

## The Meaning of Work in Teachers' Lives: A Qualitative Study

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**ABSTRACT** This paper, the first empirical study on Turkish teacher perspectives of work meanings, presents findings from a small-scale qualitative study. The meaning of work for teachers was analyzed through semi-structured interviews covering a number of themes including the teachers' reasons to continue working, times when work lost its meaning in the teachers' lives and possible changes for a meaningful work life. Results indicated that working portrays a multidimensional sight with both its negative and positive sides in economical, social and psychological terms for teachers. Not being valued by society, parents, policymakers and their administrators are the main reasons why teachers lose their enthusiasm and motivation. The teachers' desires for more satisfactory salary and well-equipped schools suggest that economic enhancements will make their working life more meaningful. Considering all the facts related to the teachers' work lives, they are not highly satisfied, which can lead to a decrease in their performance.

### INTRODUCTION

In contemporary industrial societies, many people work at the equivalents of jobs in which they are hired to perform work behaviors but do not decide how to perform their particular jobs. These routine jobs do not allow the workers to formulate aims, to decide on the means for achieving their ends, or to adjust their goals and methods in light of experiences (Schwartz 1982). So, people who are working frequently find themselves caught between the basic dilemma of managerial roles and personal motivations. As the interest of the organizational scholars shifted to proposing more individual-centered motives in work life, factors such as "meaningful work", "meaningful workplace", and "meaning at work" have become the focus of many theoretical and empirical investigations. Bassuk and Goldsmith (2009) claimed that meaning in the workplace comes from both primary and secondary factors. Primary factors come directly from the work they do, whereas the content of the work is less important in terms of meeting their quotient for meaning, referred to as secondary meaning factors. From a different perspective, the meaningfulness of work depends on the degree of skill variety, task identity, and the task significance available in a given job (Firestone and Pennel 2009).

Work has both economic functions and powerful potential in providing for people's needs, such as self-esteem, fulfillment, social interaction and status (Harpaz and Fu 2002). Social psychology literature views the meaning of work as a psychological need, which is embedded in the individuals' social, ethical and cultural structures. Sociological literature, however, places emphasis on "the centrality of paid work to one's sense of social identity and individual self-worth". From this point of view, work meanings are an indispensable part of social structure and are shaped by the design of job tasks, the human environment of the workplace, and the choices individual people make (Gill 1999).

Meaningful work means different things to different people and the value of intrinsic or extrinsic rewards also varies among these individuals (Beadle and Knight 2012). Korotkov (1998) defines meaningfulness as "the degree to which life makes emotional sense and that the demands confronted by them are perceived as being worth the energy investment and commitment". Ruiz-Quintanilla and Wilpert (1991) define work meaning as "shared interpretations of what people want and expect from work". According to them, by influencing individual actions and the nature of society, work meanings form a component of social reality. Wrzesniewski et al. (2003) conceptualized work meaning as "the employees' un-

derstandings of what they do at work as well as the significance of what they do". In their pioneering study of work meanings, Morse and Weiss (1955) concluded that working is more than earning a living for employed people. This original study proves that besides its economic functions, work is a way of avoiding boredom, gaining a sense of accomplishment and expressing oneself through the producing role that ties a person to the society.

According to Chalofsky (2009), meaningful work is not just about the meaning of the paid work one performs, but it is also about the way people live their lives. It is the alignment of purpose, values, and the relationships and activities that people pursue in their life (Chalofsky 2009). A "meaningful work definition" based on Kant's characterization contains the following six features (Bowie 1998):

1. It is work that is freely entered into;
2. It allows the worker to exercise her autonomy and independence;
3. It allows the worker to develop her rational capacities;
4. It provides a wage sufficient for physical welfare;
5. It supports the moral development of employees;
6. It is not paternalistic in the sense of interfering with the worker's conception of what she wishes to obtain.

