, organizational commitment and belonging are internal indications, while holding back on duties that are outside the job description, not taking on new duties, and not taking responsibility for duties requiring them to spend overtime or outside working hours are external symptoms. As for the reasons, teachers quiet quit because the meaning they attach to their profession is deteriorated and their efforts are rendered worthless because of the financial challenges they experience. Also, due to the precarization they experience stemming from the paid teaching practice and the*

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*loss of prestige in the society, teachers quiet quit. Pandemic is among the other reasons that lead teachers to quiet quit. Furthermore, work-life imbalance pushes teachers to question their profession and they regard QQ as a way out of that imbalance. Lastly, low motivation and commitment are regarded as the reasons for QQ among teachers. Accordingly, it is recommended to make the precarization process of the teaching profession visible, to abolish the practice of paid teaching, to regulate teacher salaries below the poverty line, to revise excessive workload causing work-life imbalance, to limit the expectation of being available outside of work hours, and to eliminate the elements that undermine teachers' organizational motivation and commitment.*

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## **Introduction**

An up-to-date Wall Street Journal article reveals that 50% of employees have minimized their organizational commitment and gone through QQ process (Smith, 2022). Even though the statistics itself unearths how dramatic the issue is, the phenomenon has gained popularity only recently. A TikTok video raised public awareness of the phenomenon by going viral, however, it was originally come up with by Mark Boldger in 2009 (Hitt, 2022). The fact that QQ has been a burning issue does not necessarily imply it is a new act. It is a longstanding movement for employees to make just enough effort to ensure they are not fired, but not go above and beyond (Lord, 2022). Employees have been quiet quitting for so long, but the movement was not given a

specific term in the literature till 2009. QQ basically refers to a case when employees keep on carrying out the necessary duties, yet they refrain from doing the OCBs (Klotz & Bolino, 2022). It is defined as a restricted commitment to actualize the allocated duties at work and abdicate any duties other than the ones defined in job description (Formica & Sfodera, 2022). What is more, the work efficiency and commitment of quiet quitters are emphasized to decrease considerably (Yildiz & Ozmenekse, 2022). That is, quiet quitters fulfill only the tasks required by the job and refrain from making an extra effort other than the compulsory duties. "Quiet quitters, therefore, are disengaged at work and do not intend to go above and beyond their line of duty" (Formica & Sfodera, 2022, p.900). In other words, quiet quitters are the employees who display no effort to enrich the organization they work for and move it forward, and who have resigned from their commitment to the organization in mental sense even though they do not resign formally.

The phenomenon of QQ, on the other hand, should not be confused with counterproductive work behavior (CWB). Although these concepts may seem similar in various ways, they differ in some points. CWB refers to certain practices that employees intentionally carry out in order to harm the organization or its stakeholders (Spector & Fox, 2005). Accordingly, "abuse toward others, production deviance, sabotage, theft, and withdrawal" are counted as the subscales of CWB (Spector et al., 2006, p.446). Within this scope, practices such as arriving late to school, ignoring a colleague or a student, and slowing down are regarded as CWBs. As is seen, CWB wrecks the organization and is carried out on purpose. Also, while there is a negative interaction with other stakeholders in CWB, the interaction pattern in QQ is minimum.



What is more, QQ and the concept of psychological contract are thought to be affined. The concept of psychological contract is characterized as “an individual’s beliefs regarding the terms of conditions of a reciprocal exchange agreement between the focal person and another party” (Rousseau 1989, p.123). That is, there are unwritten expectations and obligations regarding the work, working conditions and the reciprocal relationship between employees and managers (Rousseau & Tijoriwala, 1998, p.680). Such expectations and obligations fall into three dimensions which are transactional - mainly about monetary factors like salary-, relational -about socioemotional factors like security and adherence- and balance –the blend of the former two (Rousseau, 1995). The disappearance of such expectations and obligations for various reasons may cause employees to refrain from providing optimum benefit to the organization and they may choose to fulfill only the compulsory tasks in the end. To illustrate, an employee whose transactional psychological contract violated may choose to avoid going beyond the job specifications and become likely to quiet quit. Indeed, it is revealed psychological contract breach ends up with employees having limited contribution to the organization (Robinson & Morrison, 2000), which ultimately accord with the phenomenon of QQ. Furthermore, the breach causes employees to decline organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) and commitment (Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2000). According to Organ (1988) OCB refers to optional practices of the employees that are not enforced by the organization through legal regulations and that advances the efficiency in the organization. In that sense, it is obvious OCB has to do with voluntary practices of employees that are beyond legal obligations and that increase the overall efficiency of the organization, and that employees do not face any sanctions if they do not fulfill them. Therefore, regarding employees’ OCB will decrease in case of



psychological contract breach, it comes as no surprise that employees may naturally resort to the phenomenon of QQ. OCBs matter in that they encourage employees to go beyond their job descriptions, make sacrifices for the organization and do more than what is required. Yet, when withdrawal behaviors increase, employees refrain from providing added value to the organization and operate with minimum effort. Therefore, psychological contract breach might play a crucial role in triggering QQ act.

