Analysis of Teachers' Opinions on Branch Teachers Committee

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Abstract

This study aimed at the effectiveness of the branch teachers' committee based on teachers' opinions. It covers 66 middle-school teachers working in Bucak town centre in Burdur province. A data gathering form consisting of open-ended questions was used. The descriptive analysis technique was used. It was understood that issues considered in this committee were not assessed effectively. The reason for such observation was that these meetings were usually held in a perfunctory way and teachers did not give necessary importance to these meetings. In addition, about 70% of teachers thought that decisions taken at the branch teachers committee were not applied. Teachers indicated, for further functional branch teacher committee, that it was necessary to evaluate subjects more in-depth, decision with higher possibility of realisation should be taken and school administration should offer required support for these decisions.

Keywords: Middle school, branch teachers' committee meeting, effectiveness.

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1. Introduction

The effectiveness and efficiency of educational activities carried out in schools are attributed to teachers' participatory efforts rather than teachers' individual efforts (Avalos, 1998; Balay, 2004; Utley, Basile & Rhodes, 2003). It is advocated that cooperation and mutual aid between teachers improve the quality of teaching and learning environments and provide better learning opportunities to students (Hopkins, 2008; Rogers & Threatt, 2000). It is reported that organisations in which teachers share their knowledge contribute to school development outside education and training activities (Hopkins, 2008). Therefore, formations are implemented that encourage participation and collaboration among teachers working in the same school and increasing help activities.

Branch teachers' committee is one of the councils established in this context in schools. This committee consists of pre-school teachers in pre-school educational institutions, classroom teachers working in the same class in primary schools and teachers from the same field in secondary school and high school. Considering the relevant legislation, it is seen that the branch teachers' committee in schools has objectives such as establishing a common understanding in education-training in schools and searching for ways of solution to difficulties encountered in applications. In addition, it can be understood that the committee aims that teachers support each other in many issues ranging from students' cognitive to social developments (MEB, 2012, 2017).

It is important for success in education to determine whether the objectives of branch teachers' committee are implemented in practice. However, when the field literature is scanned, it can be said that studies related to committees in schools focus on teachers' committees and there are limited number of studies conducted on the branch teachers' committee (Albez, Sezer, Akan & Ada, 2014; Acarbas, 2011; Demirtas & Comert, 2006; Eryalcin, 1998; Gokyer, 2011; Guler, Altun & Turkdogan, 2015). Therefore, with the intention of contributing to the field literature, the aim is to reveal functioning and effectiveness of the branch teachers' committee established in schools and to determine what should be done for making them more functional based on teachers' opinions. In line with this purpose, answers to the following questions were searched:

- Are subjects discussed in branch teachers' committee meetings evaluated effectively? What are the reasons if they are not evaluated?
- What is the level of implementation for decisions taken at branch teachers' committee meetings? What are the reasons if they are implemented?
- What should be done to make branch teachers' committee meetings more functional?

2. Method

Phenomenology pattern, one of the qualitative research methods, was used in this research. The study group was determined by using the criterion sampling method which is one of the sampling methods. The following criteria were determined: a) working in public secondary schools, b) having three or more course hours in weekly time schedule in secondary schools. Secondary teachers working in Bucak district centre of Burdur province with these criteria were included in this study. 66 teachers were accessed on voluntary basis. 34 of these teachers were female and 32 of them were male; 15 of the participants were Turkish language teachers, 14 of them were English teachers, 13 of them were science teachers, 12 of them were social studies teachers and 12 of them were mathematics teachers. While most of the teachers in this study group (n = 32) had seniority below 10 years, 21 of them had seniority between 10 and 19 and 13 teachers had seniority higher than 20 years.

For data collection, a form consisting of open-ended questions was used. While preparing the questionnaire, the draft form was created by making use of theoretical information related to the study. Then, opinions of two experts were taken for scope and appearance validity. Preliminary application was applied on five teachers. Questions leading to similar answers were combined, and the questionnaire was given its final shape by making a Turkish teacher read the form in terms of

language and expression. Research data were collected in the spring semester of the 2015–2016 academic year. Research data were decoded by means of the descriptive analysis method.

3. Findings

3.1. Quality and reason of evaluation for subjects discussed in branch teachers' committee meetings

The first question of this study was expressed as follows: 'Are subjects discussed in the branch teachers' committee meetings evaluated effectively? What are the reasons if they are not evaluated?' Approximately, 35% of teachers indicated that subjects discussed in the branch teachers' committee meetings were evaluated effectively, 58% of them reported that subjects were considered partially effectively, and 8% of them thought that subjects were discussed ineffectively. Opinions related to cause of this situation of teachers who gave the answer of 'partially' and 'ineffectively' are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Causes of ineffective evaluation of subjects discussed in the branch teachers' committee meetings

Categories	*f*	%
Perception that decisions taken are left on paper	12	27.90
Teachers not paying attention to meetings	10	23.20
Senior teachers being decisive in decision taken	9	20.93
Intervention of school management to meetings	7	16.28
Lack of communication and cooperation among group teachers	5	11.63

According to Table 1, one of the causes that subjects discussed in the branch teachers' committee meetings are not analysed effectively is teachers' perception that meetings decisions will not be implemented. Another cause is that teachers do not give importance to these meetings. Furthermore, intervention of school management and senior teachers to meetings and weakness of cooperation among group teachers are also decisive ineffective analysis of subjects discussed in these meetings.

