

## Teachers' Views Regarding Loneliness in Professional Life: A Mixed Methods Study

 Celal Teyyar UĞURLU  
Sivas Cumhuriyet Üniversitesi  
[celalteyyar@gmail.com](mailto:celalteyyar@gmail.com)

 İzzet KAPLAN  
Hatay Milli Eğitim Müdürlüğü  
[gizzetkaplan@gmail.com](mailto:gizzetkaplan@gmail.com)

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to shed light on teachers' loneliness levels at work with the reasons and consequences of loneliness according to teacher opinions. In this research, qualitative and quantitative research methods are used together and semi-structured interview form, which is one of the qualitative research techniques, is also used. The quantitative method is used to determine whether teachers' loneliness levels vary according to some variables, and also qualitative method is used to reveal why teachers feel lonely. The qualitative study group of the research consists of 10 teachers from Sivas province. In the quantitative research method, UCLA loneliness scale has been applied to 308 teachers and the loneliness levels of these teachers have been examined. Quantitative data have been evaluated with frequency, percentage, arithmetic mean and standard deviation values, independent t-test and one-way analysis of variance. Content analysis is performed on qualitative data. These data or statements are specific to the findings; it is not related to the results. It is revealed that teachers felt lonely at a moderate level. Teachers' loneliness levels make a difference according to gender, while there is no significant difference according to other variables such as education branch, seniority and income level. Most of the teachers state that they are lonely due to their weak social relationships. As a result, school events, meetings, trips, projects etc. can be organized as suggested by school principals and teachers' loneliness can be reduced. It may also be suggested that teachers spend time in a different group of friends. Hobbies and activities can be included to help teachers feel good. In general, it has been revealed that teachers are lonely in the school and male teachers are even more lonely than female teachers. There was no difference in loneliness of teachers in variables related to service time, branch and income levels in loneliness levels.

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## Öğretmenlerin Mesleki Yaşamda Yalnızlık Konusundaki Görüşleri: Karma Yöntem Araştırması

Makale Bilgileri	ÖZET
<b>Anahtar Kelimeler:</b> Yalnızlık, Öğretmen Yalnızlığı, Mesleki yaşam	<p>Bu çalışmada, öğretmenlerin yalnızlık düzeylerinin bazı değişkenler açısından incelenmesi ve yalnızlık olgusuna ilişkin görüşleri ortaya çıkarmak amaçlanmıştır. Araştırmada nitel ve nicel araştırma yöntemleri bir arada kullanılmış, Nitel araştırma tekniklerinden yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formu kullanılmıştır. Öğretmenlerin yalnızlık düzeyleri bazı değişkenlere göre değişip değişmediğini belirlemek için nitel ve aynı zamanda öğretmenlerin neden yalnız hissettiğini ortaya koymak için de nitel yöntemden yararlanılmıştır. Araştırmanın nitel çalışma grubunu Sivas ilinde 10 öğretmen oluşturmaktadır. Nicel araştırma yönteminde 308 öğretmene UCLA yalnızlık ölçeği uygulanmış ve öğretmenlerin yalnızlık düzeyleri incelenmiştir. Nicel veriler, frekans, yüzde, aritmetik ortalama ve standart sapma değerleri ile bağımsız t testi ve tek yönlü varyans analizi ile değerlendirilmiştir. Nitel veriler üzerinde ise içerik analizi yapılmıştır. Bu veriler ya da açıklamalar, bulgulara özgü durumlardır; sonuçlara ilişkin değildir. öğretmenlerin orta düzeyde kendilerini yalnız hissettiklerini ortaya koymuştur. Öğretmenlerin yalnızlık düzeyleri, cinsiyete göre farklılık oluştururken, öğretim dalı, kıdem ve gelir düzeyi gibi diğer değişkenlere göre anlamlı farklılık içermemektedir. Öğretmenlerin çoğu, zayıf sosyal ilişkileri nedeniyle yalnızlık yaşadıklarını ifade etmişlerdir. Sonuç olarak, okul etkinlikleri, toplantılar, geziler, projeler vb. okul müdürleri tarafından önerildiği gibi organize edilebilir ve öğretmenlerin yalnızlıkları azaltılabilir. Ayrıca öğretmenlerin farklı bir arkadaş grubunda zaman geçirmeleri de önerilebilir. Öğretmenlerin kendilerini iyi hissetmelerine yardımcı olmak için hobiler ve aktivitelere yer verilebilir. Genel anlamda öğretmenlerin okul içerisinde yalnızlık çektiği ve erkek öğretmenlerin bayan öğretmenlere göre daha yalnız oldukları ortaya çıkmıştır. Öğretmenlerin yalnızlık düzeylerinde hizmet süresi, branş ve gelir düzeylerine ait değişkenlerde yalnızlıklarında herhangi farklılık görülmemiştir.</p>