The issue of work meaning in organizational behavior and social psychology has received increasing attention in recent decades to discover the underlying facts shaping employees' feelings, behaviors and attitudes across several occupational groups. Harpaz and Fu (2002) claim that within the dynamic structure of organizations and environments, employees' work meanings constantly change. As a result of these changes, working life has become more oriented to socializing people into society, losing its traditional dominant role with the introduction of new technologies by reducing the time spent working (Ruiz-Quintanilla and Wilpert 1991). Efforts to understand the possible reasons for these changes have the potential to analyze and predict possible trends and generalizations about the consequences of meaning of work (MOW) patterns. According to Brief (2003), discussions of work meanings will contribute to understanding what outcomes working people value in their work and how this value arises and varies across workers. It is apparent that attempts of organizational scholars to operationalize work meanings

have taken many forms focusing on different aspects of working life.

The literature on work meanings covers a wide range of topics, such as the function and meaning of work (Morse and Weiss 1955), empirical structure of work meanings (MOW Project 1987), work centrality and post-award work behavior of lottery winners (Arvey et al. 1996), conceptual analysis of work meanings within the basis of different disciplines (Gill 1999), the changing structure of work meanings (Ruiz-Quintanilla and Wilpert 1991; England 1991; Harpaz and Fu 2002), young adults' work meanings in various cultures (Harpaz et al. 2002), national and multinational MOW studies (Ardichvili 2005; Kuchinke et al. 2009), how social interactions shape the meaning of work (Teurling 2008), and relationships between the factors of meaning of work, mental health and organizational commitment (Morin 2008).

Several researchers (Ruiz-Quintanilla and Wilpert 1991; Vecchio 1980; England 1991) have demonstrated that the domain of working is losing its dominant position as individuals place greater emphasis on leisure. Other researchers have reported that while the structure of the work definitions is similar across countries, they differentiate at the point of defining work meanings with the terms of "responsibility and exchange terms and in social contribution terms" or "work in burden/control terms". They found that in former communist countries, employees tended to define work in terms of a social contribution in accordance with the communist ideology (Ruiz-Quintanilla and England 1996). Kuchinke et al.'s (2009) findings contradicted these results reporting that Polish and German participants had higher levels of work centrality than Russians with a strong preference for continuing to work even if they did not need to earn a living. A more recent question relating to meaningful work is posed by Chalofsky and Cavallaro (2013). They question whether meaningful work can and should exist in a vacuum or should it be viewed as part of a meaningful life. As Steenkamp and Basson (2013) stated, people perform meaningful work and feel psychological safety in a meaningful workplace. Thus, meaningful work occurs when people know that their efforts contribute to some greater social benefit and a broader purpose (Steger et al. 2013). In summary, work meanings address the functional purposes of work and the subjective importance of work attached by people.

International studies investigating teacher status have limited their research questions to the questions of this paper, but the literature lacks a specific empirical examination of the “meaning and function of work” for the teaching profession in particular. This paper is based on a qualitative study of public school teachers from the primary, secondary and high schools levels with the purpose of assessing the meaning and function of working as perceived by those in the teaching profession. This involved describing how teachers define work meanings, the function and meaning of work in teachers’ lives, the reasons they remain in the teaching profession, the times work lost its meaning and changes that have the potential to make their work life more meaningful.

The main frame of this work was developed by utilizing the original study by Morse and Weiss (1955) and the later versions of meaning of work studies by England et al. (1995). This will help enlighten the determinants of work life of teachers and possible efforts to develop work life satisfaction. Secondly, this study addresses the calls of the researchers (for example, Brief 2003; Kuchinke et al. 2009) for further studies to understand this structure. This research also extends the stream of work meaning research by adding the meanings given by teachers.

### Objectives

This small-scale qualitative research aims to clarify the work meanings for teachers. It highlights the underpinnings of this work by defining its various aspects. The following questions were answered within this general aim of the study.

1. Would teachers continue working if they did not need to work? Why?
2. What is the function and meaning of working for teachers?
3. Are there times that working loses its meaning for teachers? If so, when and why?
4. What kind of changes would make the teachers’ lives more meaningful?

## METHODOLOGY

### Study Design

Qualitative design has been advocated as the best strategy in exploring a new era; therefore, this research has been designed as qualitative

due to its exploratory nature. Furthermore, qualitative data places the emphasis on people’s “lived experiences”, and is fundamentally well suited to gain a better understanding of the teachers’ perception about the phenomenon of work functions and meanings (Miles and Huberman 1994: 10). A qualitative approach with a semi-structured interview technique was reasonable for this research because it allows for discovery of the unique perceptions of teachers with specific examples to educational settings and the teaching profession.

