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School Principals' Opinions on the Meaning and Sources of Workload

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to examine various factors affecting workload of principals including psychological effects and coping strategies. A semi-structured interview was conducted with 13 principals. Participants consisted of primary and secondary school principals in a province in the Western Black Sea Region, Turkey. According to the research, principals perceive workload as work that limits the time, they want to devote to improving education. Therefore, the main sources of workload were perceived as having to run errands at school, time pressure, human resource-based problems, unnecessary formal daily routines and high e-mail volume. Finally, it was found that principals' coping strategies were not effective, and that workload caused work-family conflict, stress and emotional wear and tear. Thus, this research contributes to the theoretical framework related to workload. It is suggested to organize bureaucratic procedures in schools, share leadership, establish training programs for principals, raise awareness of principals on time management, and employ assistant principals and other technical personnel where there is staff shortage.

Key words: Principals, Workload, Workload sources

Introduction

There are some factors that increase workload of principals in educational organizations such as unplanned work, school funding, formal correspondence, time allocated to solve communication problems at school (Oplatka, 2017), prolonged and poorly managed meetings, multiplicity of documents, reports to be completed, and time spent for face-to-face or telephone interviews with stakeholders (Poirel, Lapointe, and Yvon, 2012). Likewise, statutory audits, legal expansion of principals' responsibilities (Royal, 2008; Wells, 2013), some new tasks arising from education reforms (McGuinn, 2012; Miller, 2015), high level of community participation in schools (Hauseman, Pollock and Wang, 2017), dealing with uncertainty (Starr and White, 2008) and mandatory implementation of new practices through legal tasks and guidelines (Klocko and Wells, 2015) cause inflated workload. In addition, bureaucratic work (Şahin, 2007), community pressure (Royal, 2008), school-based management (Wylie, 1997), and intensive use of information technologies in school management (Pollock and Hauseman, 2019; Schiller, 2003; Crawford, 2012; Saidun, Tahir and Musah, 2015), reducing the number of assistant principals due to budgetary constraints, accountability policies and demands of local policy makers may increase workload of principals (West, Peck, Reitzug and Crane, 2014).

Perceived workload may be either objective or subjective. The number of employees' duties may be the same for all employees, but each may feel a different sense of work. Therefore, the concept of perceived workload may vary according to individuals' perceptions (Van der Doef and Maes, 1999). As a matter of fact, subjective workload expresses one's views about the relative difficulty or ease of one's own work, while objective workload includes evaluations about the quantity of work. The amount of work is related to the measurable aspect (Bowling and Kirkendall, 2012). According to the studies related to workload, the objective or subjective perception of workload can lead to different perceptions of the difficulty of the work. The most important reason for this is expressed as the similarity of perceived stress and the factors that make up the perceived workload. The presence of stress is also associated with the perceptions of the individual (Bowling, Alarcon, Bragg and

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Hartman, 2015). As a result, employees perceive their work or task as subjective. Individuals who do the same work perceive it in different ways (Oplatka, 2017).

Different factors may affect workload of employees. Uncertain expectations of managers (House and Rizzo, 1972), an extremely busy time at work (Rutherford, 2001), work behaviour standards at the workplace (Adams, Lugsden, Chase, Arber and Bond, 2000), inadequate numbers of employees and setting unrealistic targets (Rowley and Purcell, 2001), pressures stressing employees (Hsieh, 2004), and interventions in organizations (Fong, 2004) are among the reasons that increase workload. In addition, individuals' undermined sense of autonomy (Ahuja, Chudoba, Kacmar, McKnight and George, 2007) and absence of supportive cultural characteristics of organizations can lead to high perceived workload (Duxbury, Lyons and Higgins, 2008).

The important factors in high perceived workload include poor time management skills, lack of social support, working too hard, unskilled workers, negative personality traits, and work-family conflicts (Bowling et al., 2015; Bowling and Kirkendall, 2012). Moreover, unplanned business processes, use of technology, competitive environment, globalization, low autonomy in individuals' work, unhealthy organizational culture, rise in customer expectations, unclear business goals and insufficient resources in the organization increase perceived workload (Gryna, 2004).

