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Teacher Absenteeism in Turkish Primary Schools: A Qualitative Perspective from School Principals*

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ABSTRACT

Teacher absenteeism has been one of the significant factors that influence the quality of education. This article reports findings from research aimed at investigating teacher absenteeism in the context of Turkish primary schools. Results revealed that teachers displayed more absenteeism behaviors on a monthly basis. Results also indicated that the primary individual factors leading to absenteeism behaviors were health problems and family problems, on the other hand, the most important organizational factor leading to teacher absenteeism was negative school climate. Implications for teacher absenteeism were discussed.

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Keywords:
Teacher absenteeism, reasons for teacher absenteeism, school principal, primary school, Turkey

Introduction

Teacher absenteeism has recently been one of the problematic issues for improving the quality of education and for creating a more positive learning environment in schools. There has recently been a tendency for investigating the sources of employee absenteeism and its possible effects on organizational work-flow and employee performance as well as the harms it brings to organization (Nicholson and Johns, 1995; Scott, Vaughn, Wolfe, and Wyant, 2007). Arguing that teacher absenteeism has an important effect on teaching processes, Miller, Murname and Willet (2008) state that this concept is one of the important variables that may explain the difference between the success levels of students.

Being defined as an employee's not being on duty for any reason (Bowers, 2001), the construct of teacher absenteeism has been the focus of a number of studies in which it is associated with job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intention to quit the job (Sagie, 1998), transformational and transactional leadership styles (Lucas, Bii, Sulo, Keter, Yano and Koskey, 2012), school climate (Gaziel, 2004; Imants and Van Zoelen, 1995), the academic success of students (Miller et al., 2008; Suryadarma, Suryahadi, Sumarto and Rogers, 2006), and school's ethnic structure (Rosenblatt and Shirom, 2006). Apart from that, employee absenteeism is treated and examined as a factor having a negative effect on organizational effectiveness in various sectors including business management and health (Iverson and Deery, 2001; Siu, 2002; Ulleberg and Rundmo, 1997). According to the results of the study conducted by Siu (2002) on employee absenteeism, the psychological fatigue experienced by employees, their satisfaction with their jobs, the type of the organization where they work, the interaction between an employee and his/her organization, and the active

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participation of employees in organizational processes were significant predictors of absenteeism behaviors. Based on this finding, it is reasonable to argue that organizational variables are as influential as individual variables on employee absenteeism.

The related literature includes larger scale studies besides those which investigated the relationship between employee absenteeism and individual and organizational variables. For example, Chaudhury, Hammer, Kremer, Muralidharan and Rogers (2006) found out that the absenteeism ratios of primary school teachers were 16% in Bangladesh, 14% in Ecuador, 25% in India, 19% in Indonesia, 11% in Peru, and 27% in Uganda. The number of studies on employee absenteeism is scarce. However, a report published by the Education Reform Initiative (ERI) (2012) indicated teacher absenteeism as a growing problem within the education system, and stated that the ratios of schools experiencing teacher absenteeism problem intensely rose from 13% to 37% in rural areas, and from 7% to 42% in urban areas. It was an important finding in that it showed that teacher absenteeism was a problem requiring careful treatment within the Turkish education system. The "Teaching and Learning International Survey" report prepared by Büyüköztürk, Akbaba-Altun and Yıldırım (2010) emphasized that late arrival of teachers in schools and absenteeism were among the factors having a negative influence on student learning. In parallel with that, Sagie (1998) argued that employees being absent had low organizational commitments and were not satisfied with their jobs adequately. In this regard, it may be argued that the rise in the absenteeism ratios of teachers employed within the Turkish education system yields a worrying situation in the context of system effectiveness.

Employee absenteeism is addressed as one of the factors harming organizations and preventing them from achieving their goals (Siu, 2002). Jacobs and Kritsonis (2007) state that student achievement may fall and students' commitment to class may decrease in schools with high teacher absenteeism frequency. Furthermore, some studies (Finlayson, 2009; Miller et al., 2008; Speas, 2010; Suryadarma et al., 2006) concluded that teacher absenteeism had a negative effect on the academic success of students. Another study determined a positive correlation between teacher absenteeism and student absenteeism (Ehrenberg, Ehrenberg, Ress and Ehrenberg, 1989). Stoica and Wamsiedel (2012) highlighted that teacher absenteeism gave rise to a negative teacher perception in the eyes of students and society, disrupted the relations among colleagues, harmed the positive working environment in school, and decreased the motivations of students by reducing their commitment to school. In line with this argument, Rogers and Vegas (2009) argue that teacher absenteeism should be addressed as one of the main problems affecting the learning environment in school negatively. Another study conducted on the same subject (Al-Hassan, 2009) revealed that teacher absenteeism weakened the quality of education in school, decreased the academic success of students, and disrupted the teaching plan implemented in the class. The arguments above along with a number of findings from related studies make it clear that employee absenteeism hinders organizational effectiveness and decreases the quality of organizational operations.