### INTRODUCTION

People use communication to share their experiences, feel an attachment to their organization and take part in the chain of social networks in their workplace. The level of communication changes depending on the structure and human resources an organization has. If there is a problem with communication in an organization, there can be individual issues. Communication problems of individuals such as not maintaining or improving social relationships can lead to loneliness (Balandin, Berg, and Waller, 2006). Loneliness can be defined as the experience of "the alienation between the subject and the object" in the inner world of the individual's soul (Xiaoming, 2010). Alienation can lead to a feeling of loneliness and distress (Rokach, 2014). According to Karnick (2005), the manifestation of loneliness as 'physical, emotional or social alienation' indicates that loneliness is a harmful condition. When employees feel alienated in their organization due to lack of communication, avoid frankly expressing their

views and opinions to others around them, and gradually keep away from the others; they might feel lonely at work. Loneliness at work can be regarded as a condition expected to have different causes and consequences than loneliness experienced by individuals in their private life.

A generic definition of loneliness and conditions raising it seems to be guiding for conceptual information to better elicit loneliness in working life. Within this research's theoretical framework, some of the definitions and explanations related to the concept of loneliness that constitutes the starting point are summarized as follows. Loneliness is often regarded as the absence of interpersonal relations and deterioration of social relations in quality and quantity (Cacioppo, Hughes, Waite, Hawkley, and Thisted, 2006). Flanders (1982) thinks loneliness is a means of feedback to improve a person's lower level of closeness with others in form or level. Wiseman, Gutfreund, and Lurie (1995) refer to loneliness as a process where negative emotions such as anxiety and sadness are experienced, which can be identified through a subjective perspective as a qualitative problem rather than quantitative. According to Weiss (1973), several factors cause feelings of loneliness such as individuals' failure to feel attachment in a social group, not being at a desired level of closeness, and inadequate communication and interaction within the group. The settings that individuals take part as a group include family relationships, friendships, and neighbours (individual), as well as relationships among colleagues or occupational groups (organizational). In business life, loneliness is discussed with the following definitions and explanations as a concept studied in the organizational context. According to Silman and Dogan, (2013) loneliness in the working environment is different from individual loneliness, not about the number of social relations that individuals can have, but about the quality and meaning of more interpersonal relationships.

An individual who has a quite satisfying and healthy relationship in everyday life and does not suffer from loneliness may experience difficulties in establishing social relations and getting social support in the business environment. Sermat (1980) argues that for individuals who feel lonely at work, the feeling of loneliness in a social setting is more intense and painful than being alone on their own. Because loneliness at work is often perceived as not being recognized by others and staying on one's own due to the social environment (Wright, Burt and Strongman, 2006). It is important to find out if and how loneliness at work affects employee behaviours (Lam and Lau, 2012). It would be more appropriate to take loneliness at work as a phenomenon influenced by environmental factors and employee personality traits. Because qualitative evaluation of what environmental or personal factors are more influential on loneliness at work. Besides, it is necessary to experimentally control the variables under study to reveal casual links (Kaplan, 2011). Loneliness at work is discussed in two different contexts as social relationship and emotional deprivation (Wright et al., 2006). The social relationship context refers to