Workload has some negative effects. These negative effects of workload have been studied in some different organizations. Workload adversely affects the well-being of employees, leads to quitting work and absenteeism, and reduces emotional commitment to work (Bowling et al., 2015). In addition, workload reduces in-role job performance and negatively affects employees' organizational commitment and productivity (Bowling and Kirkendall, 2012). It also increases the chances of developing some health problems (Zunker, 2008), leads to emotional exhaustion (Greenglass, Burke and Fiksenbaum, 2001) and causes work-family conflict (Goh, Ilies, and Wilson, 2015). Similarly, workload has some negative outcomes in educational organizations. For example, some principals tend to quit due to heavy workload (Wu, 2005), do not pay enough attention to students with special needs (Naz and Sulman, 2012) and spend more time in administrative and managerial tasks in schools instead of instructional leadership (Brauckmann et al., 2015). Moreover, workload increases burnout levels of principals (Yıldırım and Dinç, 2019), which is a source of personal stress (Borg Mark, 1993). Therefore, most individuals lose work-life balance due to heavy workload (Crawford, 2012). Thus, many principals are under heavy pressure due to their workload and have difficulty in fulfilling their duties and responsibilities.

Most workload literature examined the correlations between workload and different variables. These studies were designed by quantitative methods (Bowling et al., 2015; Zunker, 2008; Yıldırım and Dinç, 2019). Accordingly, the factors that make up the workload and the situational factors in the perception of the workload should be put forward. Thus, examining individuals' personal opinions about workload can show how workload changes on a personal level over time (Bowling et al., 2015). On the other hand, schools are in an environment where workload can be perceived differently because of their organizational characteristics and structure. In addition, it is important to broaden the theoretical knowledge of how principals perceive workload in schools. Thus, it is crucial to define types of workload in schools, understand subjective perspectives of school members and stakeholders, and expand the understanding of workload in educational organizations (Oplatka, 2017). Understanding subjective and objective workload will help to fill in the gap in the conceptual framework for how workload is perceived (French and Caplan, 1972). Consequently, identifying sources of principals' workload can contribute to improving schools (Leithwood and Azah, 2014).

The national literature demonstrates clearly that research on workload of principals is limited. For example, Demirkasımoğlu (2015) noted that sources of the workload of principals were bureaucratic and managerial work. Student affairs, teaching affairs, personnel affairs, interviews with parents, and activities related to official correspondence were found to be important factors in forming the workload. Karabulut (2015) found that workload perception differed depending on the type of school. Principals in kindergartens perceived workload at a lower level than high school principals did. Ural (2002), on the other hand, found that workload was due to lack of qualified personnel, having to do a lot of work in a short period of time, unequal school funding and allocating a long time to official correspondence. Other research shows that principals dealt with problems irrelevant to good teaching practice (Turan and Yalçın, 2015) such as repairing damaged things in schools (Özer and Kış, 2015), school funding, misbehaving students (Demirtaş and Özer, 2014), problems with education policies, and general and administrative affairs (Çınkır, 2010). In addition, time devoted to solving communication problems in schools (Aslanargun and Bozkurt, 2012), frequently requested reports by senior principals (Çelikten, 2004), lack of assistant principals (Baltacı, 2017), financial problems, school-family

conflict (Demirkasımođlu, 2015), lack of management skills (Altun, 2011), poor time management skills (Altun, 2011), and time devoted to matters other than education and training (Aydın, 2016; Şahin, 2007) emerge as principal workload. In this respect, the national literature frequently emphasises that principals experience an overload because of external pressures, bureaucratic and unplanned work and time allocated for solving communication problems at school. The international and national literature on workload has highlighted occupational groups in different organizations rather than the school organization (e.g., Bolat, 2011; Bowling et al., 2015; Bowling and Kirkendall, 2012; Ilies et al., 2015; Keser and Gedikođlu, 2008). In some studies conducted in educational organizations, teachers' perceptions of workload and their relationship with different variables were examined (Ballet and Kelchtermans, 2009; Cerit and Özdemir, 2015; Easthope and Easthope, 2000; Timperley and Robinson, 2000). Interestingly, however, studies on how principals perceive and manage workload are very limited (e.g. Brauckmann et al., 2015; Demirkasımođlu, 2015; Leithwood and Azah, 2014; Oplatka, 2017; Starr and White, 2008). In addition, there are also some studies on the relationship between the workload of principals and different variables (Poirel et al., 2012; Wu, 2005), what can be done to reduce principal workload (Berntson, Wallin, and Härenstam, 2012), and the effects of activities aimed at ensuring community participation on principals' workload. (Hauseman et al., 2017). In this respect, it can be stated that there is a need for new studies examining workload perceptions of principals from different perspectives. This study seeks answers to three research questions:

- (i) What are the factors constituting the workload of principals?
- (ii) What are the effects of workload on principals?
- (iii) What are the coping strategies of principals?

