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An Investigation of Turkish EFL Teachers' Work Alienation during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The education sector has been severely affected by the pandemic caused by the sudden outbreak of coronavirus disease (COVID-19), despite the preventive measures taken and innovations brought to mitigate its effects.

Purpose: This study investigated the impact of alienation experienced by EFL teachers as a result of obligatory social distancing that has become the new normal because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, it was determined whether gender, educational level, institution type, and years of experience in the profession were among the active determinants of work alienation.

Method: A mixed-method approach was adopted for this study. Quantitative data were collected using the Work Alienation scale, completed by 160 EFL teachers working at public and private schools in Mersin, Turkey. Qualitative data were gathered from the responses of 18 teachers within the survey group. The data collected from the scale were analysed, and the data from the open-ended survey were coded and classified into three themes.

Results: The findings indicated that EFL teachers experienced low levels of work alienation during the pandemic, and the survey data provided thought-provoking examples of the damage caused by the pandemic. Although no significant differences were identified in alienation based on gender, institution type, and educational level, significant differences based on the years of experience were found in the powerlessness, meaninglessness, and isolation subscales, whereby teachers with 1–5 years of experience endured a higher level of work alienation than those with more experience.

Conclusion: The findings of the study not only raise awareness regarding the importance of providing guidance to EFL teachers during the pandemic but also raise concerns about their wellbeing and digital literacy.

KEYWORDS

English as a foreign language, English language teaching, teacher alienation, teaching as labour, work alienation, online teaching

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has altered societies, causing a global crisis. People have become physically separated, which has resulted in damaged social bonds and limited interactions. According to the United Nations' (2020) policy brief, 94% of students worldwide were affected by the pandemic, which equates to 1.58 billion learners. Language teaching has been considerably affected, as it requires interaction between the input provider and receiver. Thus, the pandemic required prompt adaptations to

new teaching methodologies, approaches, and digital educational tools. Furthermore, dependence on video conferencing applications and interactive lesson materials required increased digital competence. Teachers and learners were forced to use digital platforms such as Google Classroom, Blackboard, Zoom, and WhatsApp groups, and adapt to the processes. Bailey and Lee (2020) revealed that teachers with more experience and familiarity with digital tools were more likely to perceive fewer hindrances and utilize more tools than those with lesser or no experience. The most significant



barriers encountered by learners were technical issues related to accessing online classes, attending online exams or activities, and connectivity issues (Mahyoob, 2020). In addition, social distancing and the lack of interaction, a physical learning environment, and sufficient guidance from teachers (Karataş & Tuncer, 2020) were also crucial challenges to foreign language learning. Moreover, teachers' workload and job requirements are constantly increasing, which reduces the work environment's quality and results in burnout and work alienation (Akar, 2018).

This study aimed to investigate the level of work alienation experienced by EFL teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic, an area that has not yet been explored in the literature regarding this context and sample. Furthermore, the studies on alienation have mainly focused on primary school teachers' alienation (Elma, 2003; Köse, 2018; Kovancı & Ergen, 2019), and student alienation (Özdemir & Rahimi, 2013) in the Turkish context. Hence, a comprehensive understanding of EFL teachers' work alienation during the ongoing pandemic cannot be overstated. However, limited research in the EFL field has utilized Seeman's (1959) framework for alienation, which includes five dimensions—powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement—all of which are considered to be helpful to identify and analyse the factors contributing to work alienation in a more comprehensive and established framework. Therefore, by adopting this theoretical framework, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of EFL teachers and develop more targeted interventions to address the specific aspects of work alienation experienced by them. The results of this study will contribute to the literature on EFL teachers' work alienation and provide insights for the appropriate authorities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Work Alienation

From the Marxist perspective, work is the essence of human life, acting as a mediator in how people ascribe meaning to the world. The concept of alienation in the context of labour refers to the separation of the worker from the product of their labour and the process of labour itself. When labour becomes a commodity that is bought and sold on the market, and the worker is reduced to a mere instrument of production, they may experience a sense of estrangement and disconnection from their work. This can lead to feelings of powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement, as described in Seeman's (1959) framework for alienation. Spenner (1988, p.75) emphasized the concept of self-directed jobs, wherein individuals are empowered to control their work, organize and manage their own product, and have flexible scheduling, stating that people who work "in self-directed jobs become less authoritarian, less self-deprecatory, less fatalistic, and less conformist