loneliness, which emerges when not participating in the activities performed on special occasions in the workplace and the person's feeling outside a social relationship network. In that case, loneliness can be defined as one's shutting her/himself to others, avoiding sharing emotions and thoughts with other employees, and believing that their colleagues will not understand her/him (Kaplan, 2011). In the literature, the causes of loneliness in the workplace are reported as general organizational factors, position in the organization, and career status, apart from personality factors (Adamson and Axmith, 2003; Bell, Roloff, Van Camp and Karol, 1990; Page and Cole, 1991; Reinking and Bell, 1991). Loneliness at work was found to have negative results in both individual and organizational aspects. Personal consequences include adverse effects on psychological well-being (Adamson and Axmith, 2003; Gumbert and Boyd, 1984); while organizational consequences are stress, job dissatisfaction, and disloyalty (Wright et al. 2006). In some organizations, there are strong and effective social connections among employees such as going on a picnic, organizing events on special days and weekends, participating in commemoration, weddings, etc. On the other hand, such interactions could be relatively weak in some organizations. In cases with unsatisfactory social relationships and low communication levels among employees of an organization, loneliness at work may arise as a problem. It could be argued that such loneliness is different from overall loneliness due to time, space, and emotions felt. Despite the abundance of studies on loneliness (Peplau and Perman, 1982; Wright et al., 2006), loneliness at work is a new research topic that has gained more weight in recent years (Demirbaş and Haşit, 2016; Lam and Lau, 2012). Some concepts that are studied due to their relation to loneliness at work include organizational behaviors such as loneliness and stress; job satisfaction (Chan and Qui, 2011), job performance (Lam and Lau, 2012; and organizational trust (Kaplan, 2011). Loneliness has very serious adverse effects that can consequently lead to conditions such as anxiety depression, mental disorder, heart failure, and even suicide (Cacioppo and Patrick 2008). Besides, loneliness results in neurological disorders such as neuroendocrine, cardiovascular, and heart insufficiency (Steptoe and Kivimäki, 2012; Steptoe, Owen, Kunz-Ebrecht, and Brydon, 2004). As a result of the individual's loneliness, the decline in the individual's well-being is an indicator that will cause loneliness at work, both for the individual and the organization. A teacher alone in the workplace is likely to feel upset, which negatively affects his or her work performance. It can be stated that the employees' work performance is lowered as a result of loneliness in the workplace (Ozcelik ve Barsade, 2018; Ren, Chen and Zhang, 2010) and this result could also be applied to teachers (Lau and Lam, 2012). However, the existing literature related to the loneliness of teachers is very limited. In educational organizations, loneliness at work is often associated with the school principals thereby only a few studies are related to teachers' loneliness as following.

Yılmaz and Altnok (2009) examined loneliness of school principals and their life satisfaction level, Howard (2002) studied the effects of school leadership on loneliness level, Allison (1997) investigated the relationship between isolating effect of school leadership and job satisfaction level, Cubitt and Burt (2002) studied the relationship between isolating effect of school leadership and being a burnout, and Izgar (2009) carried out research on the relationship between loneliness and depression of school principals. Studies on the loneliness of teachers (Gaikwad and Brantley, 1992; Kaplan, 2011; Yılmaz and Aslan, 2013) seem to be in a smaller number than those on school principals' loneliness.

The fact that educational organizations are social institutions allows sharing experiences among stakeholders. In schools, teachers teach in a closed environment like classrooms, just focus on completing their tasks and adopt a one-sided working life. This may cause disconnection in human relations and cause them to be left alone. According to Kaiser (1981), when teachers do not feel that there are strong commitment and mutual love within the group, they tend to seek out this relationship outside school. Thus, they can tend to be alone at school. Besides being unaware of the changes and developments at school, loneliness could lead to other unwanted consequences such as staying away from different educational activities, methods, and techniques, resulting in the poor professional performance of teachers. In the study of Lau and Lam (2012), they found that teachers who feel lonely at work decrease their performance level. Apart from that, loneliness can also be considered a reason that affects teachers' well-being in personal and psychological aspects. Loneliness experienced in the private life is a type of emotional loneliness, constituting the right to respect for privacy as a personal preference of the teacher, which is not open to debate. On the contrary, teacher's loneliness in working life is eligible for research in the scope of questions such as whether that type of loneliness is up to the teacher her/himself or factual conditions, at what times it is experienced, the level of such loneliness, the reasons for the loneliness, and so on. The issues can be considered as debatable topics. It is likely that teachers can experience above mentioned adverse effects of loneliness at work such as lower job satisfaction, organizational trust, and job performance. Therefore, if teachers are not let feel lonely in the workplace, this could play a positive role in increasing the quality of education. Indicators of loneliness at work can be listed as teachers' interaction with school administrators, sharing educational and social items with their colleagues, and collaborating with students and their parents. In addition, it may have a facilitating effect on the efficacy of their works in the school. To avoid loneliness at work, teachers can expect school stakeholders to assume some roles and duties. The present study's motivation is to find out whether this expectation is met or not, in other words, whether teachers feel lonely at school, considering the causes and consequences of such loneliness. The research aims to reveal teachers

'level of loneliness in the workplace and the causes and effects of loneliness according to teachers' views.

