



The Alienation of Science Teachers from Their Profession and Its Impact on the Teaching-Learning Process

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Abstract

The investigation of teacher alienation and its ensuing effects is of critical importance across all educational tiers, including secondary and high school levels. Elucidating the causes and consequences of alienation specifically among secondary and high school teachers is paramount for the enhancement of educational quality. The concept of alienation reflects an individual's sense of isolation and, given its prominence in related research, can be characterized as a socio-psychological construct. Fundamentally, alienation denotes an individual's withdrawal from their society or, put differently, a state of disconnection from the community. This study aims to identify the causes of professional alienation among science teachers in Mugla and to determine its subsequent impacts. This study employed a qualitative research methodology, utilizing a semi-structured interview form for data collection. The sample group consisted of 30 Science teachers employed in Mugla during the 2021-2022 academic year. The analysis of the collected data revealed that the most predominant factor leading to professional alienation was the escalating issues within the education system. Consequently, this alienation manifested in the emergence of an unproductive learning environment and a growing disaffection with the teaching profession.

Keywords:

Alienation, Self estrangement, Isolation, Powerlessness, Science Education, Science Teacher.

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid technological transformation of our era contrasts sharply with the growing prominence of the crisis in human relationships with nature, other people, and society at large, and the accompanying unhappiness. Alienation can be described as an individual leading a lifestyle contrary to their essence or incongruent with human nature.

Alienation can be categorized into four primary groups:

1. Alienation stemming from economic factors.
2. Alienation resulting from technological developments. The individual adjusts their life according to technology, which in turn creates a sense of alienation.
3. Alienation induced in the individual by changes in the social structure.
4. Alienation arising from distancing oneself from society, philosophy, all branches of fine arts, music, and, in essence, the cultural accumulation of humanity (Kır, 2002).

1.1. Problem statement

Drawing on the relevant literature, this study aims to determine the reasons for professional alienation and its effects among 30 Science teachers working in Mugla during the 2021-2022 Spring academic year.

1.2. Research Questions

A review of the relevant literature reveals the significant importance of the concept of teacher alienation from an educational perspective. This study, therefore, seeks answers to the following questions based on the concept of teacher professional alienation:

Guided by the aim of determining the reasons for professional alienation among science teachers and its effects, as expressed through their views, this study seeks answers to the following questions:

1. What are the reasons for professional alienation among science teachers?
2. What are the effects of professional alienation among science teachers on the educational process?
3. What recommendations could be made to prevent professional alienation among science teachers?

1.3. Literature Review

Despite its benefits, technology can be argued to have negative repercussions on human socialization. Although technology undergoes rapid change and transformation, some individuals struggle to adapt to this new dynamic. When this process becomes a negative cycle, it can result in a diminished capacity to interpret events and a negative transformation in individuals. It can be posited that the number of people "alienated" by the changing social dynamics and lifestyles caused by technology is increasing daily, and a significant majority of these individuals are young university students (Oerlemans & Jenkins, 1998).

The concept of alienation is depicted as a detachment and distancing from society, values, and oneself (Yadav & Nagle, 2012). Teacher alienation from their profession can be expressed as teachers feeling excluded and discriminated against in the school, leading to a sense of estrangement from their colleagues and, subsequently, from themselves (Eryılmaz & Burgaz, 2011).

Melvin Seeman (1959) conceptualized alienation across five distinct dimensions: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, social isolation, and self-estrangement. The concept of alienation can signify individuals' inability to interpret social events or their misinterpretation, loss of belonging to their society, loss of faith in them and society, and distancing from themselves and their environment. Alienation denotes the distancing of one thing from another or the severance of ties with another person. It can also be defined as an individual's feeling of detachment or separation from their environment, work, and self. Similarly, it can be described as a decrease in the individual's adaptation to their social, cultural, and natural environment, a process that gradually leads to loneliness and helplessness. From another perspective, alienation involves individuals disregarding or being unaware of their own and society's characteristics, adopting the conditions, values, lifestyles, and beliefs of the society (Tezcan, 1995). Likewise, it is defined as an individual distancing from themselves and society, remaining indifferent to the process (Bademci, 2001). The concept of alienation is also described as an individual's indifference to problems within themselves and their environment (Püsküllüoğlu, 2012).