The qualitative research design of phenomenology was used to understand the meanings that teachers constructed about their teaching occupations, work experiences and actual work lives. According to Robson (2011: 151), phenomenological research “focuses on the need to understand how humans view themselves and the world around them”.

### Participants

A purposive sample of currently practicing elementary, secondary, and high school teachers in Ankara was used. The teachers interviewed within this research worked in schools varying in size, type and area, yielding a representative cross-section sample of practising teachers. Also, teachers with different seniority and different fields will reflect the varying perspectives of teachers working in urban and suburban schools in Ankara (Table 1). The participants consisted of 15 teachers (seven female and eight male) working in public primary, secondary and high schools. Teachers’ tenure ranged from 6 to 29 years. The participants’ average age was 36.9 years and their average teaching experience was 14.7 years.

By selecting the teachers from different school types and fields of teaching, the researcher wanted the teachers’ views to complement each other in missing points. The participant names from Table 1 were coded as P1 to P15 by the researcher to ensure anonymity.

### Data Collection

The data was collected from April to June 2013 from 15 public schools in Ankara. Teacher interviews ranged in length from 50 to 110 minutes. Data for this study came from in-depth, semi-structured interviews, which consisted of seven

**Table 1: Demographic breakdown of the 15 participants**

<i>Participants</i>	<i>Field of teaching</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Seniority</i>	<i>School type</i>	<i>School setting</i>
P1	Classroom	Female	48	28	Primary	Urban
P2	Classroom	Male	34	12	Primary	Suburban
P3	Classroom	Female	40	19	Primary	Suburban
P4	Classroom	Female	40	19	Primary	Urban
P5	Classroom	Male	50	29	Primary	Suburban
P6	English	Female	29	7	Secondary	Suburban
P7	Geography	Male	39	16	Secondary	Suburban
P8	Physical Education	Male	49	25	Secondary	Urban
P9	Maths	Male	29	7	Secondary	Urban
P10	Science	Female	31	6	Secondary	Suburban
P11	English	Female	30	7	High School	Urban
P12	Philosophy	Male	38	16	High School	Suburban
P13	Social Sciences	Female	31	10	High School	Urban
P14	Information Technology	Male	34	11	High School	Urban
P15	Technology and Design	Male	32	9	High School	Suburban

open-ended questions. The researcher conducted the interviews. Fourteen interviews were recorded with a digital voice recorder. Since one participant did not want to be recorded, the researcher took notes. In addition to using a voice recorder, the researcher took extensive notes. Participant validation strategy was used to check whether the findings represented a reasonable account of the teachers' opinions. Therefore, recorded data was transcribed and returned to the participant teachers to check the accuracy of their statements that they reported during the interviews. Written responses from teachers were added to the data before the analysis.

### Procedures

In developing the interview form, the first step was to review the theoretical and empirical literature. The research questions used in this study were basically an expansion of previous studies that explored the function and meaning of work for employed people. Additionally, some questions were utilized from the later versions of meaning of work studies of England et al. (1995). Specifically, four questions were asked of the teachers in order to gather data:

1. If by some chance you inherited enough money to live comfortably without working, do you think that you would or would not continue to work? Why? (Morse and Weiss 1955)
2. What does "working" mean to you and what is the function of working in your life? (Adapted from England et al. 1995)
3. Have you ever felt that working lost its meaning in your life? If yes, would you

describe and exemplify, please? (Developed by the researcher)

4. What kind of changes would make your working life more meaningful? (Developed by the researcher)

Since the purpose of the study was exploratory in nature, data was analyzed using a content analysis in three phases. Firstly, the responses of the participants were listed within each question in the form of raw data. Secondly, the participants' responses to the predetermined categories were assessed to determine if there were sub-themes under the core themes. Thirdly, selected quotations that convey the core theme and subthemes or the essence of that category were presented within the findings. Finally, findings were discussed in light of the literature and related studies.

### FINDINGS

#### Teachers' Opinions about Continuing to Work

Starting with the well-known lottery question used in a diversity of studies related to work meanings, teacher participants were asked to indicate whether they would work if they had enough money to live without working. Consequently, they were asked about the reason behind their answers.