There are a series of factors causing employees to display absenteeism behaviors. In general, these factors are examined in two groups: (i) involuntary and (ii) voluntary (March and Simon, 1958; Ramsey, Punnett and Greenidge, 2008). Involuntary absenteeism refers to the factors beyond the control of an individual (e.g. absenteeism due to health-related excuses). That means that an employee is not on duty due to his/her health problems (Bowers, 2001; Bradley, Green and Leeves, 2007; Rosenblatt, Shapira-Lishchinsky and Shirom, 2010). Voluntary absenteeism, however, is about the conscious preferences of an employee regarding keeping at a job (Ramsey et al., 2007). Voluntary absenteeism refers to factors that are under the control of an individual (Gaziel, 2004). On the other hand, previous research on this subject demonstrates that employee absenteeism in general and teacher absenteeism in particular results from many different individual and organizational reasons (Brown and Uehara, 1999; Gaziel, 2004; Erickson, Nichols and Ritter, 2000; Rosenblatt and Shirom, 2006; Sagie, 1998; Siu, 2002; Speas, 2010). For instance, Siu (2002) conducted a study on nurses, and determined that age, psychological stress, job satisfaction, and the interaction between individual and organization were significant predictors of employee absenteeism. In another study, Rosenblatt and Shirom (2006) revealed that the absenteeism behaviors of teachers decreased when they took on an administrative task in school. The research findings of Sagie (1998) demonstrated that the absenteeism behaviors of employees decreased as their levels of organizational commitment and job satisfaction increased. According to Erickson et al. (2000), those employees who experienced burn-out and had little children whom they were obliged to look after were absent from job more frequently. Brown and Uehara

(1999) state that the teachers with a higher job stress displayed absenteeism behaviors more frequently. Gaziel (2004) determined that negative organizational climate was in a positive relationship with employee absenteeism. According to the research findings of Speas (2010), the educational levels where teachers worked (i.e. primary school, middle school, high school, etc.) and the socio-economic levels of students were influential on teacher absenteeism.

Teacher absenteeism is an important factor that may prevent the creation of an effective learning and teaching environment in school and may promote the increase of student achievement (Büyüköztürk et al., 2010). As a matter of fact, Gaziel (2004) suggested that the quality of teaching is low in schools where teacher absenteeism was high. A line of research findings further showed that there was a negative correlation between teacher absenteeism and students' academic achievement (Brown and Arnell, 2012; Clotfelter, Ladd and Vigdor, 2009). According to Suryadarma et al. (2006), teacher absenteeism was regarded as one of the important indicators of teacher effectiveness and performance. It is therefore needed to conduct further studies on teacher absenteeism. However, there are only a limited number of studies on this subject in Turkey (Büyüköztürk et al., 2010; ERI, 2011).

The Present Study

Teacher absenteeism is closely related to student learning and building a healthy and effective learning environment in school. Therefore, teachers displaying absenteeism may impede creating an effective school environment. Furthermore, it is more likely in schools with absent teachers that the quality of classroom practices would fail and that student learning would decrease. In this regard, it was expected for the present study, aiming at determining the frequency and the causes of absenteeism behaviors of teachers as well as the solutions suggested by school principals for this issue, to make an important contribution to the field. In addition, it was thought that the results of the study might offer an important data source to the policy-makers aiming to minimize teacher absenteeism. Furthermore, the present study was considered significant in that it could provide data about the quality of the learning and teaching environments in schools. This study, therefore, investigated the frequency of absenteeism behaviors of primary school teachers, the causes of teacher absenteeism, the possible problems that might be created by teacher absenteeism for schools, and the solutions which school principals resorted to for eliminating teacher absenteeism in practice and the solutions they suggested for the same.

As teacher absenteeism is one of the problems that influences effective management of the organization, a school principal has a crucial role in monitoring and decreasing teacher absenteeism behaviors (Gaziel, 2004; Sagie, 1998). Furthermore, solutions for the problems of empty classes or school guards that are aroused from teacher absenteeism are assigned to the school principal. As the chief officer of the school, a principal is responsible for ensuring that teachers keep at their jobs. The basic problem that guides this study refers to teacher absenteeism. The problems of empty classes, finding a suitable teacher for an empty class, and explaining the situation to parents in detail are closely associated with the lack of human resources within school and the school principal is the one who faces such problems stemming from teacher absenteeism directly. Therefore, this study tried to shed some light on determining the views and attitudes of school principals about teacher absenteeism. The researchers further agreed that school principals' views on teacher absenteeism might be objective and coherent. Considering social desirability effect, teachers were more likely to hide their behaviors or distort the problems about their absenteeism. Thus, an attempt was made to answer the following questions: (1) What is the frequency of absenteeism behaviors of teachers according to school principals?, (2) What are the individual factors leading to teacher absenteeism?, (3) What are the organizational factors leading to teacher absenteeism?, (4) What problems may teacher absenteeism create for school?, (5) What are the solutions applied or offered by school principals for preventing and decreasing teacher absenteeism?