in their ideas while becoming more self-confident and more responsible to standards of morality." Similarly, work conditions with a lack of control can cause alienation from the product and process, and result in self-estrangement. More precisely, "through deprivation of control over the means and product of labour, the worker loses something in and of himself" (Josephson & Josephson, 1973, p.173). Consequently, a negative relationship between job satisfaction, which refers to the level of contentment an employee experiences with their job, and work alienation has been identified in studies by Korkmazer and Ekingen (2017) and Siron et al. (2015). Similarly, studies by Akar (2018) and Çetinkanat and Kösterelioğlu (2016) have identified a negative relationship between quality of work-life (QWL), which refers to the overall level of satisfaction, comfort, and well-being experienced by an employee in their work environment, and work alienation. Many teachers are not included in decision-making processes and lack a sense of control over the job, which can trigger work alienation, given that "power and authority have been centralized at the top of the school hierarchy" in educational organizations (Tsang, 2016, p.4). Teachers are given pre-prepared books and curricula, which may result in feelings of disempowerment. Moreover, "the expectations, interventions, and many applications and enforcements related to the educational system can lead teachers to become alienated from their jobs" (Yorulmaz et al., 2015, p.33). Dissatisfaction with work, heavy workloads, and lack of appreciation may also lower job commitment, which is highly related to work alienation (Ramaswami et al., 1993).

The theoretical framework used in this study, Seeman's (1959) theory of work alienation, is based on the idea that work can be a source of meaningfulness and fulfilment in people's lives. However, when certain conditions are present in the work environment, workers can become alienated from their work and the meaning it provides. As mentioned before, Seeman (1969) defines work alienation in five dimensions: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement. Having a sense of powerlessness refers to feeling like you do not have any control over your environment at work or the process of making decisions. Meaninglessness refers to a sense that work lacks significance or purpose. Normlessness describes a feeling of a lack of clear expectations or standards in the workplace. Isolation refers to a sense of disconnection from colleagues and other social connections. Finally, self-estrangement refers to feeling disconnected from one's own sense of identity and values. Together, these dimensions create a complex web of negative feelings toward work that can lead to a sense of disconnection from the workplace and ultimately impact job satisfaction and well-being. The existing literature emphasizes how lack of social bonds in the organizations (Seeman, 1967) and isolation from friends and co-workers (Forsyth & Hoy, 1978) trigger work alienation in the isolation dimension. Work alienation in the meaninglessness dimension entails experiencing work as devoid of meaning (Nair & Vohra, 2010). Hence, related authorities, employers, and

administrators should examine the reasons triggering work alienation and focus on improving the QWL.

The COVID-19 Pandemic and Alienation in Education

Education has become one of the worst affected sectors since the pandemic, as educators and learners have been challenged by distance education, the introduction of new digital learning tools, the physical separation from the school environment, and psychological barriers. Distance education has become an area of concern with learners experiencing a “lack of self-control and self-learning ability” and lacking a “face-to-face teacher or even parental supervision” (Zhou et al., 2020, p.516). Distance education has also forced the reformulation of the approaches and methods used in classes that necessitated quick adaptations to e-learning to avoid disruptions to education. The need for information and communication technologies (ICTs) and physical distancing and job insecurity accelerated teachers’ work alienation (Kozhina & Vinokurov, 2020). Among the concerns raised by Hamilton et al. (2020) is the lack of support and guidance provided to teachers when it comes to their digital literacy. The importance of incorporating technology in the teaching of English has become increasingly apparent to teachers (Khatoony & Nezhadmehr, 2020). Concordantly, some studies have highlighted the importance of professional development in distance learning (Caglayan et al., 2021) and classroom interaction (Walsh, 2011), whereas others noted that “computer-based information technologies separate and alienate people from direct experience with nature and community” (Knapp, 1998, p.7). Although Yeşilyurt (2021) was in favour of distance education during the pandemic, and Falfushynska et al. (2020) proposed blended education for the future, the challenges are not negligible, as some Turkish university students prefer traditional face-to-face education because they feel disconnected from school and friends (Ustabulut & Keskin, 2020). The challenges faced by distance education include the lack of government support, high costs associated with e-learning, internet speeds (Mahmoodi-Shahrehabaki, 2014), a lack of ICT infrastructure and curriculum adaptations to e-learning (Qureshi et al., 2012), and the need for academic staff training (Soydal et al., 2011). Aliyyah et al. (2020) emphasized collaboration among stakeholders, educators, learners, and parents. Five instructional strategy principles have been suggested by Bao (2020) as a means of ensuring effective online education: 1) appropriate relevance between instructions and learning, 2) effective delivery, 3) adequate faculty and instructor support, 4) high-quality participation to enhance student learning, and 5) preparation of a contingency plan to prepare for emergencies. Similarly, Toquero (2020) revealed the need to reassess the curriculum to be responsive to the needs of universities. Almazova et al. (2020) recognized the importance of professional development programs to provide university teachers with psychological, technical, and methodological support. Similarly, Atmojo and Nugroho (2020) supported technology integration in language learn-

ing, ICT, and online language learning courses for teacher education and training programs.