#### Would Continue Working

Most participants indicated that they would continue working even if they did not need to work. Among 11 participants, six stated that they would continue working as a teacher mainly for

two reasons: their love for the job and children, and the belief that the teaching profession is the best way to contribute to society. One of the respondents explained:

*“The important thing for me is not money. Actually, the money we are earning is not enough to live humanely. Most of us are left with no choice but to work in additional jobs to live the way we like. The others, not doing additional work, are in a very difficult condition. The teaching profession is not a job that is done for the sake of money. If I had enough money to live without working, I would keep working because becoming an English teacher was my dream since secondary school. I cannot imagine myself in any other kind of job where I am expected to sit behind a desk for eight hours, signing some papers or reading a book. Nothing can make me happier than what I am doing now. I love being with people and children” [P1].*

#### **Would Continue Working in a Different Job**

Across respondents, many of them noted that they would keep working but in a different job. Teachers prefer different jobs that are more prestigious and valued. Also, they believe that prestigious, respected and interesting work would make them happier. The following statement reflects one of these views:

*“I think it is not pleasant to spare one’s life without working. I would do a job other than teaching. In general, I am not a person who has some sort of problem with teaching, but the state of the teaching profession is very bad in Turkey. Since working and classroom conditions are not good, I would not continue teaching” [P4].*

#### **Would Not Continue Working**

The reasons why some of the teacher participants were unhappy with their profession are because working itself is an extra load and stressor in their lives and the structural changes in the educational system have brought about uncertainties that lead to chaos in their work life. One teacher noted,

*“I would not keep teaching because teaching does not make me happy. The other reason is that I do not want to add workload to my life psychologically and physically” [P6].*

### **Teachers Opinions about Meaning and Function of Work**

The second question was, “What does working mean to you and what is the function of work in your life?” The data analysis yielded three subthemes from this theme, which are important for understanding how the meaning and function of working are perceived. These themes are economic, social and psychological meanings and functions of work. In addition, each subtheme was grouped in its positive and negative functions (Table 2).

Table 2 shows that 25 concepts were generated to describe the 61 functions and meanings of work. The answers under each subtheme were formulated as positive and negative functions and meanings of work in order to simplify understanding. The largest code category in this theme included statements about the *psychological* aspect of work with 21 positive and 5 negative statements. *Social* aspects of work life follow this subtheme with 14 positive and 7 negative statements. The last referred to the aspects of work meanings is its *economic* dimension with 9 positive and 5 negative statements. The data provides that positive meanings and functions of work were dominant in terms of the teaching profession.

#### **Economic Meaning and Function of Work**

The number of respondent statements on economic work meanings and functions seems relatively small when compared to the social and psychological aspects for teachers. This does not mean that they attach less importance to the economic side of working; rather it means that the fact that economic meanings and functions of working can be expressed by anyone from any kind of work is limited in itself. The most frequent type of positive work meaning and function was, “working is necessary to earn a living and provides better life standard”. On the other hand, the respondents complained about their salaries despite finding the work as a necessary endeavor. Teachers’ opinions about positive and negative work meanings and functions are as follows:

*“I always want to work to be able to stand on my own feet economically and to have a regular income. I find my salary is enough for my cost of living” [P8].*

**Table 2: The meaning and function of work for teacher**

<i>Themes</i>		<i>Meaningful units</i>	<i>f</i>	
<i>Economic Functions</i>	<i>Positive</i>	Working is necessary to earn a living	5	
		Working makes our lives easier and we live in better standards.	3	
		Working provides you an income that is needed and it is satisfactory economically.	1	
		Total	9	
	<i>Negative</i>	Necessary to earn a living but not satisfactory economically	5	
		Total	5	
	Total		14	
	<i>Social Functions</i>	<i>Positive</i>	Working is a useful way for you to serve society and humanity.	6
			Working is a means of associating with people	4
			Working as a teacher has a great potential to transform the society since a teacher is very influential in children's and parents' lives.	1
A way of being a productive person			1	
An area in which we fulfill our personal goals related to our lives.			1	
Responsibility to society			1	
		Total	14	
<i>Negative</i>		Roles, responsibilities and rules expected from the members of profession limit their freedom and impose them specific behavior patterns.	3	
		Working occupies all my time not leaving enough time to leisure time activities and friends.	1	
		Responsibility towards oneself and society	1	
		A conflict between personal values and work life rules	1	
		Teaching profession has been depreciated as result of educational policies deliberately and this situation effects teachers negatively	1	
			Total	7
		Total	21	
<i>Psychological</i>				
<i>Psychological Functions</i>	<i>Positive</i>	Makes me happy because of contributing to the society	8	
		A way of keeping occupied	5	
		A phenomenon that inceases women's self esteem	3	
		A part of being a humanbeing	2	
		Working with children is enjoyable and a dynamic process	1	
		A psychological need	1	
	Makes me feel free	1		
		Total	21	
	<i>Negative</i>	Tiring and hard conditions	2	
		Feeling of burnout and stressed	2	
Feeling obligated to work causes negative perceptions related to work		1		
	Total	5		
Total		26		
Economic, Social and Psychological Functions Total			61*	