Method

Research Model

Qualitative research method was used in this study. Qualitative research method, aiming to make an in-depth examination of a phenomenon within its own reality, was considered more appropriate for the present study. Phenomenology design was employed in the study. Characteristically, the phenomenology

design focuses on the phenomena of which one is conscious, but about which one does not have any in-depth and detailed perception (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2011).

Study Group

Purposeful sampling method and criterion sampling techniques were employed for determining the study group. Characteristically, the main purpose of criterion sampling method is to examine all situations fulfilling certain pre-determined criteria (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2011). The criterion used for determining the participants of the present study was to be a school principal with a minimum one year of experience in the present school. The reason for adopting this criterion was that school principals needed to spend a particular time in their schools in order to have an awareness concerning teacher absenteeism. The second criterion was having master's degree in the field of educational administration and inspection. The main reason for accepting this criterion was that school principals could make a better analysis of the causes of teacher behaviors and their effects on student achievement and school functioning if they had obtained theoretical knowledge in the field of educational administration through graduate study. In short, it was considered that the school principals fulfilling these two criteria could have more knowledge, competency, and awareness concerning teacher absenteeism and the concepts about it. Therefore, a total of 10 school principals employed in primary schools located in the city center of Ankara and fulfilling the above-mentioned criteria participated in the present study. Although this study primarily conducted purposeful and criterion sampling methods to determine the participants, snowball sampling method was also used in a suppressive manner as the interviews were ended up at the point of saturation. Thus, after interviewing 10 school principals, it was observed that the responses of school principals began to resemble each other and the researchers, therefore, decided that there was no need to interview any more school principals. While participants were being determined, sampling variation was conducted based on gender, age, professional seniority, and years in current school. While 4 participants were female, 6 were male. The average age, average seniority, and average administration period of the school principals were 38, 15 (years), and 3 (years) respectively.

Data Collection

One of the main data collection tools in phenomenology studies is interview (Fraenkel, Wallen and Hyun, 2012; Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2011). A semi-structured interview form, developed by the researchers, was used in this study. Semi-structured interview forms allow people included in an interview to express themselves (Büyüköztürk, Kılıç-Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz and Demirel, 2012). At the stage of preparing the interview form, (*i*) national literature and international literature were reviewed, and a question pool including six questions was created based on the interviews with academicians from the related field; (*ii*) experts in the field of educational measurement and evaluation were asked to deliver their opinions concerning the interview form; (*iii*) the prepared questions were improved in terms of meaning and coherence in accordance with the opinions expressed by experts from the field of Turkish language; (*iv*) the opinions of two primary school principals not included in the study group concerning the six-question semi-structured interview form were taken, thereby ensuring scope validity; and (*v*) the five-question interview form was finalized after deciding to cancel a question which was determined to be measuring similar properties. The finalized interview form included search-type questions, besides main questions, in order to enable participants to organize their views better when questions were not understood or were understood wrongly.

The data of the study were gathered from participants in their schools. The questions were asked to the participants by using the same words and questions. Each of the school principal was asked whether they let the researchers use voice recorder to record their answers for the questions. All the participants gave permission to use voice recorder. Therefore, the answers of the participants were tape-recorded during the interviews. Furthermore, written notes were taken when needed. Each interview lasted about 40 minutes and the researchers observed that the participant school principals answered the interview questions in a quite sincere way.

Data Analysis

Descriptive analysis and content analysis were used for data analysis. The tape-recorded interviews and notes taken down during interviews were transferred into electronic environment. Then, the related files were deciphered by the researchers. To ensure a correct and precise decipherment, the interview process was followed through the written documentation while audio records were being listened, thereby making an attempt to prevent any deficiency. Later, the data were grouped based on themes, and content analysis was conducted. The themes were determined based on the related literature, and codes were identified. Accordingly, an attempt was made to make a content analysis suitable for the research purpose.