In line with the earlier literature, the starting point of this study was to investigate the challenges experienced by EFL teachers during the pandemic, especially in relation to distance education. Further, it was determined whether variables such as gender, educational level, institution type, and years of experience in the field were indicators of work alienation. The findings will help in creating an environment where EFL teachers may share and reflect on their experiences during the pandemic. Therefore, the research questions of this study were as follows.

- (1) How do Turkish EFL teachers perceive the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their work alienation?
- (2) Are there any significant differences in EFL teachers’ work alienation based on their demographic information, such as: gender, years of experience in teaching, institution type (private or public), and educational level (elementary, secondary, or high school)?
- (3) Are there any statistically significant differences in Turkish EFL teachers’ perceptions of the four dimensions of the work alienation scale: powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation, and alienation from school?

METHOD

Research Design

As part of this study, gender, educational level, institution type, and experience were examined to determine whether work alienation is influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to four subdimensions of the work alienation scale, which are powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation, and alienation from school. Moreover, the study created a context for EFL teachers to share and reflect on their experiences. We used both quantitative and qualitative research methods to obtain valid results, confirm generalizations (Panthee, 2020), gain profound perceptions, and “increase the richness of data” (Patton, 1990, p.324). During the course of the study, the university board approved the protocol as a master’s thesis, and all participants provided written informed consent prior to participation in the study. As part of the mixed-method research, data were collected over a period of six months.

Participants

The convenience sampling method was adopted to select participants because it was difficult to contact teachers, especially during school closures. An online link to the Elma’s (2003) Work Alienation Scale was shared with EFL teacher groups. The sample for the scale was 160 EFL teachers working in private and public schools in Mersin, Turkey.

Additionally, all participants were provided with links to an open-ended survey, and 18 participants voluntarily agreed to participate. The scale and the open-ended survey, which are described later in the paper, were completed online, and participants were provided with consent forms and asked to supply demographic information. The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1*Demographic Characteristics of the Participants*

Baseline Characteristic	N	%
Gender		
Female	126	78.8
Male	34	21.3
Educational Level		
Primary education	34	21.3
Secondary Education	84	52.5
High school	42	26.3
Years of Teaching Experience		
1–5	60	37.5
6–10	51	31.9
11–15	15	9.4
16–20	18	11.3
21–25	8	5.0
26+	8	5.0
Institution Type		
State	100	62.5
Private	60	37.5
TOTAL	160	100.0

Instruments

The Work Alienation Scale (see Appendix I for the original Turkish version) was designed by Elma (2003). It consists of 38 items with four subdimensions: powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation, and alienation from school. The scale is a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from never to always—1) never, 2) rarely, 3) sometimes, 4) often, and 5) always—to identify the frequency of work alienation, and it was used in reference to the first, second and third research questions. As the scale used in the study is in Turkish, it was not translated into English (see Appendix II for the English-translated version of the original version for this publication) because the participants of this study were also Turkish. In other words, participants were likely to be more comfortable and familiar with the Turkish language and, consequently, better able to understand and respond to the questions. Therefore, using the original Turkish version of the scale was considered to

be the most appropriate and reliable approach for this particular study.

Regarding the reliability of the scale, Cronbach alpha values were found to be .90 for powerlessness, .91 for meaninglessness, .91 for isolation, and .63 for alienation from school subscales. The total Cronbach's alpha value of the Work Alienation Scale was .94. Therefore, the reliability of this tool was high.

The second instrument, an open-ended survey with seven questions (see Appendix III), was designed to investigate EFL teachers' perceptions and experiences and utilized to seek complementary answers for the first research question. It was used to gain more insights into how they perceive work alienation regarding the pandemic and other concerns that the quantitative survey could not provide. We developed four questions based on Davarçı's (2011) study on labour alienation among university teachers. It is important to note that all questions were posed in English, and no changes have been made to quotations to avoid misinterpretation.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the data from the Work Alienation Scale was performed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the demographic information provided by the participants. EFL teachers' alienation levels, educational level, and years of experience in the field were analysed using one-way ANOVA, whereas a t-test was used to determine whether EFL teachers' alienation levels differed based on their gender and institution type. Finally, the results regarding experience in the field were further analysed using post-hoc analysis. The subdimensions of the scale were analysed using correlation analysis, and the relationships among them were identified accordingly.

The data obtained through the open-ended surveys were subjected to a coding process in order to facilitate its organization into three main themes, which are presented in Table 3, and to align with the objectives of this study. The codes were assigned based on the frequency of occurrence of themes during the analysis of the data. Subsequently, the researchers interpreted the data, and the findings were discussed in relation to the earlier cited studies.