Theoretical framework

Workload has several definitions. It is defined as intensity of individuals' effort to finish a job (Bowling and Kirkendall, 2012), or pressure related to completion of work-related demands in a limited time (Huey and Wickens, 1993; Ilies, Huth, Ryan, and Dimotakis, 2015). Another definition sees workload as a high level of intense mental effort spent on controlling and supervising (Curry, Jex, Levison, and Stassen, 1979). It is also defined as the perception of an individual's amount of work above his/her own capacity (Elloy and Smith, 2003). Furthermore, the concept of the workload of employees is defined as stress and pressure due to time limitation and amount of work (Demerouti, Bakker, and Bulters, 2004; Geurts, Kompier, Roxburgh, and Houtman, 2003; Ilies et al., 2007; Janssen, Peeters, de Jonge, Houkes, and Tummers, 2004; Jex, 1998). The workload literature generally refers to the concept of overload (Oplatka, 2017). Excessive workload is perceived by employees as compelling, heavy and excessive (Greenhaus, Parasuraman, Granrose, Rabinowitz, and Beutell, 1989).

According to the literature, workload is defined as a multifaceted structure because of its complex nature (Bowling and Kirkendall, 2012). Workload may be classified as qualitative or quantitative (Bowling and Kirkendall, 2012), mental or physical (Dwyer and Ganster, 1991), and objective or subjective (Caplan, 1971). Of these, qualitative workload is related to the difficulty of the work. Quantitative workload is related to the amount of work (Bowling and Kirkendall, 2012). Qualitative workload arises when employees are expected to perform complex and difficult tasks. Quantitative workload occurs when employees are expected to perform different tasks in a given time frame (Cooper and Marshall, 1976). Some classify workload as either mental or physical. Mental workload is the workload of activities that require the use of mental skills of an individual (McCormick and Sanders, 1992). It also characterizes the demand of tasks on a human's limited mental resources (Wickens, 1979, 2008). Physical workload is the energy used by the individual during the performance of a task and the amount of physical effort spent. Physical workload can also refer to short-term physical reactions of the body (de Zwart, Frings-Dresen, and van Dijk, 1996; Kuijjer, Visser, and Kemper, 1999).

Method

Research Model

The aim of this research is to explore in detail how principals experience workload. This research was designed in accordance with phenomenology approach. Phenomenology explains how individuals relate to events in the world they live in. The nature of social events is complex and difficult to understand. In order to understand

social events deeply, detailed studies are needed (Patton, 1987). Schools are exposed to high demands from their environment. Therefore, principals are expected to respond to the demands of stakeholders, which increases principal workload. This paper examines workload to identify how it is perceived by principals. The meanings, and the emotions they experience in relation to this concept are revealed. Thus, it is aimed to understand the common meanings of the concept (Creswell and Poth, 2017).

Study Group

In order to find answers to the research questions, 13 primary and secondary school principals were interviewed. All the principals work in public schools. The participants of the study were all male. The age of the principals ranged from 33 to 59 years. The professional seniority of the principals was between 3 and 23 years. All the principals work in provincial schools in the Western Black Sea Region of Turkey. The number of students in the schools is between 114-850. Table 1 provides information on the qualifications of the principals.

Table 1: Participants' Demographic Characteristics

Participants	Gender	Age	Professional seniority	Number of students	School type
P1	M	46	4	802	Primary
P2	M	46	6	853	Primary
P3	M	48	16	126	Secondary
P4	M	46	6	850	Primary
P5	M	55	10	250	Primary
P6	M	52	12	457	Secondary
P7	M	35	4	320	Secondary
P8	M	33	5	114	Primary
P9	M	40	3	782	Primary
P10	M	51	16	460	Primary
P11	M	46	6	438	Primary
P12	M	59	17	302	Primary
P13	M	48	23	125	Primary

Data collection and analysis process

A semi-structured questionnaire was used in the process of data collection. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to examine the participants' thoughts about workload deeply (Patton, 1987). The researchers first searched the literature on the field of workload and obtained the first version of the research questions. The findings and questions in the study conducted by Oplatka (2017) were used in the preparation of the research questions.

Criterion sampling, one of the purposeful sampling methods, was used in the study. In this method, it is necessary to access situations and participants that meet the predetermined criteria (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2011). 20 principals were contacted first. Principals who did not meet these criteria were not included in the study. In this respect, the participants of this study, namely 13 principals, had at least 3 years' experience and felt overloaded at school. Then, the interviews with the 13 principals were conducted. The interviews lasted 30-50 minutes on average. Before going to the interview, the principals were asked to make an appointment for a suitable period of time. Interviews were recorded and then analysed.