The criteria determined by Miles and Huberman (1994) were taken as basis for ensuring the validity of the study. Coding was performed as determined beforehand, and the codes were showed in tables in accordance with the conceptual framework. To ensure the internal validity of the study, it was examined whether the data were meaningful, the findings were consistent, and the findings were compatible with the previous conceptual framework. The research method was defined in detail in order to ensure the external validity. Some strategies are employed in order to increase reliability in qualitative research (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2011). In this regard, to increase the reliability of the present study, an attempt was made to ensure that enough time was spent together with the participants to feel themselves comfortable. It was tried to diversify data sources. Expert opinions were taken during the stage of creating data collection tools. Member checking was conducted, and analyses were conducted in accordance with the detailed conceptual framework created beforehand. To ensure confidentiality, participants were indicated with abbreviations (e.g. [P] for *school principal*). In addition, one number was assigned to each participant.

Findings

The findings obtained from the interviews including questions determined for the present study are presented in tables below. Table 1 presents the views of the school principals participating in the study concerning the absenteeism frequencies of teachers.

Table 1. Findings regarding the absenteeism frequencies of teachers

Codes	***n***
Monthly	4
Weekly	3
Daily	3

The question, 'How often do the teachers employed in your school display absenteeism behaviors' was addressed to the participants. It is here reasonable to note that displaying absenteeism refers to teachers' absence in their job for any reasons. Important sections of the answers given to this question are summarized below with the participants' own expressions. According to the Table 1, four school principals stated that they encountered teacher absenteeism behaviors at least on a monthly basis, whereas three participants declared that they witnessed teacher absenteeism behaviors at least on a weekly basis and the other three school principals articulated that they came across teacher absenteeism behaviors at least on a daily basis. In other words, the majority of school principals (n = 7) thought that teacher absenteeism was seen at least on a monthly and weakly basis. Thus, teacher absenteeism may be regarded as a managerial primary in primary schools. However, when absenteeism is considered in terms of education system and school, it is clear that even one-day absenteeism of a teacher gives rise to quite serious losses. Therefore, it is very important to develop solutions for preventing teacher absenteeism excepting special conditions and to take some measures increasing the commitment of teachers to school. The views of some participants on this subject were as follows:

We may encounter this problem at any time daily. (P1)
There are many teachers in my school. Thus, it is quite difficult for me to follow all of them as I have administrative affairs to deal with. However, I and my vice principals observe that these kinds of things occur several times weekly. (P2)
One or two teachers may display these kinds of behaviors weekly. (P4)
It has been one and a half year since I started to work in this school. I often spent time with teachers in the beginning in order to know them. Thus, I could easily determine those who were absent. Absenteeism

behaviors were displayed by the same people in general. Among these people, some teachers displayed these kinds of behaviors several times weekly. (P6)
It is very likely that we encounter these kinds of behaviors every day. (P8)
In fact, if there were no control mechanism, we could encounter these kinds of behaviors every day. However, only a couple of cases occur in my school monthly. (P10)

Table 2 presents the findings about the individual factors causing teacher absenteeism. The question, '*What do you think are the individual factors leading to teacher absenteeism?*' was addressed to the participants. Important sections of the answers given to this question are summarized below with the participants' own expressions. According to the Table 2, the school principals thought that health problems (n = 5), family problems (n = 5), burnout and job dissatisfaction (n = 3), inexperience (n = 2), and arbitrariness (n = 1) were among the individual factors leading to teacher absenteeism. Based on the research findings, it is possible to argue that the individual factors leading to teacher absenteeism are mostly about health and family problems.

Table 2. Findings regarding the individual factors leading to teacher absenteeism

Codes	***n***
Health problems	5
Family problems	5
Burnout and job dissatisfaction	3
Inexperience	2
Arbitrariness	1

According to the views of the primary school principals, burnout and job dissatisfaction, inexperience in teaching profession, and arbitrariness are among the factors influential on job dissatisfaction. The views of some participants on this subject were as follows:

The main reasons for teacher absenteeism are family problems, problems resulting from their children and spouses, and health problems. (P2)
In general, there are teachers who become ill or receive a medical report when they have to enter class or be on duty. In my opinion, health issue is abused in some cases. (P3)
I sometimes ask to our absent teachers, I hope nothing is wrong. Is there any problem? Some teachers even give the answer. I felt disinclined, so I did not come. (P7)
These kinds of behaviors are frequently displayed by teachers who have just become a mother. It is also known that some teachers receive a medical report in June for enjoying cheap holidays. It is possible to associate such absenteeism behaviors (excepting motherhood) with job dissatisfaction and lack of professional ethics. (P8)
Our teachers sometimes forget the fact that they have to come to school every day. I attribute these kinds of situations to their inexperience and unawareness of their rights and responsibilities. (P9)

Table 3 presents the findings about the organizational factors leading to teacher absenteeism.