RESULTS

Qualitative Data Findings

Frequency Distribution of Codes for Themes

It is the purpose of this section to present the findings for the first research question on how Turkish EFL teachers perceive the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their work

alienation. Table 2 demonstrates the characteristics of the open-ended survey participants and Table 3 illustrates three themes that emerged from participant responses: work environment, barriers to teaching, and psychological impact of the pandemic on teachers.

Findings on Work Environment

This theme includes how teachers' work environment affects them and their teaching experience. Regarding attitudes toward school management and the system, the results indi-

cate that EFL teachers are mostly dissatisfied with external factors such as work conditions ($f = 12$) and workload ($f = 8$). A participant reflected on her experience as follows:

Ruby: Our school principal did his best to handle the situation and provided information and guidance at every step of the new decision-making process. However, I could not get enough guidance on paperwork or other job requirements, except teaching, since it was my first year. Also, I worked at a private institution last year, and the owner of the school was too demanding and oppressive to the teachers and doubled his demands when the pandemic started.

Table 2

Demographic Characteristics of the Open-Ended Survey Participants

Participants	Gender	Educational Level	Years of Teaching Experience	Institution Type
Ruby	Female	Secondary School	1-5	State School
Laura	Female	High School	1-5	State School
Jack	Male	Secondary School	1-5	Private School
Tena	Female	Primary School	1-5	State School
Sophie	Female	High School	16-20	State School
Michelle	Female	Secondary School	1-5	State School
Hailey	Female	Secondary School	6-10	Private School
Lisa	Female	Secondary School	11-15	Private School
Emma	Female	Primary School	6-10	Private School
Alice	Female	High School	6-10	Private School
Eva	Female	Primary School	1-5	Private School
Leo	Male	Secondary School	1-5	Private School
Jane	Female	Secondary School	1-5	State School
Grace	Female	Primary School	1-5	Private School
Amy	Female	Primary School	1-5	State School
Rachel	Female	Secondary School	1-5	State School
Lily	Female	Secondary School	1-5	State School
Sarah	Female	Secondary School	6-10	Private School

Table 3

Frequency Distribution of Codes for Themes

Themes	Codes	Frequency of Codes
Work Environment	Work conditions	12
	Workload	8
Barriers to Teaching	Poor communication with students	14
	Technology-related issues	10
	Adaptation and teachers' readiness	8
Psychological Impact of the Pandemic on the Teachers	Tiredness	15
	Loss of enthusiasm, interest, and motivation	13
	Self-doubt	8

Findings on Barriers to Teaching

The theme highlights the challenges EFL teachers faced during the COVID-19 pandemic. The teachers were mostly challenged by poor communication with their students ($f = 14$), followed by technical issues ($f = 10$) and the sudden transition to distance education and related adaptation problems ($f = 8$). A participant (Lily) expressed how the pandemic and distance education affected her students' success rates and perceived e-learning as a whistle in the wind, while another participant (Jack) perceived this period as a chance for improvement.

Lily: ... I could not reach them [the students] because distant learning is a vain attempt to teach children. They become easily distracted. I could not give them sufficient feedback. We alienated each other. This adversely affected learning performance.

Jack: I rarely feel alienated. When it comes to its impact on my teaching, I can say that the pandemic showed us that we should engage more in technology-based courses, and we should give more importance to that because the upcoming generation will be very good at technology. Therefore, I must be proficient at using new technology, specifically in the field of education.

While teachers reported being caught off guard and facing challenges while adjusting their lesson plans, students, and themselves to an uncertain situation, most believed that taking this opportunity would lead to their improvement as teachers.

Findings on Psychological Impact of Pandemic on the Teachers

This theme addresses the reflections, psychological states, and well-being of EFL teachers during the recent pandemic. The most commonly used expression was feeling tired ($f = 15$):

Ruby: I feel relieved at the end of the day because there is not an arranged schedule for our lessons from Eğitim Bilişim Ağı (EBA) [Educational Information Network]. The lesson times are scattered throughout the day, making it impossible to make another plan as well as giving me a headache and backache from sitting in front of the computer.

Similarly, the participants expressed demotivation, disinterest, and a decrease in enthusiasm ($f = 13$) toward the profession, teaching, and distance education. Some teachers, like Eva and Laura, evaluated teaching during the pandemic as a vain attempt, whereas others, like Rachel and Sophie, questioned their job preferences.

Eva: I become less attracted to my job each day, less motivated, and less excited.

Laura: I still love teaching English, but I am not as enthusiastic as before.

Rachel: I feel like English is just a lesson now, so it's not as enjoyable as it used to be.

Sophie: I loved teaching English, but now I am just tired.

Perhaps one of the most striking expressions from the participants was self-doubt ($f = 8$). The participants reported that they felt inadequate regarding learning new approaches, digital learning/teaching tools, and management styles. Therefore, the teachers started to question their teaching competencies, and they hold themselves responsible for the failure of their students:

Hailey: I asked myself: Did you solve each problem or every student's distance education problem? Did you reach all students? Are you okay today? This situation makes me feel insufficient for my students.