The act of QQ is believed to be closely associated with the pandemic and to be the outcome of Covid-19 pandemic (Formica & Sfodera, 2022). The pandemic has led to a remarkable transformation not only in people's way of socializing, their cultural and economic activities, and mindset, but also in their work processes, business manner, and perceptions of work. Employees who have gained awareness about the time they spare for themselves with shutdown and realized the importance of being at home with the implementation of the concepts such as flexible working and remote working, became aware of the fact that work is the sole focus in their lives and thus work started to mean less to them (Guler, 20223). For this reason, it is frequently stated that there is a close relationship between QQ and pandemic. However, attributing the source of this phenomenon solely to the pandemic may hide the main causes. Hare (2022) indicates that quiet quitters are mostly assumed to disengage at work so as to redress the balance between their private life and business life or to sustain their well-being under challenging workplace circumstances. Teachers, on the other hand, whose job descriptions are relatively more ambiguous than other occupational groups, are assumed to quiet quit due to not being able to sustain the balance between their work life and private life and probably for many other reasons. In accordance with the



Merrimack College Teacher Survey conducted by EdWeek Research Center 44% of teachers are on the verge of QQ (Heubeck, 2022). Considering the enormous impact of teachers' organizational commitment on teaching and learning processes, it is vital to address the phenomenon of QQ from teachers' perspective, in order to properly identify and resolve the problem.

QQ in educational settings is unique in that teachers are supposed to be emotionally and professionally dedicated to teach. Unlike other professions, teachers are to be engaged into their profession emotionally, physically and mentally since it has a profound impact on all other fields. When teachers quiet quit, they will only fulfill their basic obligations and refuse to do more, which will cause academic failure. Considering its extensive impacts on the society, it is of critical importance to address the phenomenon of QQ in education field and especially in teachers, who are the milestones of education. Based on this, revealing the signs of QQ and the factors that lead teachers to quiet quit is the foremost significant step to be taken to address the issue.

Since QQ is a current concept, there are few studies regarding the phenomenon in the literature. Formica and Sfodera (2022) examined the current case and future research directions of QQ on a large scale in their most cited studies on the phenomenon and concluded that work-life balance, flexibility, and the search for meaning at work play a role in QQ practices. Guler (2023) similarly, handled QQ in terms of causal factors, consequences, and methods of prevention and aimed to draw a conceptual framework for QQ phenomenon. Cimen and Yilmaz (2023) examined the causes and practices of QQ as well as the solutions to prevent it in their review article. In his descriptive study examining the sources related to the concept, Caliskan (2023)

addressed QQ from a broader perspective and focused on the consequences of QQ on employees and organizations. Arar et al., (2023), in their study, which framed QQ more specifically within the theories of Social Exchange, Conservation of Resources and Generations, categorized the antecedents of QQ as managerial/organizational factors and employee-based factors and revealed possible effects and solutions. Esen (2023), on the other hand, focused on QQ in the public sector within the framework of the pandemic and individual and organizational reasons affecting QQ, and examined the results of QQ. Mahand and Caldwell (2023) explored the causes of QQ in an organizational context and attributed it to managers' failure to successfully fulfill their basic leadership duties. Hamouche et al., (2023) examined QQ in terms of its effects on the tourism and accommodation sector by associating it with concepts such as burnout and job dissatisfaction.

Even if studies on QQ is limited in number, there are already some addressing teacher QQ. Tsemach and Barth (2023) studied the phenomenon of QQ among teachers. In their study they investigated the mediating role of teachers' organizational commitment in the relationship between authentic leadership and OCB and burnout (Tsemach & Barth, 2023). Yilmaz et al., (2024) also addressed the phenomenon specifically for teachers and developed a scale consisting of administrative and employee-based dimensions in their study, which aimed to develop a data collection tool to determine teachers' QQ behaviors. Likewise, in their study, Yucedaglar et al., (2024) developed a scale to reveal teachers' QQ levels.

This study, unlike the ones above, reveals the practices of QQ among teachers and the reasons that lead to it, beyond the scope of different variables and from a broader perspective. Therefore, the study is



supposed to form the basis for future QQ studies regarding teachers and education field.

### **Indications and Grounds of Quiet Quitting**

QQ is embodied in employees in a variety of ways. Yildiz and Ozmenekse (2022) argue that quiet quitters do not employ their imagination in work processes and do not take into consideration the organizational targets. That is, using imagination points out to innovation and it requires additional effort. Similarly, once the entire demands of an organization are considered, it indicates that employees need to contribute to many work-related processes and most probably need to reduce the time they allocate to their private lives. According to Klotz and Bolino (2022), quiet quitters are the employees who do not go out of working hours, do not stay overtime or show up early and do not participate in non-compulsory meetings. That is, quiet quitters do not choose to make self-sacrifice their private time and imbalance their work and privacy. Nonetheless, it is actually more than the time sacrifice issue. QQ refers to a silent protest that is anticipated to be recognized by the authorities (Youthall, 2022). The intervention in the privacy of employees, the expectation of being available by call or e-mail at all times and the demand of participation in meetings even at the weekends (Youthall, 2022) are among the protested factors. Furthermore, excessive workload, low wage, inflation and despair of promotion also triggers QQ act (Guler, 2023). Then, it is concluded when employees are dissatisfied with their wages or when they do not attach credence to the hope they will get promotion no matter how hard they work, they tend to show low engagement in their work. According to Tong, on the other hand, quiet quitters display “lack of motivation, underdevelopment of skills, lack of flexibility and inability to work in a team setting” (Tong, 2022). Quiet quitters do not yearn for





making any effort to advance since they mostly assume that there is no gain in return. Moreover, quiet quitters refuse to subscribe to hustle culture and reject working under time pressure (Rosalsky & Selyukh, 2022).