First, similar data were organized, and codes and categories were created. Then, the codes and categories were established independently. In addition, tests were made in accordance with the codes, categories and themes and alternative explanations were used when necessary (Marshall and Rossman, 2010). After that, the theme of the research was determined as the top component of the situations that the interviewers frequently repeated and underlined, based on the sub-categories and codes that emerged. Similar statements were given the same codes. Any coded item was compared in terms of emerging categories and sub-categories (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). In order to increase credibility, interviewer statements and direct quotations were included in the research. Thus, the level of overlap between the interpretation of the data and the expressions becomes visible. The themes, sub-themes and codes that the researchers revealed were re-examined by another researcher specialized in the field.

In addition, two experts in the field of educational management examined the given codes and themes and confirmed the consistency between the codes and themes.

Findings

In this section, three themes and sub-themes reflecting the perspectives of the principals that emerged for the purposes of the research are given. The three main themes are as follows: (i) Factors that determine principals' workload perceptions (ii) Effects of workload on principals' lives (iii) Methods of coping with workload. The principals in the research are coded as P1, P2, P3, etc., and these codes are used in direct quotations in this section.

Factors determining the workload perceptions of principals

When the workload perceptions of principals were examined, 5 different sub-themes emerged. These themes were: (i) responsibility for everything, (ii) diversity of workload sources, (iii) lack of time, (iv) problems with human resources, and (v) high e-mail volume. These sub-themes are the main factors that make up the workload.

Being responsible for everything

This factor indicates that workload limits of principals are not clear. When principals were asked about their workload, it is seen that almost everything related to school management such as paperwork, budget or physical conditions of the buildings are evaluated under the responsibility of principals' workload. Principals state that they have a wide range of responsibilities. It is mainly principals who are responsible for everything in the school:

The principal is responsible for everything; the responsibility belongs to me! When there is a negative situation in the school, all responsibility belongs to me! The principal is effective in making decisions; I have to give all the approvals. These are the things that make up the principal's workload. P3.

I can describe it as all the work and operations under the responsibility of a principal. [...] I can say anything..., responsibility to the top principals, paperwork and follow-up, that is, all the work and operations of the principal. P11.

Principals argue that many of the events that emerge as a source of workload are actually unnecessary things that make it difficult to be involved, or prevent or restrict them from being involved in educational activities. These events occur suddenly, take a long time to complete, and are related to some areas that exceed their own skills and require technical skills. Principals state that it is annoying to deal with these things that have no purpose and do not contribute to education:

Sudden events can prevent the principal from being planned. There is no money; and I have to find that resource expected from me; it's really time-consuming. However, the principal should act as a role model for students, teachers and employees. Such non-educational activities can prevent this, in terms of time. In addition to being an educator, the principal must also think like a security guard. Tasks such as security, repairs, financial resources, plumbing, and office work full of paperwork often prevent management and leadership duties. This is a tedious workload that transcends our expertise. P12.

Although some principals are busy with unclear tasks during the day, the most important and desired activities of the principals are educational activities:

Do you know what I really want to do? The implementation of the education programs based on the upbringing of these students, the follow-up of the students' gains on the basis of courses, focusing on solutions of their various problems, the follow-up of the teachers' works closely, the education of the students as well as the education of the parents. I want to do all these kinds of work for monitoring and organization of educational needs. P2.

Diversity of workload sources

This factor reveals that the workload of the principals is quite high. Principals stated that they have a wide range of different tasks and responsibilities regarding workload sources. These were identified as managerial affairs, planned and unplanned meetings, and planning for school and non-school activities. Principals linked workload

sources with 9 different responsibilities. These are: routine administrative activities, formal correspondence and reporting, school-parent association activities, parent-teacher-student communication, formal-informal meetings, relations with senior institutions, preparation for project competitions, assignments and follow-up of school staff at different activities, search for school funding, and improvement of the physical environment of school. The abundance of these sources also reveals that principals need to have different skills:

The principal needs to be versatile. He must be a carpenter, constructor, or technician. It is not always possible to call somebody and ask for help due to lack of budget. A door breaks, a water pipe bursts... The principal is trying to do everything on his own; this is workload. The workload spans many areas other than education and management. This can also prevent the principal from being planned. There is no source of money, and it is really time-consuming to find that source expected from the principal. P12.