## **METHOD**

This is a mixed methodological study that combines quantitative and qualitative methods. The method is preferred as it minimizes both approaches' respective limitations along with combining qualitative and quantitative research (Christensen, Johnson and Turner, 2015; Creswell, 2013). In the quantitative research model, relational studies intend to determine the degree and direction of the relationship between variables. Therefore, this is relational research studying the relationship between teachers' loneliness levels and variables of gender, seniority, branch, and income level (Frankel, Wallen, ve Hyun, 2011). In this study, quantitative data were used to determine teachers' levels of loneliness and whether those levels differ by certain variables. In the qualitative research model, a phenomenologic study was employed to investigate the causes and consequences of teachers' loneliness. Therefore, the qualitative method was used to reveal why teachers feel lonely, and what consequences arise when they feel lonely. The study was designed with an exploratory research design since it helps first collect quantitative data followed by interpretation of quantitative and qualitative data in studies with mixed methods (Creswell and Clark, 2015). For this reason, at first, quantitative data were collected, analyzed and results were obtained. Then, qualitative data were collected, analyzed and results were obtained for interpretation of quantitative data. In the third step, both quantitative and qualitative data were evaluated to reach a general conclusion. As a result, a comprehensive and integrative viewpoint was obtained to reveal the mixed-method research's purpose and reach more reliable and detailed results.

### **Sample/Study Group**

#### **Sample for Quantitative Method**

For the quantitative part of the study, the population includes teachers who work in primary schools in Sivas central district during the 2013-2014 academic year. The sample consists of 308 teachers who work in 20 elementary schools randomly selected to represent the population. In descriptive studies, the sample size should be 100 for each large group and 20-50 for each small group in the population (Cohen, 1988). In this case, the loneliness scale was given to a total of 308 participants who were distributed in a number above 20 to 50 for each subgroup (gender, seniority, branch, and income level), which indicates that the population/sample ratio is reached. For example, in the gender category, the numbers of female and male subgroups were 136 (>20-50) and 172 (> 20-50), respectively. Likewise, the number of participants in each subgroup for seniority, branch, and income level was > (20-50), indicating good compliance with the rule.

### Sample for Qualitative Method

Ten teachers took part in this part of the study. The convenience sampling method was used as a type of purposive sampling. In selection, attention was paid to a balanced distribution between genders and branches of teaching. So, half of the teachers were female and the other half were males. Also, 5 of them were classroom teachers, while the other 5 were branch teachers. In scientific studies employing qualitative research techniques such as interviewing, sample selection is quite flexible (Kuzel, 1992). The assumption that data regarding teachers' opinions about the causes and consequences of loneliness in school can be obtained through teacher views, can imply that the sample can be selected flexibly. As a result, personal information about the participants is given in Table 1.

**Table 1.**

*Branch, Gender and Place of Dwelling of Participants*

Name	Branch	Gender	Place of Dwelling
Participant 1	Class Teacher	Female	Central province
Participant 2	Class Teacher	Female	Central province
Participant 3	Science and Technology	Female	Central province
Participant 4	Class Teacher	Female	Central province
Participant 5	Social Studies	Male	Central province
Participant 6	Mathematics	Male	Central province
Participant 7	Science and Technology	Male	Central province
Participant 8	Class Teacher	Female	Central province
Participant 9	Mathematics	Male	Central province
Participant 10	Class Teacher	Female	Central province

### Data Collection Tools

#### Quantitative Data Collection Tools

The University of California Los Angeles Loneliness Scale (UCLA) developed by Russel, Peplau, and Ferguson (1978) was later revised by Russel, Peplau, and Cutrona (1980) to rewrite half of the items as positive statements and the others negative. Then it was adopted to Turkish by Demir (1989). The 4-point Likert type scale is rated as 1- I Never Feel, 2- I Rarely Feel, 3- I Sometimes Feel, 4- I Often Feel. The highest score that can be taken from the scale is 80, while the lowest score is 20. Scores from 20 to 40 refer to a lower level of loneliness, 41 to 60 to medium level, and scores ranging from 61 to 80 indicate a higher level of loneliness. The test validity method is based on the criterion validity with Beck Depression Inventory, the correlation coefficient being .82. Reliability studies were carried out with the test repetition method, yielding reliability coefficients of .94. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was found as 0.82 in this study. The reliability coefficient value implies that the scale is reliable (>.70).

### **Qualitative Data Collection Tools**

This procedure aimed to find out the causes of teachers' loneliness in the workplace in light of the findings from quantitative data whether loneliness levels of teachers vary depending on gender, seniority, branch, and income levels. That's because the research question of whether teachers' loneliness levels due to personal facts or organizational factors were set as the guiding question in our research. Apart from the causes of teachers' loneliness, the same effects were also examined in this study as a supplementary research question. To this end, an interview form was developed as an open-ended semi-structured interview form. The draft was first reviewed by two faculty members experienced in qualitative research in educational sciences. The questions in the form were then revised according to the expert opinions. Before finalizing the draft, it was given to two teachers who do not study participants so that necessary adjustments could be made about clarity, comprehensibility, and scope of the questions before the main application. Finally, the questions to be applied to participants were determined. The semi-structured interview form's final version included the following questions: *a) Do you ever feel lonely? What do you think the reasons could be? b) If you do not feel lonely, what do you think the reason could be? c) What could be the reasons for the feeling of loneliness by your colleagues who you believe feel so? d) What do you think could be the possible consequences of teachers' feeling lonely? e) To prevent teachers' feeling of loneliness, what would you expect from your school managers, and f) teachers?*