Even if Formica and Sfodera (2022) allege that pandemic has been a catalyst for the movement of QQ, it is estimated that there are many other factors pushing employees to quiet quit. As specified by Mahand and Caldwell “lack of commitment to career development, the failure to value employees, increasing employee disconnection, importance of employee autonomy” and “decline in organizational trust” lead employees to quiet quit (2023, p.10-11). Falling behind the expected salary and not being appreciated for the success at work may be counted as some of the other reasons behind QQ (Inbusiness, 2022). “The most important reason why employees quiet quit is that they want to improve or protect their mental health. There is also a desire to prevent burnout and alleviate or combat stress and ensure or achieve a better work-life balance” (Guler, 2023, p.250). That is, putting in too much effort for work life, working overtime and worrying about excessive workload turns into a source of psychological unease and ultimately creates an imbalance between work life and private life, which ultimately brings on QQ.

QQ is considered as a phenomenon stemming from the deterioration of well-being of employees, and therefore some reasons such as stress and burnout that trigger ill-being are listed among the components that induce QQ. Cooper (2022), on the other hand, states that employees who are made to feel worthless and who think that they are exploited in the workplace enter into a sort of QQ process. The exploitation of labor may often manifest itself in the form of excessive workload, attributing the work or success of an employee to someone

else, and sometimes demanding more than necessary in return for the wage.

According to the article by Kobal and Bati (2022), common reasons for the act of QQ may be listed as follows:

- Sense of worthlessness at work
- Lack of transparent communication in superior-subordinate relationship
- Mismatch between individual talents and job description
- Insufficient support from the institution and administrator in terms of personal, professional and technical development
- Inability to use creativity and limitation of creativity
- Inadequate encouragement and support of administrators to realize employees' full potential
- The ambiguity of the concept of working hours in the new working order (Kobal & Bati, 2022).

QQ is a phenomenon that has various negative consequences for employers, employees and society (Guler, 2023). Therefore, determining the factors giving rise to the QQ movement is crucial to get to the bottom of the problem and eliminate it. In this regard, whether the act of QQ exists among teachers and if so, its grounds should be determined.

### **Possible Contextual Features Strengthening Quiet Quitting Among Teachers in Turkey**

Turkey is quite unique in terms of contextual features that strengthen QQ. Factors such as economic contraction, precarization, reflections of

the pandemic, migration, and earthquake may be considered as factors that foster QQ among teachers.

The negative impact of the economic crisis in Turkey since 2018 on teachers' salaries should not be ignored. According to the results of the Hunger and Poverty Line Survey for July 2023 by the Turkish Trade Union Confederations (Turk-is), the poverty line for a family of 4 was determined as 39,975 TL. On the other hand, teacher salaries vary between 22,840 TL and 26,641 TL depending on seniority (Hurriyet, 2023). Apparently, teachers work for a salary below the poverty line assuming of being the only one who provides for the family. It is a known fact that falling behind the expected salary is one of the reasons for psychological contract breach, it reduces organizational commitment and OCB (Robinson & Morrison, 2000; Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2000) and thus, may be one of the reasons for QQ. Therefore, the issue of teacher salaries, which has been exacerbated by the economic contraction, has been a potential significant reason for QQ among teachers in Turkey.

Teachers have been subject to many economic and political changes on a global scale, such as privatization and de-unionization, and have become precarious and insecure (Castro, 2022). Teachers in Turkey are struggling with the precarization of teaching profession in many aspects, such as their labor, their prestige in society, being hired in different forms of employment, and inadequate personal rights, as well. It is a matter of research to what extent teachers, who are alienated from the teaching profession as a result of precarization, continue their psychological contracts. To illustrate, paid teaching practice, which is one of the different forms of employment in Turkey, is a form of employment in which teachers, regardless of whether they are graduates of the faculty of education or not, work in return for a



fee paid per lesson, exempt from various sanctions and fringe benefits, and without even having their insurance fully paid. The government eliminates the teacher shortage by assigning paid teachers, and thus the number of paid teachers has been increasing in recent years. Indeed, based on official figures, it is clear that the government is closing teacher shortage to a large extent through the employment of paid and contract teachers. (Dag, 2020). As of January 2023, the number of paid teachers working within the Ministry is 76,485 (Turk Egitim Sen, 2023). Teaching Professional Law, which was expected to be a solution to such problems, created a complete disappointment among teachers and could not meet their expectations, which can be considered as a factor strengthening the QQ movement. Furthermore, precarization basically creates economic insecurity (Kalleberg, 2009) and insecure working conditions and employment patterns disrupt teachers' well-being (Gomez & Klautau, 2021). In that case, employees resort to disengagement so as to balance their well-being (Hare, 2022). Therefore, it is estimated that precarization experienced by teachers and many factors it brings along may increase QQ. Compared to many other professional groups, teachers who experience a clear loss of prestige and financial problems profoundly experience ill-being, lose their organizational commitment in time and thus become likely to end up with QQ.