Amy: I had found online teaching inspiring and exciting at first during the pandemic. But then, I saw that not every child has the same right to be in the same boat. It made me think that I was incapable of reaching them, so I sometimes lost my faith in teaching.

Rachel: Being in class with in-person communication is always my choice, so I don't think I am effective enough with these online lessons, and this discourages me to teach.

Quantitative Data Findings

Findings According to Descriptive Statistics of the Work Alienation Scale

In response to the first research question, the analysis of the subdimensions of the Work Alienation Scale indicated that EFL teachers experienced low levels of alienation in all subdimensions. The alienation level of teachers was on the "rarely" level for powerlessness ($\bar{x} = 2.8$), closer to the "sometimes" level for meaninglessness ($\bar{x} = 2.0$) and isolation ($\bar{x} = 2.2$), whereas it was on the "sometimes" level for alienation from school ($\bar{x} = 3.5$), as shown in Table 4. The items forming the alienation from school subdimension included positive attitudes toward the profession. More precisely, a higher mean score for this subdimension indicated that although teachers experienced alienation at low levels, they were not alienated from school.

Findings on Gender, Educational Level, and Institution Type

In response to the second research question, the t-test analysis of gender and institution-type variables indicated no statistically significant difference between female and male participants and between private and public schools in all subdimensions ($p > 0.05$). According to the ANOVA results regarding educational level, participants' alienation levels did not differ ($p > 0.05$).

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for the Work Alienation Scale and Its Subscales Used in the Study

Subscales	N	Mean	SD
Powerlessness	160	2.7831	.985
Meaninglessness	160	2.0231	.943
Isolation	160	2.2406	1.01
Alienation from school	160	3.4648	.656

Findings on Years of Experience in Teaching

According to the ANOVA test, EFL teachers' work alienation levels differed Table in terms of their years of experience. As shown in Table 5, Post-hoc Tukey test results demonstrate that teachers with 1-5 years of experience have higher levels of work alienation in the powerlessness and isolation subdimensions of the Work Alienation Scale than those with more experience. The level of alienation differed in the meaninglessness dimension as well; however, it was not significant when compared to the powerlessness and isolation dimensions.

Correlation Analysis of the Work Alienation Scale

As part of this study, the third research question examined whether the Work Alienation Scale significantly correlated with the dimensions of powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation, and alienation from school. In Table 6, the results demonstrate a positive and moderate to strong correlation between powerlessness and meaninglessness ($r = .674$), isolation and powerlessness ($r = .652$), and a strong correlation between isolation and meaninglessness ($r = .757$). Aliena-

tion from school did not demonstrate a significant relationship with any of the other dimensions.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to extend the understanding of the challenges that EFL teachers have experienced during the pandemic. Descriptive statistics for the subdimensions indicated low levels of work alienation in the powerlessness, meaninglessness, and isolation subdimensions, whereas the alienation from school subscale indicated higher-than-usual work alienation on the "sometimes" level. Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic may not be a strong determinant of EFL teachers' work alienation, have a direct impact on teachers' alienation level, or cause a strong change in their perceptions about their profession. Previous literature presents moderate levels of teachers' work alienation in Turkey (Erbas, 2014; Şimşek et al., 2012). However, some studies have demonstrated teachers' increasing work alienation (Çetinkanat & Kösterelioğlu, 2016; Tsang, 2016), especially during the pandemic (Alparslan et al., 2021; Kozhina & Vinokurov, 2020).

According to the Post-hoc Tukey test, teachers who have had 1-5 years of experience are more alienated from their work than those with more experience in the powerlessness, meaninglessness, and isolation dimensions. These results are in accordance with Calabrese and Anderson (1986), Elma (2003), Yorulmaz et al. (2015), and Tsang (2016). It is likely that the only statistically significant difference was observed among teachers with 1-5 years of experience as a result of the adverse effects of the pandemic, and feelings of disappointment may have contributed to the adoption of negative attitudes toward the profession. Additionally, they may feel insecure because they are contract teachers who have

Table 5

Comparison of Alienation Levels in Terms of Experience with the ANOVA Test

Subscales	Groups	N	\bar{X}	SD	F	P	Multiple Comparison (TUKEY)
Powerlessness	1-5 (a)	60	3.0717	.94063	4.286	.015	a>b a>c
	6-10 (b)	51	2.6059	1.02458			
	11+ (c)	49	2.6143	.93229			
	1-5 (a)	60	2.2500	1.09537			
Meaninglessness	6-10 (b)	51	1.8569	.80654	2.895	.058	a>b a>c
	11+ (c)	49	1.9184	.83183			
	1-5 (a)	60	2.4967	1.09032			
Isolation	6-10 (b)	51	2.0667	.97173	3.186	.044	a>b a>c
	11+ (c)	49	2.1082	.89904			
	1-5 (a)	60	3.4854	.70037			
Alienation from school	6-10 (b)	51	3.4020	.65542	.353	.703	-
	11+ (c)	49	3.5051	.60862			
	N	160					