The concept of alienation was later utilized by Karl Marx. Marx interpreted alienation as "the process whereby the products of human labor subjugate the human being, ultimately transforming the human into a non-human" (Şimşek et al., 2016), thereby paving the way for the concept's recognition.

Occupational alienation is one of the issues observed in the teaching profession, similar to other professions. In today's educational system, the increase in problems, despite teachers' struggles with these numerous issues and the eventual belief that the problems are unsolvable, alienates teachers from their profession (Şimşek et al., 2012).

There are numerous reasons for teachers' professional alienation. These can be listed as follows: the exclusion of teachers from the decision-making process within the organization, a conflict between their personal needs and the school's objectives, the pressure felt from the curriculum despite the obligation to complete it within a set timeframe, as well as the school's circulars and regulations (Yapıcı, 2004). Similarly, school culture and content, school administration and communication, work pressure, low salary, workload, lack of educational materials, and poorly planned programs can be cited as reasons for teachers experiencing alienation from their profession (Oshagbemi, 2000).

Teachers experiencing alienation from their profession view their job merely as a source of income. This prevents them from deriving satisfaction from their teaching profession. A teacher who has not internalized their profession and is alienated from their work finds the educational process boring and joyless and offers little benefit to the student. An alienated teacher does not believe they can be successful and avoids taking responsibility at school (Gülören, 2011). Consequently, high academic success cannot be expected from the students taught by such a teacher. In this context, an alienated teacher does not prioritize professional development, and their belief, enthusiasm, and passion for the profession diminish (Erjem, 2005). As they reach a point of emotional and physical exhaustion, they develop a negative attitude towards the people they serve and themselves. Therefore, regardless of the job, they find it difficult to meet the required expectations, and their sense of personal competence gradually decreases (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001).

As the teacher distances themselves from their passion for teaching, they lose their ideals and enthusiasm for it. Consequently, it has been stated that when teachers feel inadequate in their profession, occupational burnout emerges (Friedman, 2000). Teachers' cognitive, affective, or behavioral withdrawal from educational processes, and the increasing meaninglessness of these processes to them, can lead to teachers perceiving their profession as boring and unenjoyable (Kurtuluş & Karabıyık, 2016).

The alienation of teachers from their profession negatively impacts their professional motivation. In this context, teacher alienation can manifest negatively in the workplace as follows: absenteeism, inability to think creatively, failure to communicate with colleagues, indifference to work, and a lack of willingness and effort. Teachers, as the primary actors of the learning-teaching process, require high motivation to create a productive learning-teaching environment for their students. This is because individuals who work with high motivation will experience lower levels of alienation (Shantz et al., 2015). Teachers who do not experience alienation towards school prepare and implement better lesson plans and are more skilled at engaging their students in discussions (Kaner, 2010). Furthermore, they exhibit distinct and observable behaviors such as confidence, diligence, persistence, and effort (Telef, 2011).

2. METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative research method. The findings resulting from qualitative research are highly explanatory. To support the research findings, excerpts from documents, field notes, and participant interviews are incorporated. These excerpts contribute to and enrich the explanatory nature of the study (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research aims to examine phenomena in depth and detail; it typically uses interviews, observation, field notes, and open-ended questions as data collection tools, and the results are based on descriptive narratives and direct quotations from participants rather than statistical reports (Johnson and Christensen, 2012). This study attempts to reveal the reasons for science teachers' professional alienation and its effects in a multifaceted and in-depth manner.

2.1. Population and Sample

The study group consists of twenty-four Science teachers working in the province of Muğla during the 2022-2023 academic year. For the qualitative data of the research, 30 Science teachers were selected using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling allows for in-depth research by selecting information-rich cases relevant to the purpose of the study (Büyüköztürk et al., 2009).

Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of the Study Group Participants

Demographic Characteristics of the Participants (N=30)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Characteristic	Category	Frekans	%
Gender	Kadin	15	50
	Erkek	15	50
Age	21-25	-	
	26-30	3	10
	31-35	12	40
	36-40	12	40
	41-45	3	10
Professional Seniority (Years)	6-10	3	10
	11-15	6	20
	16-20	6	20
	21-25	9	30
	26+	6	20
Level of Education	Bachelor's Degree	21	70
	Master's Degree	9	30
Faculty og Graduation	Faculty of Education	24	80
	Faculty of Science	6	20

2.2. Data Collection Instrument

A semi-structured interview form was prepared to gather qualitative data for the study. The interview questions were developed based on a review of the literature and in consultation with experts in curriculum development, assessment and evaluation, and science teachers. The data obtained from interviews with 30 science teachers were transcribed, and categories and codes were derived from these texts. The data were analyzed independently by the researcher and another science educator using descriptive analysis techniques. The inter-coder reliability was calculated at 86.14%. Reliability scores above 70% are considered acceptable for research (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this context, the study's reliability was calculated using Miles and Huberman's (1994) reliability formula: $P = [Na \text{ (Agreement)} / (Na \text{ (Agreement)} + Nd \text{ (Disagreement)})] \times 100$.

The participating science teachers were coded as ST1, ST2,... ST29, ST30 (e.g., ST2 represents the second teacher, ST16 the sixteenth, and ST28 the twenty-eighth).

3. RESULTS

The codes derived from the teachers' responses to the question, "What are the reasons for science teachers' professional alienation?" are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Reasons for Professional Alienation

Codes	Frequency	Teacher Participants
Workload	13	ST1, ST3, ST6, ST9, ST11, ST13, ST15, ST21, ST22, ST24, ST27, ST29, ST30
Low Salary	11	ST2, ST5, ST9, ST12, ST13, ST15, ST19, ST22, ST24, ST27, ST30
Exclusion from Processes	6	ST4, ST7, ST14, ST17, ST25, ST28
Pressure from Administrators & Parents	4	ST6, ST14, ST19, ST27
Student Disrespect	4	ST9, ST18, ST22, ST25
Classroom Management Difficulties	3	ST14, ST23, ST30
Constantly Changing Education Policies	2	ST5, ST17

As seen in Table 2, workload emerged as the most frequently cited reason for alienation, while constantly changing education policies was the least emphasized. Teachers expressed their views on the reasons for alienation as follows:

"I love my teaching profession very much, but the disrespectful behavior of students has made me disheartened with my job." (ST18)

"There is a huge disparity between the workload expected of me and the salary I receive. This negatively affects my motivation to work." (ST9)
 "Our opinions are not sought in the decision-making processes for the school. It's as if we don't exist here." (ST4).

Table 3. Effects of Professional Alienation

Codes	Frequency	Teacher Participants
Loss of Motivation	15	ST3, ST5, ST6, ST8, ST11, ST15, ST17, ST18, ST21, ST23, ST25, ST26, ST28, ST29, ST30
Professional Dissatisfaction	11	ST2, ST7, ST12, ST13, ST16, ST18, ST20, ST22, ST24, ST27, ST29
Breakdown in Communication	8	ST6, ST11, ST18, ST21, ST23, ST26, ST27, ST30
Decline in Student Academic Achievement	6	ST7, ST13, ST17, ST24, ST26, ST28
Decreased Productivity	5	ST4, ST16, ST18, ST25, ST28
Stress	4	ST8, ST11, ST18, ST24
Feeling of Isolation	3	ST2, ST13, ST15

Table 3 indicates that loss of motivation was the most frequently reported effect of alienation, while feeling isolated was the least cited. Teachers described the effects as follows:

"As a result of all these processes, my motivation has gradually decreased. There are days when I don't even want to come to school." (ST5).

"Since I, as a teacher, am not working productively, this negatively affects my students' academic success." (ST17).