On the other hand, the transition to distance education with the pandemic has led to a great inequality of opportunity due to income inequality in Turkey. While some students did not have any or had limited access to the internet, others lacked the technological equipment to participate in online classes. Teachers were left alone to fight against this inequality of opportunity and had to cope with a serious learning gap after the pandemic. Some of the teachers also did

not have enough skills and motivation to use technological tools, they had difficulty in motivating students to learn and getting parent support (Aytac, 2021). Teachers who faced such difficulties stemming from the pandemic began to question their profession and the labor and time they devoted to it. The teaching profession, which is already demanding in nature, has become even more questioned by teachers with the distance education process. In addition to professional challenges they had never experienced before, teachers, like all other professions, enjoyed being at home and saw how valuable and indispensable the time they devoted to themselves was. Furthermore, employees enjoyed flexible working conditions, which pushed them to question working hours and nature of working (Esen, 2023). Therefore, pandemic is regarded as a strengthening factor of QQ among teachers, both because of the negative outcomes they got with distance education and because the imbalance between work and private life has become more visible.

Moreover, Turkey has faced an incredibly large wave of immigration in recent years, resulting in too many refugee students in schools. The process of refugee students participating in education was not managed very well, and as a result, the process was mostly left to the initiative of the teachers. However, teachers did not have the pedagogical competence or special training to deal with this. Ultimately, teachers viewed refugee students in their classrooms as a demotivating factor. Teachers perceived those students who did not speak the language and were unfamiliar with the education system in their classes as a source of workload and stress. It is a known fact that language barriers and cultural differences significantly affect integration. (Eksi at al., 2016). In that regard, teachers who faced problems such as language barriers, discipline problems, and cultural



problems (Taskin & Erdemli, 2018) had difficulty in the adaptation and many other processes and did not receive much support from the authorities and felt alone in the face of refugee education. Considering the wave of immigration refers to millions and its effects on teachers, it is not surprising immigration is an element that might strengthen QQ among teachers.

When talking about the reflection of QQ on teachers in the Turkish context, it is necessary to mention the two devastating earthquakes that occurred 9 hours apart and affected millions of people. Teachers suffered from inadequacy of infrastructure, ill-being, insecurity and many other aspects after the earthquake (Arici et al., 2023). Many factors such as the post-trauma process experienced by teachers affected by the earthquake, educational activities ongoing in containers, teachers' housing problems, and difficulties in accessing basic necessities may be counted as these aspects. It is not considered as a realistic expectation for teachers to show dedication and commitment to their profession and, moreover, to go beyond just what the job requires, when they have not yet met their basic needs such as housing, and feeling safe. What is more, teachers experienced low motivation, social and psychological problems after these earthquakes (Polat & Saricam, 2024). Setting out all these negative impacts, teachers may feel helpless and working may turn into meaningless practice, which is likely to end up with QQ. Therefore, all these factors may further consolidate the QQ process among teachers.

Teaching, unlike other professions, requires absolute well-being, commitment and dedication. When teachers experience any problems that may affect their well-being, they tend to reflect this on their students, exhibit aggressive behaviors and have negative attitudes towards students (Grayson & Alvarez, 2008). Therefore, it is possible

that teachers may be affected more by the above factors. Considering that education provides resources to all other fields, it is inevitable that QQ of teaching profession will be more prominent than that of others. In addition, unlike other professions, teaching includes many tasks that are not included in the job description. Sticking only to the legal obligations is essentially against the nature of the profession. Considering the input and output of education are human, it is obvious that the QQ of teachers is quite crucial than other professional groups.

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

The study was conducted on the basis of phenomenological design, which is one of the qualitative research methods. Phenomenology intend to unearth people's perceptions, evaluations and interpretations of a phenomenon in depth, based on their daily experiences and practices (Patton, 2014). Phenomenological studies mean to disclose the circumstances which may not be simply noticed like perceptions, impressions, judgments, and feelings of people about a phenomenon (Yildirim & Simsek, 2016). To this end, the study was designed according to the phenomenological pattern in order to reveal the participants' experiences regarding the phenomenon of QQ and to provide an in-depth data flow regarding the phenomenon.

The study has some limitations and constraints. We carried out the study with 13 volunteer teachers working in different state schools. Because of the limited number of participants, the findings of the study should not be easily generalized throughout all teachers. Besides, 5 of the participants rejected to be voice recorded as they felt uncomfortable.



## **Research Participants**

The participants of the study consist of 13 teachers working in diverse schools and selected by snowball sampling method, which is one of the nonprobability sampling methods. Nonprobability sampling methods enable the inclusion of participants who can express their thoughts on the research phenomenon from a broad perspective in clear and understandable language (Patton, 2014). Snowball sampling method is one of those methods and the researcher demands the participant to direct him to another participant (Etikan et al., 2016). It basically aims to find the participants who will ensure the enriched data flow to the study (Creswell, 2013). Since QQ is a more profound phenomenon than it sounds and can be confused with different concepts like OCB and CWB, snowball sampling method was employed in the study in order to include the participants who are thought to be informed of the phenomenon of QQ. In this context, the first participant who would provide in-depth data flow to the research was found, and interviews were held with the other participants from different schools who were found through successive guidance of the previous participant. The study contained 13 participants because the study reached the saturation point. The saturation point marks the point at which no further data flow is provided to the research (Creswell, 2013). Participants were coded as P1, P2, P3, ..., P12, P13 within the scope of the confidentiality of the study.