Table 6
Correlation Analysis of the Subdimensions of the Work Alienation Scale

Subscales		Powerlessness	Meaninglessness	Isolation	Alienation from school
Powerlessness	Pearson Correlation	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)				
	N	160			
Meaninglessness	Pearson Correlation	.674**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000			
	N	160	160		
Isolation	Pearson Correlation	.652**	.757**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		
	N	160	160	160	
Alienation from school	Pearson Correlation	.088	.119	.140	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.267	.132	.078	
	N	160	160	160	160

to teach for at least three years before they are tenured in public schools or are in the process of renewing contracts in private schools. Job insecurity, which has been identified as a critical predictor of work alienation in private universities (Taamneh & AL-Gharaibeh, 2014), has become more prevalent among university professors during the pandemic (Kozhina & Vinokurov, 2020). In addition, teachers with less experience in online teaching have expressed frustration (Bailey & Lee, 2020).

In their study, Eryilmaz and Burgaz (2011) found that public school teachers were more alienated than private school teachers in the powerlessness, normlessness, and self-estrangement dimensions. However, although the quantitative data did not find statistically significant differences between the two institutions, the survey data analysis offered a different perspective. The data forming the work environment theme highlighted the importance of support from school management and guidance and provoked reconsideration about workload and QWL. Çetinkanat and Kösterelioğlu's (2016) study found a negative and significant relationship between QWL and work alienation. Negative attitudes toward the system may be attributed to the heavy workloads and long working hours required by private schools. Moreover, some participants specifically highlighted that they were from public schools in considerably remote areas. As demonstrated by Ünsal and Usta (2021), village schoolteachers experience greater work alienation than teachers working in the city centre. The open-ended surveys hinted at differences between private and public EFL teachers through profound insights into the participants' teaching practices.

Another issue was the technology-related challenges associated with distance education, which led to the second theme, barriers to teaching. Many teachers highlighted

deficits in technological infrastructure, issues with teacher readiness, and poor communication. These findings are in agreement with Dong (2020), who identified poor network infrastructure as a barrier to online education. Additionally, Almazova et al. (2020) noted that computer literacy levels and teacher readiness hindered the implementation of efficient online education. Similarly, Karahisar and Unluer (2022) drew attention to the competency of academics with distance education while emphasizing the importance of providing support to them.

The gender variable was chosen because female teachers outnumber male teachers at elementary and secondary levels in both public and private schools (Ministry of National Education Strategy Development Presidency, 2020). In addition, role conflict between working women is a significant indicator of stress (Martin & Hansen, 1985) and, as Yadav and Nagle (2012) argue, stress can also be a feeling of alienation in some cases. According to Howard (1986) and Elma (2003), gender played little or no role in alienation. Nevertheless, some studies revealed greater female teacher alienation in the powerlessness, meaninglessness, and isolation dimensions (Erdem, 2014) due to career barriers for women (Inandı et al., 2018), while others reported greater alienation among male teachers (Dağlı & Avarbek, 2017; Knoop, 1982). It may be perceived that Mersin is an advantageous area for schools since our sample was limited to that area. Research conducted in other cities, therefore, may yield different results. Importantly, the teachers faced similar challenges during the pandemic, regardless of their gender. According to the analysis of the educational level variable, no significant difference was found among primary, secondary, and high school EFL teachers' work alienation levels, which may be attributed to school closures owing to the pandemic. Given that work alienation can occur when an employee

feels a lack of connection or purpose within their workplace and can lead to feelings of isolation and detachment, it was also intensified by COVID-19-induced professional isolation and reduced meaningfulness of work, negatively affecting job satisfaction and commitment (Lagios et al., 2022). Therefore, it is important for organizations, and especially schools, to prioritize building a positive work culture and addressing any factors that may contribute to work alienation among employees.

It has been shown through correlation analysis that powerlessness and meaninglessness, isolation and powerlessness, and isolation and meaninglessness are positively related. This may be explained by the nature of alienation. Individuals who feel powerless are likely to experience meaninglessness, especially considering that teachers in Turkey are not involved in the decision-making process. Furthermore, it was found that when teachers perceive themselves as being highly skilled and competent in their jobs, their sense of detachment from their work decreases (Yorulmaz et al., 2015). Isolation was also found to be related to powerlessness. In this study, we did not find a significant correlation between alienation from school and other subscales.