\* Total number of comments exceeds the responses since one participant can make more than one comment.

“In Turkey, teachers have to work in a second job and think over their children's future. So I do not think that they earn what they deserve” [P1].

**Social Meaning and Function of Work**

As seen in Table 2, the social aspects of work meanings and functions are the most referred to

with both negative and positive responses. Positive meanings attributed to working focussed on the function of serving the society and the opportunity to have interesting contacts with different people. On the other side, societal norms and organizational rules that are embedded in work life shape teacher perceptions negatively and so they complain about not having enough leisure time. Discrepancies between personal and organizational values and the depreciation of the status of the profession are the other discontents expressed about the dual nature of work life meanings and functions. One teacher noted,

*“Despite the fact that the teaching profession has been disvalued, it still has a great potential to transform society. A teacher is very influential in the children and parents’ lives. If a teacher has such intentions, the teaching profession is still very important” [P2].*

Another teacher noted the social negative function of work, and stated the following:

*“I perceive working as a kind of responsibility. You are in a social environment while working, but this environment limits you in many ways because of the existing rules. There are relationships in working life and you are expected to follow these rules. This situation limits you and your freedom. In terms of socialization, it may cause you to become more of an introverted person. If you are not a person successful in human relations, you may become alienated by your work life. In other words I do not see the work life as a means of socialization. It limits your friendships and behaviors. If I were not working, I would have many more friends. Despite the fact that it seems that working socializes people, it actually does not” [P15].*

### **Psychological Meaning and Function of Work**

Among the three sub-themes related to work meanings and functions, teachers generated the most comments about its psychological aspects. For teachers, the most common types of positive psychological functions were: “feeling happy because of contributing to the society” and “working is a way of keeping occupied”. Many of the teachers noted the psychological well-being function of working, which is accomplished through serving for the good of society. Teachers stated:

*“Working is a psychological need and a necessity of being a human. If I contribute to my society, I feel satisfied” [P11].*

*“I experience different learning adventures with each student, so I do not get bored in this job. This job has a very dynamic characteristic. My students’ reactions and interpretations add a very different value to each course. Therefore, every course becomes unique. I love my job and branch; this makes me happy” [P13].*

A teacher mentioning the negative aspect of the psychological work function describes her opinions as follows:

*“Teaching is a very tiring profession. Our responsibilities increased after the last structural changes in the educational system and our profession was depreciated in the eyes of the society. Every passing day, we are being demoralized psychologically because of the practices resulting from the current educational policy. We are seen as valueless and idle people earning a lot of money. Psychologically, this situation affects us negatively” [P4].*

### **Reasons Why Working Has Lost Its Meaning**

Another question regarding work meanings was whether teachers felt that working had lost its meaning during their work life. Those who responded that working had lost its meaning were asked for their reasons with examples. Table 3 shows their reasons.