Before applying the form, the participants were provided preliminary information, and appointments were made for interviews. At a pre-determined time, the researcher visited the participants in their schools to hold interviews in a proper environment. The interviews were recorded after being confirmed using a voice recorder with the participants' consent.

### **Analysis of Data**

#### **Analysis of Quantitative Data**

The data obtained in the quantitative part of the study were analyzed with the SPSS. For analysis of the data, the data analysis techniques in the relational model were utilized. First of all, the normality of the distribution was checked against the criteria of skewness and kurtosis values (-1,5, +1,5), concluding that the distribution is normal. Frequency, percentage, arithmetic mean and standard deviation values were calculated in the study. The Independent t-test was used for binary comparisons in the relationship test for the study. As for comparing three or more variables, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used.

#### **Analysis of Qualitative Data**

After the interviews, the recorded data were transcribed. The data were subjected to content analysis. In content analysis, the participants' views were coded by quantifying-



digitizing- participants' opinions according to clear instructions (Simon and Burstein, 1985). The data were coded concurrently by different researchers and then compared to ensure a higher data reliability level. During the data classification following the coding, categories and themes were also identified by various researchers and then compared for compliance. Moreover, an external expert who has experience in qualitative research was applied to check compliance between the categories and themes and necessary amendments were made accordingly. As a result of the classification of the codes, categories, and themes; results were reached and interpreted. In addition, the participants were renamed as K1, K2, K3...K10 according to sub-questions of the study, and direct quotations were included from the participants' statements.

### **Validity and Reliability in Mixed Methods Research**

In mixed methods research, validity or reliability evidence is checked in five different ways such as internal and external validity, the validity of reduction of weaknesses, sequential validity, sample integration validity, and multiple validities (Onwuegbuzie and Johnson, 2006). For this study, the following steps could imply considering validity of the evidence.

To provide internal and external validity in the study, participants' views were recorded and confirmed, then they were transcribed under the supervision of two researchers and one external expert who is not a part of the research team. The validity of the reduction of weaknesses is the type of validity achieved by combining two or more approaches in one study (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The intention here is to see the difference between subjective reality and objective reality. To this end, after filling in the scales, the participants were asked for their opinions about the scale items to find out what sense they make to them. To provide sequential validity, firstly quantitative data were collected with the scale of loneliness in the workplace and then analyzed with statistical methods. In the second stage, qualitative data were obtained by using a semi-structured interview form containing questions different from the scale items and analyzed with content analysis. Besides, to achieve consistency, each analysis step of the data was checked by the researchers themselves and an external expert. The consistency of the codes generated simultaneously by different researchers was checked with the following formula (consensus/consensus + dissensus > .70) (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

### **RESULTS**

In this section, the results and interpretations obtained from the quantitative research component are presented. The results given in this section relate to the level of loneliness of teachers under examination and whether such level varies depending on gender, seniority, branch, or income level. On the other hand, the qualitative method yielded results in response to the following questions. 1.a) Do you ever feel lonely? What do you think the reasons

could be? b) If you do not feel lonely, what do you think the reason could be? 2) What could be the reasons for the feeling of loneliness by your colleagues who you believe feel so? 3) What do you think could be the possible consequences of teachers' feeling lonely? 4) To prevent teachers' feelings of loneliness, what would you expect from a) your school managers and b) teachers.

### 1. Results from the quantitative method and comments

The Independent t-test was conducted to find out whether loneliness levels of teachers differ according to gender or branch. The results are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.**  
*Investigation of Teachers' Loneliness Levels by Gender and Branch*

Variable		N	$\bar{x}$	Ss	t	Level	p
Gender	Male	136	53.02	5.00	5.38	Moderate	.00*
	Female	172	49.07	7.01		Moderate	
Branch	Classroom	113	49.86	7.00	-1.962	Moderate	0.51
	Other branches	195	51.36	6.14		Moderate	

\*p<.05 (A table should not be placed on two separate pages)

As seen in Table 2, the loneliness levels of teachers were found at a moderate level, which differs according to gender variable. Still, there is no significant difference according to the other variables' branches (p <.05). It was found out that women ( $\bar{x}$  = 49.07) feel loneliness less than men (53.02) representing a significant level of difference. Regarding the branch of teaching, it was seen that class teachers ( $\bar{x}$  = 49, 86) feel loneliness less than other branch teachers but at an insignificant level. It should be an arithmetic mean sign, not an  $\bar{x}$ . To find out whether the loneliness levels of teachers vary according to their seniority and income levels, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed. The results are displayed in Table 3.