"Alienation from their profession causes stress for these teachers. This stress negatively impacts their entire professional life, leading to adverse effects such as a breakdown in communication with other teacher colleagues." (ST11)

Table 4. Recommendations to Prevent Alienation

Codes	Frequency	Teacher Participants
Collaboration Among Teachers	10	ST2, ST6, ST8, ST10, ST13, ST17, ST21, ST25, ST27, ST30

Administrator-Teacher Collaboration	9	ST3, ST5, ST9, ST13, ST18, ST24, ST26, ST27, ST29
Social Cohesion Activities	8	ST5, ST9, ST12, ST14, ST17, ST18, ST22, ST30
Teacher Inclusion in Decision-Making	6	ST8, ST14, ST16, ST23, ST27, ST29
Fair and Equitable Treatment by Administrators	5	ST8, ST16, ST19, ST25, ST28
Reward and Incentive System	3	ST3, ST15, ST22

Table 4 shows that collaboration among teachers was the most suggested recommendation to prevent alienation, while a reward and incentive system was the least mentioned. Teachers offered the following recommendations:

"Collaboration with our other colleagues and administrators will be positive for everyone in the school environment." (ST13)

"If teachers are the cornerstone of education, why are we not consulted when a decision is made? I believe teachers must be included in decision-making processes." (ST14)

"It is very important for administrators to be fair and equitable. Otherwise, significant negative issues arise among teachers." (ST28).

4. DISCUSSION

Teachers are influenced by a multitude of physical, material, social, and psychological factors within the school environment. Furthermore, the specific qualities, type, structure, and management of the school in which they work are significant determinants of teacher alienation (Eryılmaz & Burgaz, 2011). A sense of isolation from teaching and learning processes can gradually erode a teacher's connection to the school climate. Feelings of being undervalued, inadequate, and lacking an environment to utilize their skills can lead to significant pressure.

Alienation from their work can cause teachers to develop negative attitudes towards colleagues, students, parents, and administrators. It can also result in a loss of interest, enthusiasm, and passion for the teaching profession. An alienated teacher will likely struggle to fulfill expected duties. Ultimately, the teacher's inability to find meaning in their profession can precipitate numerous adverse effects on the educational process. Common behaviors observed in alienated teachers include indifference to student academic failure and diminished commitment to the school and profession (Elma, 2003). The findings of this study corroborate this, indicating that teacher alienation leads to a decline in student academic achievement, primarily due to reduced professional commitment and its negative impact on motivation.

A decline in focus on school goals among teachers and administrators, and their resulting lack of professional engagement, transforms them into participants in an environment where they find no satisfaction in their work (Şeren, 2019). Professional alienation is characterized by a teacher's inability to derive pleasure from their work and a sense that their profession holds no personal meaning (Halaçoğlu, 2008). In other words, it is the perception of teaching as a monotonous and unfulfilling endeavor, leading to gradual disengagement and a

sense of meaninglessness (Kurtulmuş & Yiğit, 2016). This effect can be generalized, suggesting that teacher alienation negatively impacts not only the school environment but all echelons of society.

Alienation within educational institutions can have repercussions that extend beyond the individual or the institution to affect the entire nation (Bowen, 1980). The results of this study align with this perspective, revealing that alienated teachers experience a lack of motivation and an inability to find satisfaction in their profession. The study also found that finding the profession meaningless leads to professional dissatisfaction. Similar research supports this outcome. A highly motivated teacher performs their duties willingly, which contributes to both their professional development and organizational productivity (Özerten, 2018).