From Table 3, one can see that 3 of the 15 teachers had not reported a time or incident in which working had lost its meaning. On the other hand, teachers reported several incidents in which work had lost its meaning for particular reasons. The main reason was indicated by the participants of this study as, “not being respected by the society as much as they deserved”. This reason was followed by depreciation of the teaching profession by the people who give direction to the national educational policy. A primary school teacher explained one of these reasons as follows:

*“When we have problems with parents and we think that we are not understood by them, we feel that teaching has lost its meaning. We are working devotedly but nobody cares about our efforts. Society does not value the teaching profession and does not value the teachers as much as they deserve” [P9].*

**Table 3: Teachers’ opinions regarding the reasons why working lost its meaning**

<i>Reasons why working lost its meaning in the lives of teachers</i>	<i>f</i>
Any time	3
When the society does not respect as much as they deserved	3
Depreciation of teaching profession by the people who gives direction to the national educational policy.	2
Not being appreciated for my devoted work	2
School administrators’ undiscerning and insensitive behaviors (that is in cases of health problems)	1
School administrators’ discriminatory behaviors towards different political views, beliefs and worldview.	1
School administrators’ contradicting behaviors and attitudes of rules and law.	1
The times when they not to be understood by parents	1
When the work load is over and the responsibilities are distributed unfairly	1
With the new law and organization of the educational system as 4+4+4, educational system was brought on the brink of chaos	1
To be paid less than even the lowest clerical positions	1
Because of the monotonous nature of the teaching profession	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>

Another teacher complained about the political attitudes regarding the educational system and also the school administrators’ contradicting behaviors and attitudes regarding the laws:

*“Political statements and sometimes school administrators’ unreasonable behavior made me feel that working had lost its meaning. Some school administrators think that school is one’s private preserve and I oppose this kind of attitude. When I remind him of the rules and laws, he abuses his authority by close supervision. He sometimes misuses his authority by mobbing teachers. This kind of administrator attitude alienates me from my work” [P10].*

**Changes that Have the Potential to Make Working Life More Meaningful to the Teachers**

The fourth major theme included those categories that teachers believed would create a more meaningful work life for them. In other words, the categories under this theme reflect the aspirations of teachers for a more meaningful work environment (Table 4).

Table 4 depicts that among 15 respondents, only one teacher found her current working conditions to be perfect. Teachers primarily want to

**Table 4: Changes that have the potential to make working life more meaningful to the teachers**

<i>Working life would be more meaningful to me if</i>	<i>f</i>
I was paid better	4
Schools were well-equipped in terms of both rooms and materials	4
There were not dress codes for teachers	2
The schools were at the heart of natures with its trees and animals	2
Schools were administered more democratic and participatory	2
The reasons and functions of existing rules were rational and clear	2
Teaching was to be a high status and respected job in the eyes of the society	2
Working conditions were predictable	2
There was academical freedom that would not force the teachers to implement a fixed national curriculum.	1
There was not a student election system as it is in our country	1
The teachers were better-qualified	1
There were flexible working hours and less bureaucracy	1
There were opportunities for professional development	1
I had more time for leisure time activities	1
Class populations were less	1
Teachers’ opinions were taken into consideration in national policy making process.	1
Working conditions were worker oriented and special to considering the special needs of workers	1
Schools weren’t compulsory	1
- Working is meaningful enough-	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>

be better paid and work in well-equipped schools. No dress codes, schools nested in nature, democratically administered schools, rational and clear organizational rules, high status or a respected job and predictable working conditions have the potential to make the working life more meaningful according to the teachers' opinions. One of the primary teachers pointed out:

*"If I had the opportunity to realize my personal desires with a well-paid profession, teaching would be more meaningful to me. Even when I go home, I keep working; I cannot spare time for my leisure. I always have to postpone the things that I want to do" [P5].*

Another teacher expressed the desire for more predictable working conditions, stating other issues:

*"It would be better if the working conditions were more stable and predictable. It would be helpful if the parents were more conscientious. Educational policy should be determined considering teachers' opinions, since they are practitioners who know the problems best" [P15].*

A teacher expressed his desire for more democratically administered schools and for a more employee-oriented human resource management approach stating the following:

*"Teachers' opinions should be taken into consideration and valued. I want my administrators not to implement the rules equally for everyone. Because there are times that special cases need special attention. Being a teacher, I want to feel that I'm unique and special for my administrator and school" [P2].*

These answers seemed to indicate the teachers' desire for a more satisfactory salary, well-equipped schools and an administrator-teacher relationship in which they felt special and valued.