Table 3. Findings regarding the organizational factors leading to teacher absenteeism

Codes	***n***
Negative school climate	6
Authoritarian administration	5
Negative student behavior	2
Difficulty in accessing the school	2

The question, '*What are the organizational factors leading to absenteeism behaviors?*' was asked to the participants. Important sections of the answers given to this question are summarized below with the participants' own expressions. According to the Table 3, the school principals stated that negative school climate (n = 6), authoritarian administration (n = 5), negative student behavior (n = 2), and difficulty in accessing the school referring to the farness of house from school (n = 2) were among the organizational factors leading to teacher absenteeism. The research findings demonstrated that the school principals thought that the physical structure of school took an important place among the organizational factors

leading to teacher absenteeism. Apart from that, a considerable number of the school principals told that negative school climate caused absenteeism among teachers. According to the research findings, among other factors bringing about teacher absenteeism were authoritarian administration style adopted by school principals, negative behaviors of students, distance between school and house, and negative communication environment in school. The views of some participants on this subject were as follows:

Negative school climate, lack of communication among employees, and uneasy organizational environment may cause teachers to display absenteeism behaviors. (P1)
As I stated before, my school is quite a big one both in terms of the number of teachers and physically. The thought that one's absence may not be noticed within this big structure or lack of physical conditions may lead to absenteeism. (P2)
The voluntariness of teachers may decrease and teacher absenteeism may occur if student absenteeism is high, students are involuntary for learning, and parents are carefree on this subject. (P3)
There has been an infighting and resentment between some teachers for a long time. That affects other teachers, too. As a result, the school climate is influenced negatively. For this reason, non-communication may be considered the best way among teachers. (P5)
The houses of some of our teachers are very far from the school. I think these teachers do not prefer to live in the vicinity of school because of its neighborhood. That gives rise to such problems as difficulty in transportation, adverse weather conditions, etc., which are some of the reasons for teacher absenteeism. (P7)
Some of the important factors influential on teacher absenteeism behaviors are the physical structure and technological equipment of school, lack of adequate tools and materials, unreliability of the school's neighborhood, etc. (P9)

Table 4 presents the findings concerning the problems to be created by teacher absenteeism for school.

Table 4. Findings regarding the problems to be created by teacher absenteeism for school

Codes	***n***
Decrease in academic success	7
Increase in student absenteeism	6
Negative school culture	5
Disruption of relations among colleagues	3
Lack of cooperation	2
Disruption of discipline	1

The question, '*What problems may teacher absenteeism create for school?*' was addressed to the participants. Important sections of the answers given to this question are summarized below with the participants' own expressions. According to the table 4, the school principals stated that decrease in students' academic success (n = 7), increase in student absenteeism (n = 6), negative school culture (n = 5), disruption of relations among colleagues (n = 3), lack of cooperation (n = 2), and disruption of discipline (n = 1) were among the problems that might result from teacher absenteeism. Based on these findings, it is possible to say that the school principals participating in the study thought that the most fundamental problem to be created by teacher absenteeism was decrease in students' academic success. In addition, a considerable number of the school principals thought that teacher absenteeism brought along student absenteeism. Moreover, the school principals stated that teacher absenteeism caused a negative school culture to prevail at school, damaged relations among colleagues, hindered cooperation processes, and disrupted discipline. The views of some participants on this subject were as follows:

Teacher absenteeism may lead to many problems in school. Among these problems, the most important one is decrease in students' academic success. If students are absent frequently, students will fall behind in the lessons and their interests in the lessons will fall. That will also disturb relations among colleagues in the working environment. School administrators and teachers may develop a negative attitude towards teachers who are absent frequently. (P2)
When the teacher of a class does not come, the students of the class start to be absent, too. Students behave however their teachers act. (P4)

It is very difficult to compensate even one minute of the idle lesson. As a result, academic success decreases, and discipline is disrupted. An absenteeism behavior displayed by a teacher encourages others to do the same. Most importantly, it misdirects the attitudes of students towards absenteeism. (P5)

School climate and school culture are affected negatively in every aspect. As a result, the attitudes of families towards school as well as the attitudes of teachers working in other schools towards our school are affected negatively. (P7)

I sometimes examine the grades of students. The success of the class taught by teachers coming to school without any absenteeism was quite good in the first exams. However, when the teachers of the same classes started not to come, other teachers began to enter classes, as a result of which grades fell. (P8)

Disciplinary problems emerge among students. This is because; new teachers enter the class instead of absent ones. This being the case; students want to prove themselves and display negative behaviors due to puberty, etc. (P10)

Table 5 presents the findings concerning the solution suggestions aimed at preventing and decreasing teacher absenteeism. The question, '*What may be done to minimize teacher absenteeism? What are your solution suggestions for preventing and decreasing the problem?*' was addressed to the participants. Important sections of the answers given to this question are summarized below with the participants' own expressions. According to the table 5, the school principals mostly thought that a positive school climate should be created (n = 9) and school principals should have a participative leadership style (n = 8) for preventing and decreasing the absenteeism behaviors of teachers.