**Table 3.**  
*Investigation of Teachers' Loneliness Levels by Duration of Service and Income Level*

Variable		N	$\bar{x}$	Ss	KT	Sd	F	p	
Duration of service	1-4	101	50.86	6.49	Intergroup	8.889	2	104	.901
	5-11	99	51.01	5.63	Intragroup	12976.9			
	12 +	108	50.81	7.26	Total	12985.8			
Income Level	Low	77	51.01	6.5	Intergroup	5.78	2	.068	.934
	Moderate	185	50.70	6.3	Intragroup	12980.02			
	High	46	50.81	7.09	Total	12985.81			

<.05

As Table 3 shows, teachers' loneliness levels do not show any significant difference against the variables of the duration of service or income levels (p <.05). It was found out that the participants with experience of 1 to 4 years ( $\bar{x}$  = 50.86), 5 to 11 years ( $\bar{x}$  = 51.01), and 12 years or more ( $\bar{x}$  = 50.81) feel loneliness at levels close to each other. Apart from that, the participants with low ( $\bar{x}$  = 51.01), moderate ( $\bar{x}$  = 50.70), and high ( $\bar{x}$  = 50.81) levels of income seem to feel nearly the same level of loneliness at work. So, it could be argued that teachers' level of loneliness is not influenced by their duration of service or income levels.

## 2. Results from the qualitative method and comments

In this part, teachers' responses to the interview form questions and the qualitative data collection instrument are interpreted. In particular, Table 4 gives an account of a) whether teachers feel lonely, b) if yes, the reasons, c) the reasons for the feeling of loneliness by their colleagues if so, d) possible consequences of teachers' feeling loneliness, e) teachers' expectations from school managers, and f) from teachers to prevent the feeling of loneliness by teachers.

**Table 4.**  
*Views regarding Teachers' Loneliness*

View	Theme	Category	f
a) Whether teachers feel lonely	Yes	Sometimes (K1, K2, K5, K6, K7, K10)	6
	No	Never (K3, K4, K8, K9)	4
b) Reasons for the feeling of loneliness	Association with similar people	Being with people who understand me (K1, K2, K3, K6, K7, K8, K9, K10)	8
	Personal preference	Related to the person her/himself (K4, K5)	2
c) Reasons for feeling of loneliness by their colleagues if so	Problems in communication	Weak social relations (K1, K5, K6, K8, K9, K10)	6
	Individual problems	Psychological reasons (K2, K3, K7) Belief that they are not understood (K4)	3 1
d) Possible consequences of teachers' feeling loneliness	Education	Negative effects on education environment and students (K1, K2, K3, K4, K8, K9)	6
	Individual	Mental depression (K5, K10)	2
		Lack of communication (K6, K7)	2
e) Expectations from school managers to prevent the feeling of loneliness by teachers	Organizing events	Events to socialize teachers (K2, K3, K4, K5, K6, K8, K9)	7
		Activities to increase the reputation of teachers (K1, K10)	2
	Communicating	Conversing with teachers (K7)	1
f) Expectations from teachers to prevent the feeling of loneliness by teachers	Social relations	Creating social settings where communication among teachers can be started (K1, K3, K4, K5, K7, K8, K9, K10)	8
		Promoting cooperation and problem-solving (K2, K6)	2

a) In reference to question one, two themes and two categories were derived. For the positive answer, the participants named K1, K2, K5, K6, K7, and K10 stated that they 'sometimes' feel loneliness. Particularly, K2 said 'There necessarily are times when I feel loneliness'. Conversely, the participants called K3, K4, K8, and K9 noted they *never* feel lonely. In this regard, K8 said, "I do not feel alone in school because our school environment is good in terms of colleagues, management, and students".

b) Likewise, two categories and two themes were found regarding the reasons for teachers' sense of loneliness. Under theme one, association with similar people, there was found one category as weak social relations (f = 8). K8 said "*Feeling of loneliness is tearing apart people and causing many obstacles in social relations*". The second theme, personal preference, provided one category explaining the feeling with the person her/himself (f = 2). In this regard, K4 "*I can express myself correctly, also my expressions can be well understood by others*".