3.2. Implementation status of branch teachers' committee decisions in school

The second question of the research is towards determining the level of implementation of decisions taken in branch teachers' committee and reasons for failure in applying these decisions. Approximately 32% of teachers who were interviewed in the study reported that committee decisions were implemented in schools, 61% of them reported partial implementation, and 8% of them considered that decisions were not implemented. Teachers' opinions related to reasons of failure in implementing committee decisions were given in Table 2.

Table 2. Reasons for failure in implementing committee decisions in schools

Categories	*f*	%
Incompatibility between prepared plans and the program	18	40
The conflict between the examination system and curriculum	14	31.11
Setbacks encountered during the school year	13	28.88
Insufficient course hours	12	26.67
School management providing inadequate facilities	9	20

Table 2 shows that incompatibility between prepared plans and the program is shown as the cause of failure in implementing committee decisions in schools. Similarly, setbacks encountered during the school year such as incompatibility among the curriculum and the central examination system, snow holidays and teacher absenteeism are given among reasons for this situation. Besides, teachers consider lack of support given by the school management and classroom hours as reasons for failure in implementing committee decisions.

3.3. Suggestions towards making group teachers' committees more functional

The last question of the study was towards determining suggestions that will improve the quality of branch teachers' committee meetings. Findings regarding the solution of this question are given in Table 3.

Table 3. Suggestions for improving the quality of branch teachers' committee meetings

Categories	*f*	%
Ensuring that teachers pay attention to meetings more	12	18.18
Meetings should be abolished as a formal requirement	11	16.67
School management should provide adequate support and provide guidance	10	15.15
Meetings should be done in an appropriate environment and time	7	10.6
In meetings, decisions with high implementability should be taken	6	9.09
State of implementation for decisions should be checked	5	7.58
Intervention of school management to meetings should be prevented	5	7.58

Table 3 shows suggestions towards improving the quality of branch teachers' committee meetings. However, suggestions including teachers' paying more attention to meetings, abolishment of meetings as an official requirement, support by school management and guidance applications were stated more frequently. Furthermore, some teachers suggested that these meetings were held in appropriate environment and time for better effectiveness and implementable decisions be taken. According to some of the participants, feedbacks based on the implementation status of decisions and abolishment of intervention of school management to these meetings will be decisive in making these meetings more effective.

4. Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

In this study that was conducted to reveal functioning and effectiveness of branch teachers' committee meetings and to determine what should be done to make them more functional, it has been understood that subjects discussed in branch teachers' committee meetings are not evaluated effectively in general and committee decisions are implemented partially in schools. In this case, it can be said that branch teachers' committee meetings are held for getting rid of responsibility in schools and decisions taken are not implemented. When an assessment is made in the light of these findings, it is considered that these meetings do not achieve their goals. In some studies conducted on this subject, teachers' basic opinions on this activity in question were also in this direction. For example, in the study conducted by Guler et al. (2015), it was understood that a majority of teachers participated in branch teachers' committee meetings perfunctorily and they had less faith in necessity of these meetings. Besides, there are also studies available in the field literature emphasising that branch teachers' committee are 'generally' effective (Albez et al., 2014) and they are 'always' carried out in goal-oriented way (Demirtas & Comert, 2006).

Furthermore, in the study, it was seen that suggestions were given towards making branch teachers' committee meetings more functional including teachers' paying more attention to meetings, abolishment of meetings as formal requirements, support by school management, following state of implementation and giving feedbacks to teachers and prevention of interference to these meetings by school management. In a similar study, it was indicated that teachers' belief in necessity of branch teachers' committee meetings should be increased. It was stated in this study that teachers should be convinced of importance of these meetings as a part of education-training activities rather than an obligation. It was understood that teachers reported that they should identify contents of meetings by themselves (Guler et al., 2015). This finding of the current research can be perceived as an indicator of intervention by school management to these meetings. In this study, intervention of school management to these meetings was also emphasised. As specified by Cohen and Bailey (1997), school administrators may support team works carried out in accordance with school objectives and guide

group teachers' efforts like a team leader. However, this situation should be at a level and in a form that will not damage teachers' perceptions towards the necessity of these meetings by ensuring autonomous decision-taking among teachers.

Consequently, based on these findings of the study, it can be said that branch teachers' committee meetings do not completely achieve their goals and teacher collaboration in schools is not realised at a desired level. It is observed that teachers offered some suggestions to avoid this situation. In this part of the study, some suggestions were made in line with the results.

- It is quite difficult to improve the effectiveness of schools and ensure school development by means of meetings that will be held perfunctorily a few times during a school year based on obligation. Therefore, such activities should be transformed into a culture rather than a necessity as in some countries, and teachers' perceptions towards branch teachers' committee meetings should be improved.
- In addition, necessary atmosphere and conditions should be provided to make teachers more effective in these studies and elements hindering group studies should be removed from the environment.
- After applying these measures, it should be ensured that decisions with high implementability should be taken, and school management and head of teachers' committee will follow whether decisions taken are implemented in practice. Depending on the situation, various sanctions may be applied.
- This research was carried out on secondary school teachers working in a district. This status may limit the power of representation in the study. Therefore, similar studies with larger samples using different models can be applied to other educational levels and results can be compared.

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