## DISCUSSION

Most of the teachers included in this study noted that they would continue working even if they did not have to. On the other hand, teachers would prefer more attractive jobs than teaching in terms of prestige and status if they had another chance. The reason why teachers would stay in the same profession is related to the love of being a teacher and being with students. These findings are similar to those of Hargreaves et al. (2006) who found that teaching is an attractive

career because of working with and influencing children. In the current study, some teachers stated that they would not go on teaching if they had another chance. This finding is also consistent with those of Hargreaves et al. (2006), because teachers were of the opinion that an unsatisfactory pay is among the negative reasons why teaching is seen to be an unattractive career.

Many of the teachers noted that they would keep working, but not teaching. Instead, they aspired for more prestigious, respected and interesting work. The reasons why some of the teacher participants were unhappy with their profession were because working itself was an extra load and stressor in their lives and the structural changes in the educational system brought about uncertainties that led to chaos in their work life. As Morse and Weiss stated (1955), "The major reason for working at a particular job may be monetary, even though the reasons for wanting to continue to work are not". Findings of this study indicate that for most of the teachers, the phenomenon of "working" itself is important and also "being a teacher" is important. But the same assumption could not be made about their opinions related to present jobs, namely the teaching profession. The participants who would not remain in the teaching profession were looking for some other meaning they could not satisfy with their current jobs and work environments. This finding is parallel to the findings of a study by Quintanilla and Wilpert (1991) in which the researchers determined that many people in the working class occupations have a desire for a more prestigious and freer job. In other words, middle class participants wanted more prestigious jobs in these two studies.

Working is a means of satisfying psychological, economic and social needs; however, it is also a source of a stressful life. Among the three subthemes related to work meanings and functions, teachers generated the most comments about the psychological aspects. For teachers, the most common types of positive psychological functions were: "feeling happy because of contributing to the society" and "working as a way of keeping occupied". It seems that teachers value working most, because it provides personal psychological well-being for serving the society. Other meanings and functions of work are being occupied, feelings of self-esteem, a psychological necessity of feeling oneself as a

human being, an enjoyable and a dynamic process, and something that creates a sense of freedom. Positive meanings attributed to working focus on the function of serving the society and opportunity to have interesting contacts with different people. This finding is consistent with Ros et al.'s (1999) finding that work provides the teachers with an opportunity to express concern for others in social relations and maintain the status quo. Additionally, the researchers proved that teachers did not see work as a vehicle for pursuing independence. This is in line with the opinions of current studies that indicate that the teachers' roles, responsibilities and rules expected from the members of profession limit their freedom and impose specific behavior patterns upon them.

On the other hand, societal norms and organizational rules that are embedded in work life shape teacher perceptions negatively and so they complain about not having enough leisure time. Discrepancies between personal and organizational values and the depreciation of the status of the profession are other discontents about the dual nature of work life meanings and functions. Some teachers' opinions related to the power of the teaching profession in transforming society are in line with the project ESF 2007, which concentrated on the teachers' status in Latvia. Respondents in this study believed that the teaching profession is a socially significant and respectful profession despite the fact that the government and society at large undervalued it. Another aspect that arose from teachers' views was related to the negative side of working and they indicated that teaching became a very tiring profession with the increasing responsibilities resulting from educational policies. This was also found in the ESF Project (2007) that displayed the teachers' opinions about their increased roles and responsibilities. Teachers included in both the project and this study were similar in the sense that both believed that their responsibilities and workload had increased in recent years.

The main findings regarding the work meanings and functions in psychological terms are that "contributing to the society", "earning a living", "staying occupied" and "associating with people" were the most significant factors that teachers referred to while describing this multidimensional phenomenon in their work life. The result implies that for many of the teachers serv-

ing their society, it increases their sense of psychological well-being. Additionally, these results confirmed the idea that people seek more meaning than economical reasons in their lives as stated by Morse and Weiss (1955).

In short, working has paradoxical meanings and functions since it has both positive and negative associations in terms of economic, social and psychological aspects for teachers. On one hand, working satisfies the needs of teachers in terms of earning a living, serving the society and psychological well-being. On the other hand, it causes personal distress because of the low status of the profession, the roles and responsibilities expected from society and the difficult conditions. Taken together, work has multidimensional meanings and functions for teachers with negative and positive attributions to each dimension.