Last but not least, the theme of the psychological impact of the pandemic on teachers highlighted teachers' experiences, reflections on their teaching practices, and how the process influenced them. Tiredness may be due to fewer break times, classes not being scheduled on time and, therefore, not maximising output each day, and falling behind on the curriculum due to technical issues and poor attendance by students. The reasons for this emerging code may include all the issues mentioned previously, such as technical problems, heavy workload, lack of support, and adaptation to distance education. The lack of digital competence of teachers may lead them to feel disempowered and insufficient. Moreover, gender may be influential, as female participants tended to question their teaching and displayed self-blame behaviours more than male participants. A study by Voronin et al. (2020) provided evidence for coping responses during the pandemic wherein female participants reported higher rates of self-blame. Finally, the results indicate that teachers are open to new approaches, experiences, and responsibilities.

CONCLUSION

In this study, we investigated Turkish EFL teachers' work alienation during the COVID-19 pandemic and its related factors. According to Elma's Work Alienation Scale (2003), teachers have low levels of work alienation across all dimensions. However, alienation levels varied based on experience, and a higher level of alienation was reported among teachers with

1–5 years of experience. The study also allowed EFL teachers to express their thoughts and experiences. EFL teachers were mostly dissatisfied with their increasing workload, felt physically and mentally tired, felt distant from the students and the educational process, lacked knowledge or guidance on digital literacy, experienced technical issues that disrupted lessons, and were confronted by unequal student access to digital devices. The most outstanding finding was that teachers held themselves responsible for students' failures and questioned their teaching competencies. Consequently, their motivation, enthusiasm, and interest decreased. Thus, the importance of guidance and support provided to the teachers, improvements in the technological infrastructure, teacher-parent collaboration, and the psychological wellbeing of teachers should be acknowledged to manage the crisis caused by the pandemic.

In the absence of a physical connection with the school environment, students can feel alienated from the education system. Therefore, the need for psychological and technological support for teachers should be emphasized. Providing teacher training courses on digital literacy and problem-solving strategies is important. Further, contingency plans can be drafted for unexpected situations. Stakeholders should improve the technological infrastructure to meet district requirements. Thus, principals and employers should be provided with guidance so that they can guide teachers. Finally, teachers should be heard and supported because they are active agents of the education process. A larger sample for face-to-face interviews would ensure more generalizable and reliable data. Including different locations and examining different variables such as marital status, age, salary, and class hours may result in different outcomes.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

None declared.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Tugce Bilgi: Conceptualization; Data curation; Formal analysis; Funding acquisition; Investigation; Methodology; Project administration; Resources; Software; Supervision; Validation; Visualization; Writing – original draft; Writing – review & editing.

Seden Eraldemir Tuyan: Conceptualization; Resources; Validation; Visualization; Writing – review & editing.

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APPENDIX A

Original Questionnaire

BÖLÜM I

Genel Bilgiler

Cinsiyet: Kadın Erkek

Sınıf: İlköğretim Ortaöğretim Lise

Okul: Özel kurum Devlet okulu

Öğretmenlik mesleğinde deneyim süresi:

1-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 21-25 26+

***Lütfen ekteki maddeleri COVID-19 Pandemi dönemine dair duygu ve düşüncelerinize göre cevaplayınız.**

Bölüm II
EFL ÖĞRETMENLERİNİN PANDEMİ SÜRECİNDE İŞE YABANCILAŞMASI
ÖLÇEĞİ

Madde No	MADDELER	Hiçbir zaman	Nadiren	Bazen	Çoğu zaman	Her zaman
1	Ortaya çıkan sorunlarla mücadele etmek gücümü yitirdiğimi düşünüyorum.					
2	Öğrencilerimle etkili iletişim kurmakta zorlanıyorum.					
3	İşimde tükendiğimi, yıprandığımı hissediyorum.					
4	Okula ve öğrencilerime yaptığım katkının yeterli olmadığını düşünüyorum.					
5	Çalışma isteğimi ve heyecanımı yitirdiğimi hissediyorum.					
6	İş yaşamımda her şeyin benim dışımda geliştiğini hissediyorum.					
7	Öğretmenlikten soğuduğumu hissediyorum.					
8	Okuldan gereksinim duyduğum sosyal desteği alamadığımı hissediyorum.					
9	Okulda doğruları savunmanın artık yarar getirmedeğini düşünüyorum.					
10	Okuldaki kurallarla birlikte yaratıcılığımı engellediğini düşünüyorum.					
11	Neyi niçin öğrettiğimin hiçbir anlamının olmadığını düşünüyorum.					
12	Öğretilenlerin gerçek hayatta hiçbir işe yaramadığını düşünüyorum.					
13	Aynı konuları öğretmekten bıktığımı hissediyorum.					
14	Kendimi anlamsız bir iş yapıyormuşum gibi hissediyorum.					
15	İdealist öğretmenleri gördükçe, öğretmenlikten uzaklaştığım duygusunu yaşıyorum.					
16	Bir öğretmen olarak kendimi işe yaramaz ve önemsiz hissediyorum.					
17	Öğretme eyleminin anlamsız bir çaba olduğunu düşünüyorum.					
18	Öğretmenliği sıkıcı bulmaya başladım.					