c) As for question three, two themes and three categories were derived. The theme of problems in communication was explained with one category as weak social relations (f=6). On this topic, K6 said "*I have friends who, I believe, experience the feeling of loneliness. This could be their own problems. Or as far as I observe, it could be because they are new in the profession, or they do not have the behaviours to express themselves at school*". Under individual problems, two categories were placed: Psychological reasons (f = 3) and the belief that they are not understood (f = 1). K2 said "*It is caused by character, I think. If a teacher wants to make friends, s/he can find a setting and make a close friend in all ways. But it becomes difficult with teachers, people, who are more intrinsic living their feelings inside. So, if teachers feel loneliness, they want it*". Concerning the other category under this theme, one teacher (K4) said "*They may think they are not understood*".

d) Possible consequences of teachers' loneliness were summarized in two themes, education and individual, with one category under each. The theme of educational consequences was explicated with adverse effects on the education environment and students (f=6). In this aspect, K2 said, "*It may result in inefficient classes because if s/he is upset about lacking friends at school, s/he cannot have efficient classes*". Under the theme of individual consequences, two different categories were mental depression (f=2) and lack of communication (f=2). Regarding the former, K10 said, "*First and foremost, they are psychologically affected.*" For the other category, K6 said, "*It might have many consequences; it will have a lot of consequences regarding both effective working and communication with others and communication with and management of students.*"

e) As another question, teachers' expectations from school administrators as a part of preventing feelings of loneliness by teachers was discussed in connection with two themes and three categories. Theme one was found to cover events to socialize teachers (f=7) and activities to increase teachers' reputation (f=2). About the former category, K2 said "School administrators may be an important factor in eliminating these loneliness feelings. Because they can arrange trips, breakfasts or dinner days to come together so that interaction among teachers can be reinforced". In relation to the other category, participant K1 said "School managers could take measures to constantly increase the prestige of teachers as a part of their sense of service instead of constantly dictating the rules". The latter category, communicating, covered one category as

conversing with teachers (f=1). On this topic, K7 said, "Talking to teachers is effective. If he has a problem, it is about to share it, to communicate, and if there is a problem, it is to try to get it off."

f) Lastly, the behaviors expected from teachers to prevent teachers' loneliness were explained under one theme, social relations, with two linked categories. It was suggested to create social settings where communication among teachers can be started (f= 8) and to promote cooperation and problem solving (f=2). In relation to category one, K8 said, "They can do some work to get people involved by recognizing them as they are and respecting differences. These works can be done to include them into chats, social events or some activities". About the latter category, K2 said, "Teachers should undertake works to promote help and cooperation, team spirit, rather than competitive feelings."

### **CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This part discusses the loneliness levels of teachers and whether those levels depend on certain variables. In the conclusion section, a language specific to the findings that should not be used here was distilled from the qualitative method applied following the quantitative method used to determine the causes and effects of loneliness experienced by teachers.

To start with, it was concluded that teachers face loneliness at a moderate level. However, lower levels of loneliness in the workplace were reported by Kaplan (2011) in the context of teachers, Wright (2005) among participants with various professions, and Demirbaş and Haşit (2016) among academicians. Although the same data collection tool was used in both present and previous studies, our results contradict previous findings. It could be due to the sample in this study. In other words, the moderate level of loneliness of teachers might be caused by the school culture and climate they work in.

Also, it was found out that teachers' loneliness levels vary depending on gender but not other variables as branch, seniority, or income level. On the other hand, Kaplan (2011) found out in their samples that female teachers feel higher levels of loneliness compared to their male peers, which seems to be contrary to our findings. Yet, some studies indicate no relationship between gender and loneliness (Wright, 2012). Thus, it looks hard to establish a precise and complete assessment of the relationship between gender and the level of loneliness in the workplace.

Also, we found out that the level of loneliness does not differ by the branch of teaching, which seems to concur with the findings of Zoba (2000), and Demirbaş and Haşit (2016). This implies that their branches do not influence the professional loneliness of teachers. It could be suggested that the variable of branch/field has a minor effect on loneliness levels in the workplace.

As another variable, seniority did not have a considerable effect on teachers' loneliness levels, which seems to be the opposite of the findings by Kaplan (2011) and Demirbaş (2014). However, Mutlu (2008) noted that the level of loneliness in the workplace is not affected by seniority. In the literature, most of the studies suggest that seniority is influential on loneliness in the workplace. Nevertheless, examples are available which report no effect of seniority on loneliness level. Further research in this specific area may contribute to a healthier and more reliable conclusion about the relationship between seniority and loneliness.