## **Data Collection**

The data of the study were collected using semi-structured interview form. The most favorable methods of collecting data for a phenomenological study are semi-structured interview form and face-to-face interviews (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). Besides, semi-structured interview form offers researchers the opportunity to alter



the questions to get a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Merriam, 2013).

In this regard, interview questions were prepared after reviewing the relevant literature, and the questions were revised in line with the feedback received from an expert in the field and a language specialist in the field of social sciences, which contributed to the reliability and transferability of the research. Pilot interviews were then conducted and after the feedback received from the participant, it was understood that the questions were suitable for data collection and the interview questions were finalized.

The interview protocol declaring the research's compliance with ethical principles was sent to the participants, and they were informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any phase. The interviews were held face to face in the settings specified by the participants and where they could express themselves comfortably. The interviews, which lasted approximately 30 minutes were then sent to the participants to check.

### **Data Analysis**

The data of the study were analyzed using content analysis technique. As a requirement of content analysis technique, the data were categorized into themes. Creswell and Creswell's (2018) data analysis steps were followed. First, the data were transcribed. Second, the text and the audios were compared to ensure accuracy and then, the data set was coded. After that, the relevant codes were grouped to form themes. Finally, the themes were revised once again.



## Findings

This part covers the themes of “Indications of QQ among Teachers” and “Reasons for QQ among Teachers”, which were formed based on the analysis of the data obtained from the interviews.

### Theme 1: Indications of Quiet Quitting among Teachers

All participants in the study agreed that QQ act exists among teachers. Accordingly, teachers listed the indications of QQ under 2 categories that are internal indications and external indications.

#### *Intrinsic Indications*

In most cases, quiet quitters are manifested externally by the actions they do or do not take, but sometimes it is expressed through internal feelings. Intrinsic symptoms essentially point to the emotional dimension, which is included within the scope of situations that can be expressed as the end of the psychological contract or the damage to organizational belonging and organizational commitment. Teachers’ loss of enthusiasm for their job, decreased motivation, and boredom while going to class are among the symptoms of QQ stated by the participants. To illustrate, P5 described QQ as “*losing the sense of belonging and commitment to the organization*”. P2, on the other hand, sees “*not having any desire to strive to be the best he can to be useful to people in the organization he works for*” as a sign of QQ. Another participant, P4, points out “*losing motivation and enthusiasm for work*” as the biggest symptom of QQ among teachers.

### *Extrinsic Indications*

The observable symptoms of QQ stated by the participants were holding back on tasks that were outside the job description, not taking on new tasks, and not taking responsibility for tasks that required them to spend overtime or outside working hours. P2 stated that teachers want to leave the school after completing their lesson hours and do not want to take part in an extra project or task as follows:

*Teachers do not want to attend meetings at the end of classes or they grumble about parent-teacher meetings on weekends. Most of the time, they perceive communicating with parents as too much workload. Especially, they do not want to carry out projects that are voluntary and of course take time. Because they always regard these jobs as waste of time.*

What is more, P9 argued that teachers are not willing to carry out extracurricular activities such as producing projects and taking part in competitions since it is a voluntary act as follows:

*Most teachers see extracurricular activities as a joe job. They do not want to participate in a competition or produce their own project and so on. These types of activities are actually very beneficial for students. But unfortunately, teachers do not tire themselves because there is no sanction for not doing them.*

Another participant, P12, emphasized that some teachers set limits on communication with parents and shared that they do not answer calls, especially after school. His opinions on work-life imbalance is as below:

*Not answering parent calls in the evening or not sharing a phone number with parents at all may be included in this. In fact, there is a*

*very valid reason for that because teachers also have a private life and they do not have to spend their own time after school on these.*

## **Theme 2: Reasons for Quiet Quitting Among Teachers**

What participants listed as the reasons for QQ are grouped under 5 categories that are financial incapability, precarization process, pandemic, work-life imbalance, and low motivation and commitment.

### ***Financial Incapability***

Almost all of the participants point to financial incapability as the biggest reason that caused teachers' psychological contract breach and triggered QQ process over time. They shared that teachers who struggle with financial difficulties do not try to work heartily. Therefore, the expectation of high performance from teachers who are concerned about meeting their primary needs is considered unrealistic. In this regard, P5 stated her view as follows:

*Considering the economic conditions of the country, the teaching profession does not satisfy almost many of its employees. It must be a dream to expect productivity from a teacher who worries about the rent of his house or the education expenses of his own children. As we all know, it is not possible for individuals who cannot meet their basic needs to move up to higher levels. It may be an exaggeration to say that teachers cannot meet their physiological needs, but it is a well-known fact that their welfare level is not very high. For this reason, as in many examples around me, economic reasons push many of my colleagues away from their profession. There are teachers who say this much work for this much salary and unfortunately I cannot say that I find this statement unfair.*

Moreover, teachers emphasized that they labor in line with the low salary they receive, and such low salary make their profession meaningless and worthless. As a result of this, they believe that QQ is an unavoidable process for teachers. P8's opinion on this matter is as follows:

*Not receiving the deserved salary in return for the labor is the main reason for QQ. Teaching is already a challenging profession by nature, and in order to make it bearable, it is necessary to offer at least financial satisfaction. After all, we work for money like everyone else, but when the salary is lower than almost all professional groups, the labor we put in becomes worthless and meaningless. We become alienated from our profession and then we enter a process of QQ.*