However, when we look at the practice, reports, official correspondence, bureaucracy-oriented work, meetings, and tasks other than education and the necessity of carrying out these events on such issues, and the request of various ministries and institutions to cooperate with the Ministry of National Education, it causes us to deal with such activities. This prevents education and training from being our first priority and puts us in trouble. P4.

Lack of time

Principals have to do several jobs at the same time for different reasons for the schools they work for. Absence of staff, a crowded school and parent-student complaints are among these reasons:

Almost every day, every minute... My school is a crowded school. We are trying to do many things at the same time because it is a school where students' and parents' problems are challenging. P1.

I have to do things at the same time. Parents' meetings, paperwork, negotiating for the school's needs, etc... P3.

A principal described the time pressure as a very ordinary event and stated that at certain times this was inevitable:

I often experience this because when I think about the daily routine, the student population of the school, the number of staff, and therefore the number of parents, I constantly face complaints and demands. This is very ordinary for me, given that they are concentrated in certain hours during the day. P2.

Principals usually experience time pressure because of workload. For this reason, they have to work outside official working hours.

It's not possible for me to finish my work during official hours. That day's work piles up onto another day and increases the workload of the other day. P1.

It's hard to finish all these things during the day. Most of the time it doesn't catch up. That's why we work outside working hours. P9.

There are times when we get stuck or we can't finish things. We endeavour to do the things that must be done, we come to school at the weekend and continue to work. P10.

Principals are aware that when time pressure increases, motivation decreases. One principal said:

Most of the time, there are tasks that go beyond our capacity, exhaust our energy and break our enthusiasm. Sometimes we have to respond in a short time, and it may not be possible to catch up in the given time. P7.

Problems with human resources management

Principals do a lot of work because of the lack of both administrative and technical personnel. This naturally increases workload. A principal stated that he had to act as both primary and secondary school principal:

I can say, I have to think about the physical needs of the schools and the need to improve the quality of education, communication of the schools with the ministry, and paperwork. I have to be a mediator between parents and students. Apart from that, our school continues education both in primary and

secondary schools and it is a heavy workload for me to be the only principal for both of the schools. I am in a difficult situation. P1.

Principals also state that principals are seen as people who are expected to do every job without having assistants:

Apart from the duties specified in the regulations, I am also responsible for other work and services at the school. Principals may be forced to work without teachers, without security guards, without assistant principals. Each missing staff member brings more workload. I therefore think of it as a position with a lot of responsibility but no authority and influence. P9.

High email volume

The Ministry of National Education uses the Document Management System (DMS) due to reasons such as fast execution of transactions and prevention of paper waste. Principals state that correspondence through the Document Management System increases the bureaucratic workload and wastes a significant part of their time. Continuous emails coming through the system increase workload:

We examine the reports prepared as the principal and send them to the Ministry of National Education via the DMS. This is our routine. For example, when I come to the desk in the morning, I look at the mailbox. I check the DMS emails. I transfer the emails to the assistant principal, then open the DMS portal and check the emails from the directors of national of education and the assistant principal again. During the day, I review the reports from the assistant principal and the officer; if there are any, I send them back in order to be corrected. Then, I approve the appropriate ones and send them to the district national education board. That's something all principals experience. Everyone is constantly experiencing this. P3.

Effects of workload on principals' lives

When principals were asked about the effects of the workload, some sub-themes were found that limited their private lives.

Challenges of work and private life

When the effects of principals' workload were examined, the following sub-themes emerged: (i) lack of time to allocate to the family, (ii) pressure and stress, (iii) low motivation for the profession, and (iv) lack of time to allocate to teachers, parents and students. Principals stated that they worked long hours and worked overtime. Therefore, not being able to spend time with family members leads to reactions of family members:

I have pressure and stress every moment of the day. I can't even answer my parents' phones. I have to go home late. I don't have time for my family. I have a small child, and I haven't been able to go to the park with my child since I started here. Because of the problems here, if there is a lot of school work, our work must continue all day long. Even if I am at home, it is not possible for me to be with my family and make plans. I get a lot of complaints from my wife and son. This makes me so sad, and I feel exhausted. P1.

I have to be at school until the end of my work. I have to be at school on weekdays and on Saturdays. I can only devote my Sunday to my family. I have to arrange my private work according to my school work. Sometimes I don't have enough time for my children. I sometimes suffer from high stress. P3.