Table 5. The solution suggestions of the school principals aimed at preventing and decreasing absenteeism behaviors

Codes	***n***
Improving the positive school climate	9
School principals having a participative leadership style	8
The mentorship of school principals	5
Effective in-service training	5
Increasing the job satisfaction of teachers	3
Assessment and payment based on performance	2

Among other solution suggestions of the school principals for preventing and decreasing school absenteeism were the mentorship of school principals (n = 5), the effectiveness of in-service training (n = 5), increasing the job satisfaction of teachers (n = 3), and assessment based on performance (n = 2). The views of some participants on this subject were as follows:

In fact, this problem may be eliminated if you, the school principal, exercise your legitimate power. However, we avoid exercising this power considering that teachers may be punished, such punishments may be entered in their registers, and their families may be affected negatively. (P3)

The commitment of teachers to school and life may be increased through personal development seminars. (P4)

It does not seem possible to be able to prevent teacher absenteeism completely. Teachers may sometimes display absenteeism behaviors due to reasons beyond their control by force of social life. However, if absenteeism results from organizational reasons or teacher-related factors, these kinds of behaviors may be minimized by taking measures on the said subjects. Thus, school principals should make efforts and conduct activities aimed at improving school climate. Some of such measures may be organizing social activities aimed at increasing communication among teachers, holding activities and meetings for improving the teacher-parent communication, and in-service trainings concerning the activities that could enable students to have positive attitudes towards lessons. (P6)

Being school principals, we are responsible for training our entire personnel. If we fulfilled this responsibility besides our administrative affairs, we could eliminate many problems including but not limited to teacher absenteeism. (P7)

All problems could be solved if there was a payment system based on performance, that is, if we could give more money to the teachers making more sacrifice and working harder. This is because; improvement in economic conditions may bring about many other improvements. (P9)

There should be cooperation among colleagues. Teachers, administrators, parents, and everyone should come to school fondly and willingly. The problems of absenteeism, cooperation, discipline, and student success may be solved if that is achieved. (P10)

Investigating the frequency of teacher absenteeism, its causes, the problems it could create for school, and the solution suggestions for preventing and decreasing it based on the views of the primary school principals, the present study revealed that teachers displayed more absenteeism behaviors on a monthly basis; health problems and family problems were the most frequent individual factors while negative school climate was the most important organizational factor leading to teacher absenteeism; the most critical problem created by teacher absenteeism for school was decrease in students' academic success; and school principals should have a participative leadership style in order to prevent and decrease absenteeism behaviors, as the most important was of eliminating such behaviors.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study investigated the frequency of teacher absenteeism behaviors, the causes of such behaviors, the problems to be created by such behaviors, and the solution suggestions for preventing and decreasing teacher absenteeism based on the views of primary school principals. The research results demonstrated that health problems and family problems were the most frequent individual factors while negative school climate was the most important organizational factor leading to teacher absenteeism. In addition, they indicated that teacher absenteeism led to decrease in students' academic success, and that school principals should have a participative leadership style in order to prevent and decrease absenteeism behaviors.

According to the research findings, four school principals stated that teachers displayed absenteeism at least on a monthly basis while three school principals indicated that teachers exhibited absenteeism behaviors at least on a weekly basis and other three school principals expressed that they encountered teacher absenteeism behaviors at least on a daily basis. In consideration of this finding, it can be said that absenteeism behaviors are encountered, though not intensely, in primary schools. According to the literature review on this subject, previous research emphasizes that the absenteeism behaviors of teachers negatively affect the educational activities conducted in school (Büyükzötürk et al., 2010), pave the way for student absenteeism (Ehrenberg et al., 1989), negatively affect the relations among colleagues in school (Stoica and Wamsiedel, 2012), hinder the curriculum followed in class (Al-Hassan, 2009), and weaken the quality of teaching (Gaziel, 2004). In line with that, the findings obtained from the present study also demonstrated that teacher absenteeism gave rise to many negative results for school, decrease in students' academic success and increase in student absenteeism being in the first place. Thus, it is possible to say that teacher absenteeism is regarded as an important problem in schools, and there is a need to generate solutions for minimizing it.

Results revealed that the primary individual factors leading to teacher absenteeism were health problems and family problems. Many studies on employee absenteeism indicated that health problems (Bowers, 2001; Bradley et al., 2007; Gaziel, 2004; Imants and Van Zoelen, 1995; Rosenblatt et al., 2010; Sagie, 1998; Siu, 2002) and family problems (Bowers, 2001; Erickson et al., 2000; Gaziel, 2004; Jacobs and Kritsonis, 2007; Miller et al., 2008) were the most important individual factors leading to absenteeism behaviors. In this regard, this finding of the study is congruent with related literature.