Similarly, teachers emphasized that the unhappiness caused by financial difficulties played a key role in their receding from their profession. P3 shares her opinion about it as follows:

*If your salary runs out just as you receive it, if you think twice about everything you buy, you question what you are doing. Therefore, you get unhappy. Unhappiness pulls you away from your profession and you can no longer continue it from the heart. If you are so desperate that you cannot resign, you resign from your heart.*

### ***Precarization***

Besides the financial challenges, teachers expressed that they entered into a sort of silent protest due to the fact that their professions got precarious. They claimed that reasons such as loss of prestige, deterioration of their labor, and inadequate personal rights caused precarization on the teacher's, which was associated with QQ. They put forward several views that the prestige withdrawal of the teaching profession in society day by day caused great disappointment among

teachers. The manifestation of such process appeared in the form of low engagement in their work at school. To illustrate, P5 stated that the respect she did not get from society in return for the sacrifices she made towards her profession led her to question the teaching profession and the sacrifices she devoted to it over time.

*As teachers, we knew what awaited us when we started this profession and that the main thing was to make sacrifices where necessary. However, while constantly striving unilaterally and losing prestige in return, this pushes many teachers, including me, to question, "Who am I doing this for?" This causes significant reduce in the level of professional dedication. Apart from that, another issue that wears us out is that the teaching profession is seen as an ordinary civil servant profession.*

What is more, the fact that teachers have limited personal rights brings about many QQ practices. Participants state that the uncertainty they face, especially due to the working conditions of private school teachers and the fact that private schools do not act in accordance with legal regulations, results in QQ. For instance, P3, as a private school teacher, explained that her commitment to her job was shaken with the following striking expressions:

*Teachers think that their personal rights are not implemented in accordance with the regulations. Especially teachers in private schools do not even have insurance, they earn minimum wage, they try to survive in the minimum way possible, and it is not clear how long they will have even these minimum conditions. It is not clear whether they will be fired tomorrow or how long they will work. A teacher who does not have sufficient personal rights, does not have sufficient financial income, and is worried about the future cannot even sleep comfortably at night, let alone fulfill his profession. It is quite unfair*

*and cruel to give teacher forty minutes of hell and expect them to offer heaven.*

Another reason for QQ among teachers turned out to be the paid teaching practice. Three of the teachers highlighted the practice as a source of loss of prestige and regarded that it caused the teaching profession to seem simple in the eyes of the society. To illustrate, P1 stated that *“The paid teaching practice creates the perception that teaching is simple and can be performed by anyone. Sometimes people who are not even graduates of faculty of education are put into classrooms. Teaching is not such a simple profession”*. Similarly, P4 stated that paid teaching practice creates a feeling of disrespect in teachers and that such a feeling prevents teachers from performing their jobs to their full potential. *“Can the prestige of teachers be questioned in a system where teacher shortage is catered with paid teachers? Can teachers who feel disrespected be expected to make sacrifices for their profession and want to do their best?”*

### ***Pandemic***

The pandemic has caused radical changes in business life, both because of the change in working order due to the lockdown and the emergence of the reality of remote working, and because people can spare time to think about work. Teachers, like other professional groups, have found time to think about issues such as the time and sacrifice they devote to their profession. Teachers who have switched to remote working and taught through distance education for a while have gained awareness of the realities of school and education, and some have now realized that the time they spare for themselves is more valuable than business life. Two of the participants stated that teachers alienated from their profession with the pandemic and students had an adaptation problem. For example, P4 stated that returning to school



was difficult after the pandemic, and that both teachers and students had an adaptation problem:

*“After the pandemic it was hard for students to adapt to school. Of course, teachers as well, gradually moved away from work and became reluctant. Then, teachers also had to motivate the reluctant students while they themselves were demotivated.”* P7, on the other hand, evaluated that the economic contraction experienced with the pandemic and parents’ increasing authority over teachers with distance education are among the factors that increase the dose of QQ: *“As economic difficulties and inflation increased with the pandemic, it became challenging to survive with low salary. The pressure of parents within the school and on teachers has increased. This increased the dose of QQ experienced by teachers.”* Another participant, P6, stated that the responsibility of teachers increased even more in distance education and that closing the authority gap caused by the low interest of parents tired teachers and caused them to get bored with their profession. *“That some parents put all the responsibility on teachers and did not pay enough attention to their kids caused teachers to get tired and dissatisfied with teaching.”*

Moreover, teachers had time to reflect with the lockdown and made some evaluations about their lifestyles and professions due to the emotions caused by losing loved ones. P10 marked that people’s loved ones died in the pandemic and they realized that there were more important things than work and that work was actually meaningless: *“The fact that people were struggling with their health and even lost their loved ones during the pandemic showed that life was hanging by a thread and that things outside of that were not very important.”*

Teachers also, got used to the comfortable working environment at home thanks to distance education that started with the lockdown. The absence of distractors at home that were quite abundant in school





setting become more prominent to teachers when they switched to face-to-face education. For this reason, when teachers returned to school, they resorted to QQ due to both the more uncomfortable working conditions and the extra time they spent on preparation and the distractors that demotivated them. To exemplify, P7 shared that:

*Being in a comfortable environment during the pandemic was perfect. Home was relaxing for us, we didn't have to get up very early, we were away from the noise in the classroom. Yet, when we were back to the school, these all were even harder for us than before.*

### ***Work-Life Imbalance***

QQ is seen as a way out of the imbalance between private life and work life. Factors such as overtime and excessive workload may require employees to sacrifice the time they spend on their private lives, followed by work-life imbalance. In addition, factors causing such imbalances result in stress, and this stress also reflects in employees' private lives. When employees realize that these factors affect their private lives, their motivation and dedication to work decreases. To illustrate, P9 states that making sacrifices for work will disrupt the work-life balance and therefore teachers will avoid making such sacrifice: *"The teacher who self-sacrifices for his job knows that he will compromise his private life, so he never attempts and gives up immediately."*

Excessive workload is also considered among the reasons for QQ. Teachers are busy with many other tasks besides teaching. P12 states that most of the paperwork that teachers do is spread over the time that teachers spend on their private lives. For this reason, he says that teachers are disengaged in their work and only do the tasks that they have to do, as follows:



*We, teachers, have a lot of work to do outside of the classroom and even school, such as assessment and evaluation activities, club reports, collaboration with parents, and feedback. In other words, we already take work home. Excessive workload weighs down teachers. As a result, teachers just want to do the job and leave school. No one wants to overshadow the time they spend with their family and themselves or their mental peace with work and work stress.*

Similarly, P11 claims that being a teacher is a means to earn to sustain life and any extra effort causes teachers to spare less time on themselves. P11's thoughts on how establishing balance is also important to avoid stress are as follows:

*If we put in extra effort for work in our private lives or keep thinking about work, this will stress us out. After all, we were not born to work and be teachers. It is important not to lose balance. After all, teaching is a means to earn money, not an end.*

#### ***Low motivation and commitment***

When employees have low motivation and commitment, they choose to overcome them by resorting to QQ (Scheyett, 2022). Teachers stated in their interviews that their motivation decreased and that they had difficulty doing extracurricular activities at school. To illustrate, P13 shares that teachers have no professional motivation and the administrators do not appreciate them enough, and they do not receive sufficient financial support. Due to all these, to him, teachers choose to do whatever the regulations require as follows:

*As teachers, there is nothing left to motivate us anymore. Neither salary nor fringe benefits are adequate, nor do our school administrators appreciate the extra work we do. In that case, we do what we have to do. Doing projects and participating in competitions*

*feels like a burden. There is no reason to do more because we don't feel like it.*

P10 uttered that teachers have limited organizational commitment and have difficulty in developing a sense of commitment towards the school and their profession. For this reason, they only fulfill the primary tasks required by legal texts as follows:

*I think teachers do not embrace school, they do not embrace their job. However, school should feel like home. Teachers are emotionally disconnected from school. We find it difficult to work hard for our students. That is why, teachers, unfortunately, only fulfill their basic obligations.*

Similarly, P4 pointed out that teachers lack unity of purpose and it deteriorates organizational commitment. P4's opinion on low motivation leading to several problems including QQ is as below:

*I believe there is no unity of purpose among teachers. Some are concerned with finishing the curriculum, some are concerned with just filling the hours. For this reason, the sense of belonging to their profession and commitment is weak. Of course, this brings along many problems. Schools are not advancing, teachers lack of enthusiasm and are displeased, student success is not increasing, etc.*

### **Discussion**

According to the research results, there is a phenomenon of QQ among teachers. Although QQ practices are mostly made visible through the way teachers fulfill their duties or the duties and responsibilities they refrain from fulfilling, they are sometimes processed internally. It has been revealed that the internal processes experienced by teachers due to the termination of the psychological contract and the damage to



organizational belonging and commitment are among the invisible symptoms of QQ. As a matter of fact, when the psychological contract is eliminated on the employee side, organizational commitment, job satisfaction and performance decrease (Salin & Notelaers, 2018; Knights & Kennedy, 2005). In this case, teachers who unilaterally terminate their psychological contract also experience a QQ process, as revealed by internal symptoms such as losing motivation for their profession and decreasing commitment and belonging to the school.

The study reveals that the extrinsic indications of QQ stated by the teachers are holding back on duties that are outside the job description, not taking on new duties, and not taking responsibility for duties requiring them to spend overtime or outside working hours. As stated by Klotz and Bolino (2022), QQ may emerge as not going beyond working hours, not staying overtime, not coming to job early, or not taking part in optional tasks. In that case, the fact that teachers want to leave the school directly after completing their lesson hours, do not run non-compulsory projects or participate in any of them, avoid attending parent-teacher meetings and any work included in the duties of other teachers reveals that teachers may be regarded as quiet quitters. QQ is a state of limited commitment of employees to the job and refers to the cases of not going beyond the job description (Formica & Sfodera, 2022). However, that even the act of teaching, which is the primary duty of teachers, is sometimes not carried out with sufficient care is also a very observable symptom of QQ among teachers.