Principals state that they are tired and stressed when they cannot finish their work at school, even though they spend a lot of time inside and outside official working hours:

I try to finish things that we cannot do during the day, sometimes by working late. I go home one or two hours after the end of working hours on weekdays. At the weekends, I cannot spend time with my family. I encounter situations like questioning myself. But when I'm too busy, or when things build up, I am more reactive towards my friends and children, which makes me nervous. P10.

Furthermore, it is stated that workload is a source of intense stress:

“The workload is a source of stress for me. Stress and pressure are very intense because of my workload. P7.

Another principal stated that mental fatigue caused low motivation and that his decision-making skills as a principal were negatively affected:

Tired in mind, not body. It lowers motivation and can lead to instability in the work to be done. For example, on the report card day last week, some of my teachers had different demands and complaints. They were disappointed that I could not fulfil those demands. I had been thinking about it all day and night, so I couldn't sleep last night. I kept thinking. I didn't even want to come to this meeting today. P10.

Inability to spend time with stakeholders

Principals stated that the workload also affected them negatively from the professional point of view. While expressing the effects that limit professional life, they state that they cannot allocate sufficient time to teachers, parents and students. A principal explained his dilemma about having to carry out official duties and spending time for parents, teachers and students:

I am too busy; I have to go to meetings at the Directorate of National Education and have urgent work to be done at school at the same time. I have to make interviews for parents' problems, and also to deal with the problems of teachers and students at school and the physical problems of the school. There is a dilemma about which one I should start and which one should take priority. Parents complain. Everyone complains. Teachers say they can't see the principal. P1.

Methods of coping with the principal workload

When the principals were asked what they were doing to cope with the workload, the answers emerged in 3 different sub-dimensions. These sub-dimensions are: (i) planning the workday, (ii) delegation of workload, (iii) working overtime. It is seen that principals did not provide very detailed information on coping with workload. The explanations show that the coping methods used are far from being considered detailed strategies. Principals stated that they plan and prioritize some of the work and get help from their colleagues:

We have to do a lot of things at the same time, but I arrange them in a planned way. I won't handle them all at the same time. I share my work with my assistant principal, because when I try to handle them all at the same time, there is always confusion or disruption. I rank them in order of importance, and I take care of them in order. P10.

In order to cope with the workload in the school, I get the help of the assistant principal and teachers, provided that I have the responsibility. I put things in order of priority and spread them over time. For example, if I have some paperwork and I have to go to a meeting, I ask for help. P3.

One principal explained that he had to take over the workload, rather than getting help, and do more work on his own:

I have to work more to cope with the workload at school. So, I do a lot of things on my own. P5.

Another principal stated that he did not act in a hurry and made plans by consulting his staff first:

I try to be patient. I listen to people, try to keep them informed of the consequences. I carry out planning and division of labour. I assign employees correctly and in a planned manner. If necessary, I work overtime. P10.

Results and Discussion

In this study, how principals perceive their workloads, their opinions about the elements that make up their workloads, how they are affected by workloads, and how they cope with workload were examined.

Principals described the workload as work that restricts or prevents the time they need to devote to education and training activities. The necessity of doing a lot of work in a short time and carrying out all kinds of work or operations knowing that the principal is responsible for everything are seen as workload by the principals. Thus,

principals provide a subjective perspective on their workload. Principals state that many jobs should be carried out simultaneously and that this creates time pressure on them. In this respect, principals consider their work as difficult and complex. Similarly, Oplatka (2017) found that activities that do not contribute to the development of teaching and learning at school, having multiple and various tasks, and having limited time to finish the work, are perceived as workload by principals. Perceived workload has a subjective meaning and is often expressed as difficulty or ease in one's own work (Bowling and Kirkendall, 2012; Van der Doef and Maes, 1999). Therefore, in this study, principals place a qualitative meaning on their workloads. The perception of qualitative workload is related to perceiving the work as difficult or complex (Bowling and Kirkendall, 2012; Cooper and Marshall, 1976). Oplatka (2017) states that principals find their administrative tasks difficult and complex due to the nature of the school's operation and processes. In Turkey, principals have to undertake different responsibilities. Along with instructional leadership, they carry out work such as school funding or finding supplies for school (Aydın, 2016; Demirtaş and Özer, 2014, Turan and Yalçın, 2015). Principals are involved in executive training programs, management of personnel and student affairs and management of general and administrative services. Moreover, they have to cope with sudden problems (Çinkır, 2010). Unsurprisingly, attempts to run the school together at administrative, organizational and managerial levels cause school principals to perceive their workloads as qualitatively difficult, complex and heavy.