Teaching is a profession that demands robust knowledge in both the subject area and pedagogy. Additionally, due to the stress inherent in the work environment, teaching is a high-risk profession for negative impacts on mental health. The adverse effects of stress can diminish a teacher's interest in their profession and their students, thereby reducing their effectiveness in fulfilling professional responsibilities. Both excessive and insufficient workload can induce stress (Maslach & Leiter, 1997); workload significantly affects a teacher's commitment by increasing their intention to leave the profession (Jones et al., 2007). Indeed, teaching is a leading stress-inducing profession because it imposes diverse and numerous responsibilities (Stoeber & Rennert, 2008). Consistent with these findings, Table 2 of this study identifies workload as the most frequently cited cause of alienation. Therefore, alleviating teacher workload is one of the most crucial factors in preventing professional alienation. Teachers generally experience higher stress levels compared to individuals in other professions (Baltas, 1998). Contributing factors include student-teacher and school-parent conflicts, student disciplinary issues, excessive bureaucracy, difficulties in advancement, public criticism, lack of community support, and pressures from social and political forces on educational institutions, as well as inadequate reward systems and participation in decision-making (Campbell & Lloyd, 1983). Teacher stress levels are influenced by various factors, including salary, social benefits, school administration, student characteristics, and job responsibilities and intensity. These factors can negatively affect teachers through low motivation and performance, difficulty adapting, communication breakdowns with colleagues, and physical and psychological ailments, stress, and exhaustion.

While negative stress leads to low performance and productivity, a certain level of stress can keep an individual active and alert, thereby fostering success. In fact, a moderate amount of stress can be considered a prerequisite for achievement. Failure to provide adequate support in the work environment will negatively impact teacher job satisfaction and attitudes toward the profession. Teachers lacking necessary support will experience burnout, unhappiness, and associated stress (Kıralp & Bolkan, 2017). Stress has been shown to cause professional deformation in teachers, leading to frustration, anxiety, and depression (Dick & Wagner, 2001). The stress resulting from alienation, as identified in this study, has adverse effects on all teachers to varying degrees. Within the same school, some teachers are less affected by stressful conditions, while others are more significantly impacted (Wonzy et al., 2015). Therefore, when analyzing and seeking solutions for occupational stress, the multidimensional nature of the problem must be emphasized, considering organizational structure, societal conditions, and teachers' individual characteristics and coping skills.

Reasons for teacher alienation can be personal, institutional, economic, or related to centralized systems and bureaucratic structures (Gülören, 2011). Supporting this, the present study identified factors such as exclusion from decision-making and low pay as contributors to

alienation. To counter this, teachers should be given responsibilities aligned with their preferences and involved in decision-making to foster a sense of commitment to the school. Teacher burnout is a chronic phenomenon causing high attrition rates in education. If solutions to teacher alienation are not found, the result will be increased inefficiency in education and a negative impact on student learning quality. Attrition rates in teaching are higher than in many other professions (Rumschlag, 2017). Therefore, it is imperative to thoroughly analyze the causes and consequences of alienation in teaching and develop effective solutions.

5. CONCLUSION

The negative impact of alienated teachers can manifest in student alienation. Sidorkin (2004) defined student alienation as disengagement from the learning process, a growing perception of the process as meaningless, and the transformation of learning into a boring and unenjoyable activity.

As shown in Table 4, findings indicate that, from the teachers' perspective, administrators must be fair and equitable. Consequently, school administrators should demonstrate a management style based on justice and democratic principles. Assignments of non-instructional duties should follow a fair and equitable approach, considering teacher preferences. To enhance teachers' sense of school belonging, responsibilities should be assigned according to their preferences and skills. Teacher participation in decision-making should be ensured, and structural changes to curricula should be developed through broad participation and in-depth analysis. It is crucial for school administrators to adopt a collaborative approach involving all stakeholders, motivating teachers by considering their individual traits and skills, and including them in decision-making processes, all based on a foundation of justice and equality.

As also seen in Table 4, a reward and incentive system can positively counter professional alienation. Therefore, recognizing and rewarding teachers' efforts and achievements by colleagues and administrators can boost motivation. Opportunities should be provided for teachers to demonstrate creativity and realize their professional ideals. Diverse motivational tools and an effective reward system should be utilized to enhance job satisfaction and institutional commitment.

Organizing various activities such as regular meetings, meals, trips, and picnics can promote harmony and unity, positively impacting communication among teachers and maintaining high motivation. This can prevent teacher alienation from the school, leading to a more productive teaching and learning environment and, consequently, positively contributing to students' academic achievement.

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