Working with children and the motivation to serve society in the best possible way are the inspiring elements for those who work as teachers. On the other hand, teachers feel undervalued by society, which causes them to lose their enthusiasm. The underlying reasons for why teachers feel unappreciated by society and authorities seem closely related to each other. One of the reasons can be explained by Turkey's national teacher policy. Almost all the participants claimed that the status of teaching has depreciated because of the overall changes in the education system shaped by policies, which in turn, give the teachers the feeling of uncertainty. Yildiz (2014) asserted that the discourses on a global scale such as "teachers are working short hours" and "teachers have too many holidays" has devalued the teachers' status. He also added that these discourses were brought about by neoliberalism, which transformed the teachers into technicians more than idealist teachers. According to Yildiz, these discourses have diffused quickly into the society and the teacher typology has been reshaped by both society and the teachers. Another finding emerging from this study is the administrators' behaviors and attitudes towards rule breaking behaviors frustrate teachers. The findings of Tummers and Knies (2013) in the public sector are consistent with this finding, which indicated that the meaningfulness of work is positively affected by the managers' relationships with employees.

Participants believed that teachers should be a part of the policymaking processes since they

are most aware of the educational problems. In a study by Hargreaves et al. (2006), where the researchers examined the status of the teachers and teaching profession, similar findings were obtained. The researchers proved that teacher participants felt that they were worthy of a much higher status. Another consistent finding comes from the study of a research by ESF (2007) that confirms that a large part of Latvian respondents evaluated the status of the teaching profession as low. They think that in the last ten years, the status of the teaching profession has diminished and the society has developed a stereotype that those who choose teaching as a profession simply fail to find a better job. This reason was followed by the sense that the teaching profession was devalued by the politicians who gave direction to the national educational policy. Actually, these reasons complement each other in the sense that if authorities directing the national policy do not value its human resources, it is not realistic to expect the society to respect the members of this profession.

These results revealed that work meanings were stirred by the negative attitudes and behaviors of policymakers, administrators and society. This outcome is similar to the findings of the study that focus on the status of the teaching profession in Latvia (ESF 2007) in the sense that in Latvia all respondents underlined that the state and the government should play the main and decisive role in improving the status of education and the status of the teaching profession in society. This includes the belief that the teachers' opinions in the development of education policies would affect the image of the teaching profession in the eyes of society. Additionally, teachers' desires for more satisfactory salary and well-equipped schools suggest that economic enhancements would make work life more meaningful to them, and this necessitates an increase in the economic costs of the national educational budget. Otherwise, as Steenkamp and Basson stated (2013), employees become alienated as a result of which, both organizations and employees suffer from loss of productivity, innovation and the loss of meaning.

### CONCLUSION

Regarding the teachers' opinions about continuing to work, it is concluded that many of the teachers would switch to another job if they had

the opportunity and nearly one-third of them would stop working if they had enough money to live comfortably without working. It seems that the teaching profession is not an attractive job for the participant teachers. This finding is consistent with the findings of other teacher studies focusing on teacher status. Teachers attribute both positive and negative meanings to working in terms of its economic, psychological and social aspects. Therefore, working has a multidimensional structure in the teachers' lives. Working with children and the motivation of serving the society in the best possible way are dominant factors that encourage teachers to stay in this profession, even though they are undervalued by society and the instability of educational policies trigger events, which cause them to lose their enthusiasm and motivation.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Taken together, findings of this study highlight some issues about social, psychological and economical aspects of work meanings for teachers. The findings discussed so far indicate that working mainly serves an economic function for most of the teachers. However, more research is needed to understand and conceptualize this complex phenomenon in varying educational settings including school administrators and possibly private schools. Different cultures may lead to other results related to the underlying facts building work meanings. Also, it would be interesting to carry out similar analyses in areas of higher education.

While limited in scope, this study is thought to be the first to apply the MOW theoretical framework to capture the work meanings and functions of Turkish public school teachers. It integrates the earlier version of work meanings framework with the recent approaches. The evidence from these studies suggests a variety of factors related to the teachers' work meaning and functions, and it has important practical implications for policymakers and public managers as well. If the findings of this study reach politicians and policymakers, it may contribute to a deeper insight to understand teachers' expectations as employees in policymaking processes. It is clear from the findings that teachers aspire for more stable national educational policies, and they want to be a part of policymaking processes. Additionally, since they are unhappy because

of the status of the teaching profession, overall measures should be taken to increase their status in the eyes of different stakeholders of the society.

### NOTE

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