In this study, the factors determining the workload of principals are diversity in workload sources, lack of time, human resource problems, and high e-mail volume. These findings are similar to research findings related to the sources of workload (Aydın, 2016; Demirkasımoğlu, 2015; Oplatka, 2017; Poirel et al., 2012; Pollock and Hauseman, 2019; Starr and White, 2008; Ural, 2002; West et al., 2014). Sources of workload are general management tasks, attending scheduled or unplanned meetings, planning for school and extracurricular activities, and studies for school operation. Similarly, Oplatka (2017) found that the factors that increase the workload of principals include school funding, unplanned work and communication. Poirel et al. (2012) showed that meetings and paperwork or unplanned interviews increased the workload of principals. In addition, Demirkasımoğlu (2015) stated that student services, personnel services, parent interviews and official correspondence raise workload. Principals, moreover, are under considerable time pressure, as many administrative, administrative or business-related tasks need to be completed at the same time. The time required to solve the problems of different stakeholders (Poirel et al., 2012), the demand to complete a lot of work in a short time (Oplatka, 2017), and the timely completion of official correspondence (Demirkasımoğlu, 2015) are known as factors that increase the workload.

In addition, the principals perceive staff shortages as a big factor in workload. For this reason, some principals both assist in administrative affairs and engage in activities to solve technical problems in the school building. Ural (2002) stated that workload in the school increases with staff shortages. West et al. (2014) stated that shortage of staff for economic reasons increases the workload of the principal. Similar results have been obtained in different organizations (Rowley and Purcell, 2001). This study showed that answers to and official correspondence with the e-mails sent by the Ministry of National Education increased the workload of principals. Principals have to do a lot of work in a limited time because of the official correspondence that is required to be answered quickly. As a matter of fact, the intensive use of information technologies in school administrative work increases the workload of principals (Pollock and Hauseman, 2019; Saidun et al., 2015).) A research study in Canada showed that in primary and secondary schools, intensive e-mail volume, time devoted to meetings, teachers' reluctance for school work, guidance in the profession or to new beginners, time spent during the preparation of teachers' lesson plans, efforts to solve discipline problems in the school, and the selection of the right personnel for the school increased the workload (Leithwood and Azah, 2014). Considering high e-mail volume, insufficient or inadequately qualified personnel, too many routine administrative, organizational and managerial tasks, meetings and activities unrelated to education, time spent for planning and organization, inter-institutional correspondence, school funding, and paper work, workload is composed of many different tasks.

The effects of workload on principals' lives were examined in the study. Workload causes some problems in the private and professional lives of principals. Principals do not spend enough time with their families. They also experience excessive fatigue, stress and pressure due to workload. The literature about workload emphasizes that intensity creates a feeling of burnout in principals (Yıldırım and Dinç, 2019), causes stress (Borg, 1993) and disrupts work-life balance (Crawford, 2012). As a matter of fact, workload causes work-family conflict in different organizations (Goh et al., 2015).

Moreover, principals cannot allocate sufficient time to communicate with students and parents. They experience a low sense of motivation to continue the profession. Similarly, the literature on workload reveals that principals do not allocate sufficient time to students due to work intensity (Brauckmann et al., 2015) and tend to quit the profession (Wu, 2005). Therefore, individuals' well-being is affected by their workload and their emotional commitment decreases (Bowling et al., 2015). Likewise, heavy workload decreases in-role work performance and negatively affects employees' organizational commitment and productivity (Bowling and Kirkendall, 2012). Interestingly, however, Oplatka (2017) found that principals did not talk about negative situations affecting them although they suffered from overload. Therefore, overload makes it difficult for school principals to manage their emotions. As a result of this, the feeling of not being able to do their job effectively creates stress and pressure.

However, it should be noted that the explanations made on this issue show that the coping methods used are far from being detailed strategies. However, the strategies used by principals are planned and scheduled work, delegating authority and responsibilities to assistant school principals or teachers, and working overtime. Similar to the findings of this study, Oplatka (2017) found that principals shared leadership among assistant principals in order to cope with the workload and delegated some of their powers and responsibilities. In this respect, only a limited number of strategies are used by principals in Turkey, which is inadequate. In contrast, it was found that principals in different countries use different strategies to reduce the workload. Oplatka (2017) stated that principals set priorities for the work to be done in order to manage the workload and that they participated in the meetings or activities organized by external institutions in a limited number and by selection. Principals did not work outside official working hours. Leithwood and Azah (2014) reported that school administrators worked with highly qualified assistants and teachers to tackle the workload. School principals preferred experienced assistant principals and at the same time they modelled the professional experience of experienced managers. Moreover, school principals shared tasks and leadership by effectively using their communication skills.