Madde No	MADDELER	Hiçbir zaman	Nadiren	Bazen	Çoğu zaman	Her zaman
19	Öğretmenliği sadece gelir getirici bir kaynak olarak görüyorum.					
20	Okulda/uzaktan eğitimde, ders verme makinesine dönüştüğümü hissediyorum.					
21	Öğretmenliğin benim için monotonlaşmaya başladığını hissediyorum.					
22	Zorunlu olmadıkça diğer öğretmen ve yöneticilerle bir araya gelmemeye çalışıyorum.					
23	Okulda dışlandığımı duygusunu yaşıyorum.					
24	Öğretmenler odasından ve/veya online toplantılardan uzak durmayı tercih ediyorum.					
25	Okuldaki ilişkilerin içten ve samimi olmadığını düşünüyorum.					
26	Okulda kendimi yalnız hissediyorum.					
27	Sınıf dışı etkinliklerde sorumluluk üstlenmeyi sevmiyorum.					
28	Okuldaki diğer öğretmenlerle, okul dışında bir şeyler yapmayı arzulamıyorum.					
29	Sosyal çevremi çok sıkıcı bulmaya başladım.					
30	Hayatımda bir boşluk duygusu yaşıyorum.					
31	Aynı görüşte olmadığım insanlardan uzak durmayı yeğliyorum.					
32	Okulla ilgili konularla ilgilenmediğim zamanlarda kendimi boşluktaymış gibi hissediyorum.					
33	Meslektaşlarım tarafından takdir edilmeyi önemsiyorum.					
34	Öğretmenliğin yapılabilecek en iyi meslek olduğunu düşünüyorum.					
35	Okulda işim ile ilgili konularda sorumluluk almaktan zevk alıyorum.					
36	Okulda/uzaktan eğitimde kurallara aykırı davrandığımda suçluluk duygusu yaşıyorum.					
37	Öğrencilerimin başarı ya da başarısızlığından kendimi sorumlu tutuyorum.					
38	Okulda/online derste sınıftayken kendimi daha rahat hissediyorum.					

APPENDIX B

Questionnaire Items in English

1. I feel that I have lost my strength to deal with problems at school.
2. I have difficulty communicating with my students.
3. I feel exhausted and worn out in my job.
4. I think that my contribution to the school and my students is not enough.
5. I feel that I have lost my willingness and excitement to work.
6. I feel that everything in my work life is developing outside of me.
7. I feel that I have been alienated from teaching recently.
8. I feel that I cannot get the social support I need from school.
9. I think that defending the truth at school no longer brings benefits.
10. I think the rules at school hinder my creativity.
11. I do not think there is any point in what I teach why.
12. I think that what is taught in school is useless in real life.
13. I feel tired of teaching the same subjects in school.
14. I feel like I am doing a meaningless job at school.
15. As I see idealistic teachers, I feel that I am moving away from teaching.
16. I feel useless and insignificant as a teacher.
17. I think the act of teaching is a pointless endeavour.
18. I find teaching boring.
19. I see teaching as just a source of income.
20. I feel like I have become a teaching machine at school.
21. I feel like teaching is getting monotonous for me.
22. I try not to get together with other teachers and administrators unless it is necessary.
23. I have the feeling of being excluded at school.
24. I prefer to stay away from the teachers' room.
25. I think that the relationships at school are not candid and sincere.
26. I feel lonely at school.
27. I am not particularly eager to take responsibility for extracurricular activities.
28. I do not want to do things outside of school with other teachers at school.
29. I find my social circle very dull.
30. I have a feeling of emptiness in my life.
31. I prefer to stay away from people with whom I disagree.
32. I feel like I am in a void, when I am not at school.
33. I care about being appreciated by my colleagues.
34. I think that teaching is the best profession that can be done.
35. I enjoy taking responsibility for my work at school.
36. I feel guilty when I violate the rules at school.
37. I hold myself responsible for the success or failure of my students.
38. I feel more comfortable in the classroom at school.

APPENDIX C

Open-ended survey questions

1. What were your motives to become an English teacher?
2. How can you describe your relationship with your students during COVID-19 pandemic?
3. How can you describe your relationship with your employers/principals?
4. At the end of a working day, how do you feel yourself when you finish your lessons?
5. What are the things you like and don't like about your job?
6. How do you think COVID-19 pandemic impact on your teaching experience and your level of alienation?
7. How can you compare your feelings about teaching English before and during COVID-19 pandemic?