Apart from that, we found out that teachers' level of loneliness does not vary depending on their income level. However, Kaplan (2011) noted that teachers with low salaries suffer more from loneliness. On the contrary, Karaduman (2013) discovered that level of loneliness does not differ according to teachers' income levels. Besides, Yılmaz and Altınok (2009) stated that the level of loneliness does not differ according to school administrators' income level. The scarcity of research on this topic remains insufficient to explain the effect of income level on loneliness in the workplace. Bearing in mind that we are not ready to make a generalization about this topic, it can be argued that teachers' income level is not a determinant of loneliness levels among *teachers*.

Since teachers' loneliness level was found not to be affected by demographic variables other than gender, a qualitative method was applied to questions that allow more in-depth and more detailed exploration of the topic. In this scope, the investigation was performed on i) whether teachers feel lonely, ii) if yes, the reasons, iii) the reasons for the feeling of loneliness by their colleagues if so, iv) possible consequences of teachers' feeling loneliness, v) teachers' expectations from school managers, and vi) from teachers to prevent the feeling of loneliness by teachers.

In reply to question one above, most of the respondents gave an affirmative answer. When asked the reasons, those who do not feel alone at school said that there are teachers around who listen to and understand them and they have a circle of close friends. Qualitative data revealed that most teachers experience loneliness, whereas the qualitative method revealed that they feel lonely at moderate levels. Still, the two findings seem to match though they are not identical.

Regarding reasons for loneliness at work reported by teachers, most participants pointed out that those individuals have poor social relations, while others referred to personality traits. Our findings seem somehow connected with social relationships (Wright et al., 2006), which is an aspect of loneliness in the workplace. Also, studies in which personality traits or personal preferences are proposed as a basis for loneliness (Rubenstein and Shaver, 1982; Wright, 2005). As a result, it seems that social relations and personality traits mentioned as factors that cause teachers to feel lonely are supported by the literature.

It seems that there is a similarity between the causes of the loneliness felt by teachers themselves and their colleagues. According to the respondents, they and their colleagues, as it happens, feel loneliness because of miscommunication and personal factors. Therefore, it is possible to suppose that communication problems and individual elements are among the factors to account for loneliness in the workplace.

For possible consequences of teachers' loneliness, two main effects were noted as a negative impact on education and instruction activities and an individual's psychological well-being. Our results show congruence with previous findings that loneliness at work could affect the quality of work performed by an individual (Wright et al., 2006). Furthermore, researchers state that loneliness in the workplace has an adverse psychological effect on employees (Gumbert and Boyd, 1984; Wright, 2005), indicating parallelism with the consequences of loneliness faced by teachers at work.

Lastly, as a part of works to prevent loneliness among teachers, the respondents listed their expectations from school administrators as arranging events to socialize teachers and communicate with teachers. As for the expectations from colleagues, they pointed out the creation of social settings, cooperation and problem-solving. According to Ernst and Cacioppo (1998), an undesirable environmental condition leads to loneliness among individuals. In this case, carrying out activities and research into reasons for loneliness can eventually prevent feelings of loneliness.

**Finally, the following recommendations were brought in the light of the study results.**

1. On the grounds of a moderate level of loneliness experienced by teachers, social attractions such as gatherings, excursions, workshops, and so on could be arranged with school administrators and teachers' suggestion.

2. Remembering the role played by gender on loneliness levels of teachers, sharing of tasks could involve both genders in group works to avoid isolation resulting from the coexistence of teachers of the same gender.

3. Due to social relationships and personal factors referred to as causes of loneliness among teachers, picnics, home visits, trips, and so on (etc.) can be arranged so that teachers come together outside of school. In particular cases of loneliness due to personal factors, it is recommended that school administrators and other teachers should sincerely invite such persons to all activities held at school so that they feel a sense of being valued.

4. Poor academic performance and deteriorating psychological well-being are the possible consequence of loneliness among teachers. It seems very unlikely that teachers can avoid facing the negative effects of loneliness in the education and teaching setting. Hence, the

recommendations mentioned above addressed to teachers could play a positive role in preventing loneliness. Moreover, teachers can be supported to keep away negative feelings of the class and to better focus on their responsibilities in the education and teaching process through awareness-raising seminars regarding the principles of the teaching profession. As another recommendation to minimize the negative effect of loneliness at work on the psychological well-being of teachers, teachers could also join peer groups or take up new hobbies and leisure activities to enhance their mood.

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**Ethics Committee Decision:** Sivas Cumhuriyet University Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Social and Human Sciences Board Approval Certificate was taken on 28.09.2020 with the decision number E.482048 / 9 and the research was found ethically appropriate.