Above all, one of the most important results in this study is the perspectives of principals on workload. Principals consider most of the work that restricts the time they devote to improving education and training in their schools as workload. Similarly, according to Oplatka (2017), school principals perceive various tasks, projects, meetings and activities as workload when they cannot relate to education and training. Likewise, Leithwood and Azah (2014) report that school principals and deputy principals perceive meetings, staff issues, formal correspondence and instant jobs as workloads, which limit the time they devote to education and training. As a result, it can be stated that school principals perceive the activities that restrict educational leadership behaviours towards improving students' learning and that cannot be related to education as workload. Despite many cultural and structural differences, school principals' workload perceptions are similar. This result confirms the research findings in other past literature. Furthermore, it is understood that principals are emotionally worn out due to the effects of workload, so they carry out routine work instead of innovating their work. In this respect, in today's education systems where innovative behaviours are at the forefront, routine behaviours will have a negative impact on school development. Therefore, school management has turned into a profession that is emotionally wearying and negates job satisfaction.

However, principals' strategies for managing their work are very limited and they refrain from distributing authority and responsibility. Strategies used by principals to reduce workload are extremely important (Leithwood and Azah, 2014; Oplatka, 2017). The centralized bureaucratic structure of education in Turkey has limited principals' use of different strategies. This is because the work that the school principals can do is determined within the framework of the legislation. Therefore, school principals cannot share authority and responsibility. Otherwise, they may face legal sanctions if unintended consequences occur.

Recommendations

According to the findings of the research, some measures can be taken to reduce the workload of principals. Principals should be encouraged to share leadership. For this purpose, by making legal arrangements, coordinating units can be set up in schools where teachers can be assigned directly. In addition, the number of personnel for the auxiliary services in the school can be improved or measures can be taken to ensure that these personnel work more effectively. The Ministry may evaluate and reorganize inefficient, bureaucracy-based work and procedures that prevent principals from performing their duties. A limit can be imposed on the number of incoming e-mails via official channels, since the workload of principals is increasing due to the e-mails sent by many different institutions at the same time. New and realistic plans should be made for school budgets. The

physical conditions of schools should be improved. Instead of crowded schools, fewer students should be placed in schools. Therefore, school principals may be offered opportunities for more autonomous work in managing the school. Additional leave may be given to school principals periodically to minimize family-work conflict. In this way, it can be ensured that they both deal with their immediate surroundings and can emotionally renew themselves. Experience-sharing programs can be planned for school principals to obtain advice from school principals who are experts in time management. In addition, time management training can be organized for school principals to be assigned to tasks. Incentives can be made to ensure that experienced school principals work for a long time in their schools. However, despite all the suggestions of the authors, it is seen that expectations from principals will increase. In this regard, it is suggested that school management in Turkey is made into a profession. Therefore, the necessary legal regulations should be prepared as soon as possible. Otherwise, it may be difficult to respond to changing world demands and expectations.

As the research is qualitatively designed, it is very difficult to generalize. However, some suggestions may be made. More studies can be carried out on what principals perceive as workload and sources of workload. These studies can be carried out at urban and suburban schools. Thus, factors causing workload can be explained more clearly. The negative effects of workload on principals' lives can be examined deeply in interviews and observations. For, although the effects of workload on principals in different organizations are examined, it is seen that the studies on school principals are quite limited and the effects of workload should be explained more clearly. This is similar in the national and international literature. Using quantitative research designs, the extent to which principals and assistant principals perceive the workload can be investigated in larger sample groups. The effects of document management systems on workload can also be examined. In addition, the past literature on workload of assistant principals is very limited. Assistant principals quit their jobs for different reasons, including heavy workload. Therefore, further research is needed (Demirbilek & Bakioğlu, 2019).

Limitations of the study

This research was conducted with a limited number of principals. Therefore, it is limited to the opinions of 13 participants. Moreover, because the survey was conducted in a province in the Western Black Sea Region, the regional and cultural context should be considered. For example, the demands and expectations of parents and students in central schools may vary in terms of increasing the workload. The last limitation is the Turkish Education System, which has a centralized structure. This should be taken into consideration when making comparisons with different systems in different countries.

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