As for the reasons pushing teachers to quiet quit, financial incapability, precarization process, pandemic, work-life imbalance, and low motivation and commitment come to the fore. To begin with, according to the results of the research, financial difficulties reduce the motivation of teachers and cause them to lose their commitment and

dedication to their profession. The fact that teachers work for a salary below the poverty line makes their profession worthless and meaningless in their eyes. As Guler (2023) indicates, low wage and inflation triggers QQ. Then, it is obvious that teachers who are dissatisfied with their wages tend to show low engagement in their work. What is more, teacher's not receiving the salary they deserve is a form of exploitation, and according to Cooper (2022), employees who are made to feel worthless and who think that they are exploited in the workplace enter into a sort of QQ process. In their study Ozen et al., (2024), comes up with a parallel results and they find out that economic sufficiency teachers face with contributes to teacher QQ.

In addition to the financial difficulties, teachers enter in the process of QQ due to the fact that their professions got precarious. Loss of prestige, deterioration of their labor, and inadequate personal rights causes precarization of teaching profession, which is associated with QQ. The prestige withdrawal of the teaching profession in society gives rise to great disappointment among teachers and such process results in the form of low engagement in their work at school.

In parallel with the result of this study, Ozen et al., (2024) concluded that when society's perception of teachers deteriorates, teachers feel devalued, which contributes to the QQ level of teachers. Another reason for QQ among teachers turns out to be the paid teaching practice which is regarded as a source of loss of prestige in the eyes of the society. This type of employment and precarization process also affect the well-being of teachers (Gomez & Klautau, 2021). Under these conditions, it is unrealistic to expect teachers to demonstrate their full potential in their profession. According to the results of the research, reasons such as precarious working conditions that teachers are



exposed to and the lack of implementation of legal regulations in private schools also cause teachers to quiet quit.

The pandemic, on the other hand, provided teachers, like other professional groups, with the opportunity to find enough time to contemplate on their profession, the time they devote to work, and their dedication. Also, the adaptation problem of both teachers and students experienced in returning to school, which is one of the consequences of the pandemic, also caused teachers to experience difficulties and ultimately to move away from their jobs as it gave rise to a great motivation loss among teachers. Furthermore, with pandemic people lost their relatives, felt lonely and restricted and thus, they pursued things that would give meaning to their lives (Aydin & Azizoglu; Li & Wang, 2020). Therefore, the meaning they attached to their profession faded in time. What is more, the pandemic enabled people to enjoy being home and working comfortably. Esen's (2023) study also reveals that employees enjoyed flexible working setting during the pandemic and being back to workplace gave rise to QQ.

Another result of the study is that among the reasons why teachers are counted as quiet quitters is they aspire to readjust the imbalance between the work and life. Aydin and Azizoglu (2022), similarly found out employees choose to quiet quit to eliminate the imbalance and sustain their state of well-being. Likewise, in their study, Ogan and Cetiner (2024) mark that employees develop QQ in the face of excessive workload, taking work home, the expectation of being available outside of work hours, which refers to work-life imbalance. As a matter of fact, many teachers have noticed that the balance between work and private life has increased in favor of work and this has become a big problem. Indeed, quiet quitters do not choose to make self-sacrifice their private time and imbalance their work and

privacy. Thus, teachers chose to quiet quit on realizing such imbalance. As pointed out by Hare (2022), quiet quitters mostly disengage at work in order to avoid the imbalance between their private life and business life.

Lastly, teachers also quiet quit as a result of low motivation and commitment. Detert's (2023) study supports that declined commitment and motivation manifest as QQ in employees. Excessive workload, conflicts in the organization, and inflexibility results in motivation loss (Tong, 2022) and it is followed by QQ because it is defined as low motivation stemming from enormous workload, financial challenges and setting a boundary for that reason (Ogan & Çetiner, 2024). Furthermore, restricted commitment leads employees to lose their enthusiasm to further work (Formica & Sfodera, 2022). Indeed, this is thought to be a reciprocal relation. QQ also brings on low organizational commitment (Harter, 2022). Thus, low motivation and commitment play a key role in QQ act of teachers.

In conclusion, the study reveals that teachers are part of the QQ act. Teachers' QQ practices exist in both their internal processes and external practices. Teachers' ending their psychological contract, organizational commitment and belonging are internal symptoms, while holding back on duties that are outside the job description, not taking on new duties, and not taking responsibility for duties requiring them to spend overtime or outside working hours are external symptoms. Moreover, there are various factors that cause teachers to quiet quit. Teachers tend to quiet quit because the meaning they attach to their profession is deteriorated and their efforts are rendered worthless due to the financial challenges they experience. Moreover, over time, they tend to quiet quit due to such challenges and the precarization they experience due to the paid teaching practice and the



loss of prestige in the society. Pandemic is also among the reasons that lead teachers to quiet quit due to the loss of motivation, visibility of work-life imbalance and inflexible working conditions. Finally, work-life imbalance as well as low motivation and commitment give rise to QQ among teachers.

In this context, the suggestions made regarding the study results are as follows:

- Efforts to make the precarization process of the teaching profession visible in the eyes of society can play a role in reducing the QQ movement by disrupting precarization and increasing teachers' professional commitment.
- The practice of paid teaching causes the teaching profession to become worthless and leads to QQ, so the practice should be abolished.
- Teachers' salaries, which are below the poverty line, should be regulated and teachers should be motivated to pursue a profession in which they believe they can get financially rewarded with what they deserve.
- Excessive workload causing work-life imbalance should be revised and the expectation of being available outside of work hours should be legally limited
- Elements that undermine teachers' organizational motivation and commitment should be eliminated from the organization culture.



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