In general, the studies in the literature regard absenteeism based on health problems as involuntary absenteeism (Gaziel, 2004; Ramsey et al., 2008). Teachers' not appearing at school for a particular time due to health problems may be tolerated naturally. On the other hand, teacher absenteeism may be grounded on any non-documented health problem. These kinds of absenteeism behaviors are generally referred to as voluntary absenteeism (March and Simon, 1958). In other words, they refer to absenteeism under the control of an individual (Gaziel, 2004). Here, the documentation of the health problem indicated as the cause of absenteeism behavior may be considered significant for preventing the results likely to emerge as a result of absenteeism. On the other hand, it is known that family problems are an important factor influential on employee absenteeism (Erickson et al., 2000; Miller et al., 2008). For example, Erickson et al. (2000) reported that teachers with children to look after displayed absenteeism behaviors more frequently. The research findings provided by Miller et al. (2008) demonstrated that adversities such as death or serious illness

experienced in the family were among important problems leading to teacher absenteeism. According to the findings of the present study, burnout and job dissatisfaction, besides family problems and health problems, also caused teachers to display absenteeism behaviors. This finding is congruent with the research findings provided by Erickson et al. (2000) suggesting that the employees experiencing burnout syndrome displayed absenteeism behaviors more frequently. According to Brown and Arnell (2012), job dissatisfaction, burnout, and depression are among important factors influential on teacher absenteeism. In this sense, the results of the present study are in parallel with the research findings in the related literature in terms of individual factors leading to teacher absenteeism.

Research findings illustrated that the primary organizational factors leading to teacher absenteeism were negative school climate and authoritarian administration mentality. In other words, school principals think that negative school climate and authoritarian administration style may cause teacher absenteeism. According to the views of school principals, negative student behaviors and difficulty in accessing the school due to farness of the distance between school and house are also among the organizational factors causing teacher absenteeism. Gaziel (2004) reported that voluntary teacher absenteeism increased in negative school climates. This finding shows parallelism with the research findings. A negative school climate is characterized by a limited degree of communication and cooperation among colleagues, an environment where school members do not support one another, and isolated teachers or school administrators (Sweetland and Hoy, 2000). Thus, frequent teacher absenteeism is a natural result of negative school climate. On the other hand, Imants and Van Zoelen (1995) suggest that authoritarian administration mentality adopted by school administrators and the restriction of teacher behaviors by such administrators cause teacher absenteeism, too. These findings are similar to the findings of the present study. In another study on this subject, Lucas et al. (2012) determined that there was a negative correlation between teacher absenteeism and transformational leadership, but a positive correlation between teacher absenteeism and transactional leadership. In this sense, the findings of the present study are congruent with the related literature.

Findings of the current study mirrored that the views of school principals concerning the possible results of teacher absenteeism were mostly about decrease in students' academic success and increase in student absenteeism. The school principals participating in the present study also said that teacher absenteeism might cause school culture to have a negative structure, affect relations among colleagues negatively, hinder the cooperation processes among colleagues, and disrupt discipline in school. The review of the studies in the literature on this subject shows that one of the prominent results of teacher absenteeism is decrease in students' academic success (Büyüköztürk et al., 2010; Miller et al., 2008; Suryadarma et al., 2006). As a matter of fact, the findings obtained from a series of empirical studies prove the existence of a negative correlation between teacher absenteeism and students' academic success (Brown and Arnell, 2012; Clotfelter, Ladd and Vigdor, 2009; Finlayson, 2009; Miller et al., 2008; Speas, 2010; Suryadarma et al., 2006). The absenteeism behaviors displayed by teachers having such responsibilities as planning, implementation and evaluation may hinder these kinds of activities and affect student learning negatively. In addition, it may be difficult to conduct educational activities in a coherent and consistent manner and achieve educational goals in schools where absenteeism behaviors are displayed frequently. In line with this argument, Büyüköztürk et al. (2010) state that absenteeism and late arrival of teachers in school are among the factors having a negative influence on student learning. Moreover, it may be thought that teacher absenteeism may hinder teaching, and substitute teachers may not determine the needs of students clearly and the implementation of effective teaching strategies in class may be difficult when regular teachers are absent (Miller et al., 2008). In this sense, the finding of the present study suggesting that teacher absenteeism causes decrease in students' academic success seems to be congruent with the expectations.

Findings of the present study made it clear that the school principals regarded teacher absenteeism as one of the causes of student absenteeism. The students attending the class of a teacher displaying absenteeism behaviors frequently may have difficulty in making sense of teaching practices and establishing a link between these practices. In such a case, it may be expected for teachers to experience dejection and display absenteeism behaviors when the effectiveness of teaching practices decreases. In addition, when teacher absenteeism occurs very frequently, students may start to display absenteeism behaviors by taking their teachers as a model. As a matter of fact, Stoica and Wamsiedel (2012) point out that the commitment of students to school falls in schools where teacher absenteeism is very frequent. The research findings

provided by Ehrenberg et al. (1989) proved that there was a positive correlation between teacher absenteeism and student absenteeism.

Finally, the present study found out the fact that school principals primarily stressed that a positive school climate should be developed and school principals should have a participative leadership style in order to decrease teacher absenteeism. Other solution suggestions stated by school principals for decreasing teacher absenteeism were the mentorship of school principals, effective in-service training, increasing the job satisfaction of teachers, and assessment based on performance.

Order and working discipline prevail in the working environments in schools with a positive climate where school members develop relationships based on trust and focus on improving student learning through an effective collaboration (Hoy, Tarter and Kottkamp, 1991). From this perspective, teachers who may cooperate and collaborate with colleagues in a positive school climate may be expected to display fewer absenteeism behaviors. According to Scott et al. (2007), teacher absenteeism negatively affects relationships and interaction among colleagues, thereby making it difficult to create a production-oriented effective learning environment in school. In line with that, the research findings provided by Gaziel (2004) showed that there was a positive correlation between low teacher absenteeism and the school climates where positive relations emerge among colleagues. Rosenblatt et al. (2010) further revealed that teacher absenteeism decreased in the positive school climates where school members helped one another and were sensitive towards one another. Thus, it is possible to suggest that a positive school climate has an important role in decreasing teacher absenteeism.

The findings of the present study revealed that the participative leadership style adopted by school principals was important for preventing and decreasing teacher absenteeism. To put it another way, the school principals participating in the present study thought that they might prevent or decrease teacher absenteeism by adopting a participative administration mentality. The related literature contains some research involving similar findings. For example, Imants and Van Zoelen (1995) demonstrated that the behaviors of school principals aimed at restricting teachers' autonomy led to increase in teacher absenteeism. Similarly, Gaziel (2004) determined that there was a positive correlation between voluntary teacher absenteeism and the restrictive behaviors of school principals, but a negative correlation between voluntary teacher absenteeism and supportive principal behaviors. Teachers may take on more responsibility for students' learning and have more opportunities for improving teaching in schools where participative leadership mentality prevails. That may improve the professionalism and autonomy of teachers. From this perspective, teacher absenteeism may be low in such schools. In addition, teachers may experience less isolation and have a tendency for playing more active roles in schools where school members share their views, opinions, experiences, and materials concerning the teaching process.

Important results of the present study based on the views of school principals may be summarized as follows: 1) Teachers display more absenteeism behaviors on a monthly basis. 2) The primary individual factors leading to absenteeism behaviors are health problems and family problems. 3) The most important organizational factor leading to teacher absenteeism is negative school climate. 4) The most important result created by teacher absenteeism for school is decrease in students' academic success. 5) The adoption of a participative leadership style by teachers is the most important step for decreasing the absenteeism behaviors of teachers.

Recommendations

The limitation of the present study was that the study group consisted of school principals. The results obtained from the study should be interpreted by considering this limitation. In consideration of the research results, it may be said that school-based activities should be conducted to minimize absenteeism behaviors of teachers, and efforts should be made for creating a more healthy school climate and culture. Apart from that, the knowledge and skills of teachers should be used in managing administrative processes in school, and teachers' participation in school-related processes should be ensured. In consideration of the fact that teacher absenteeism may give rise to important adversities including decrease in students' academic success, it is clear that the factors leading to teacher absenteeism should be investigated in detail and concrete steps should be taken for minimizing absenteeism behaviors. Based on the research results, it may be said that effective in-service training opportunities to be provided for teachers and the mentorship behaviors of school

principals may contribute to the prevention of teacher absenteeism. Furthermore, in-service training programs which have important role in informing teachers about recent developments in education (Çimer, Çakır and Çimer, 2010) and also about practices, classes or acquisitions that help teachers become more conscious about occupational ethics, roles and responsibilities should be presented.

The phenomenology design was employed in the present study. Future studies may investigate the reasons for teacher absenteeism via different qualitative research designs including action research and case study. In addition, relationships between teacher absenteeism and burnout, job satisfaction, school principal's leadership style, school climate, and school culture may be investigated through correlational or causal research. Finally, unique measurement tools and methods that effectively reflect Turkish language, culture, and education system should be developed so as to be employed in quantitative studies on teacher absenteeism.

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