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Teaching at private schools: A phenomenological study on ethical dilemmas

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Abstract: This study aims to examine in detail the ethical dilemmas faced by private school teachers. The study employed a phenomenological research design. The study group comprised 15 teachers working at private schools in a province located in the southeastern region of Turkey in the 2020-2021 academic year, who were determined by the maximum variation sampling method. A semi-structured interview form was used as the data collection instrument. Collected data were subjected to phenomenological analysis. According to the findings, ethical dilemmas faced by private school teachers can be categorized under the themes of "parents," "students," "school administration," and "co-workers." Ethical dilemmas in private schools have been found to differ in some aspects from those in public schools. Also, it was observed that teachers dealt with ethical dilemmas under the fear of losing their jobs. The results are discussed in the context of professional and workplace problems faced by private school teachers, and recommendations are presented accordingly.

Keywords: ethical dilemma, private school, qualitative research, phenomenology

Introduction

With the influence of technological developments, people's expectations of educational institutions are increasing and diversifying day by day. One of the main reasons for this situation is the multi-component and dynamic nature of schools. In an environment where expectations are becoming more and more diverse, differences of opinion can arise given the numerous stakeholders, making decision-making difficult. Decision-making is the consideration of options by identifying and analysing them in order to

achieve goals and selecting the most logical of these options (Dessler, 2004). Decision-making is also a demanding and stressful process involving the resolution of unknowns (Erdogan, 2002). In cases where alternatives are not clearly identified and a reasonable alternative cannot be selected, decision-making is more difficult, and this leads to ethical dilemmas (Lloyd, 2010). An ethical dilemma refers to the difficulties encountered in choosing among the norms, principles, similar options, and rules that compete with each other in complicated situations that are not easy to resolve (Bateman, 2015; McLeod-Sordjan, 2014). Teachers may sometimes find it difficult to decide whether to act according to other stakeholders' principles or their own principles in certain decision-making processes. Sometimes, a decision made by the school administration may not conform to the personal values of the teacher, or vice versa (Erdogan, Sezgin, 2020). The inner conflict experienced by teachers who have difficulty making decisions increases their stress and anxiety levels, which, in turn, negatively affects their teaching performance (Braunack-Mayer, 2001; Tekel, Korkman, 2020).

The reasons for the emergence of ethical dilemmas vary depending on the individual, the situation, the nature of the event, and in some cases, the individual's background, the context, and other actors involved. Ethical dilemmas affected by many variables. Since there are many variables that affect the emergence of behaviours, in particular dilemmas, the resolution of dilemmas also becomes complex. Where teachers, students, administrators, parents, senior administrators, and the public interact under one roof, ethical dilemmas may arise for different reasons as a result of the interactions among the actors (Uztemur, Dinc, 2020). An analysis of the literature reveals attempts to put ethical dilemmas in educational institutions in a conceptual framework (Catacutan, de Guzman, 2016; Erdogan, 2019; Shapiro, Stefkovich, 2016). Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016) analysed the ethical dilemmas seen in schools using case-based, multiple ethical paradigms approach under the following headings: "Individual Rights versus Community Standards," "Traditional Curriculum versus Hidden Curriculum," "Personal Codes versus Professional Codes," "The American Melting Pot versus the Chinese Hot Pot," "Religion versus Culture," "Equality versus Equity," "Accountability versus Responsibility," "Privacy versus Safety," and "Technology versus Respect." Catacuzan and de Guzman (2016) discussed ethical dilemmas in educational institutions under three headings: "behavioural," "structural," and "political." In addition to the classification by Catacuzan and de Guzman (2016), Erdoğan (2019) discussed ethical dilemmas resulting from systemic problems. Examinations of empirical studies of the ethical dilemmas experienced by teachers, show that the actors consist mainly of

parents, school management, colleagues, and students briefly by stakeholders (Barret, Casey, Visser, Headley, 2012; Bateman, 2015; Erdogan, Sezgin, 2020; Husu, 2001; Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011).

Teachers are likely to find themselves in ethical dilemmas when communicating with parents. They are particularly hesitant to warn parents about how they should treat their children and about effective parenting strategies. They also face the ethical dilemma of whether to inform parents about students' academic improvement and behavioural problems (Erdogan, Sezgin, 2020). Sometimes, talking to parents about their children's misbehaviours does not yield results; moreover, doing so can even create problems with the parents for the teacher. Teachers may also experience ethical dilemmas when faced with parents' demands for higher grades for their children (Ilhan, Guler, Kinay, 2017). Studies have shown that the ethical dilemmas that teachers face regarding students include keeping secrets, adjusting the difficulty of the course, positively discriminating against students with special situations (needs), and being student-centred (Celik, Saban, 2020; Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011; Tezcan, Guvenc, 2020). On the other hand, teachers may face ethical dilemmas in their relationships with co-workers. It has been reported that teachers may have to decide whether to do anything about co-workers who mistreat or discriminate against students, who lack professional competence, or who do not fulfil their responsibilities (e.g., being late in classroom and leaving classroom early) (Campbell, 2000; Erdogan, 2019; Hartley, Cartwright, 2016; Tezcan, Guvenc, 2020). Teachers' personal values, approaches to education and students, their teaching styles and methods, and the meanings they attribute to the teaching process sometimes conflict with the school administration's policies, which, in turn, exposes them to ethical dilemmas (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011; Walker, Dimmock, 2000). In addition, teachers may face ethical dilemmas regarding the implementation of inconsistent and unfair decisions made by the school administration, the incongruence between structural features of the school and the teacher's personal values, demands from the school administration to favour some students, and being asked to hide the facts in an event (Dowd, 2012; Erdogan, 2019; Husu, 2001). In summary, the school administration and teachers make dozens of decisions during the educational process (e.g., deciding which students should be given the right to speak, resolving conflicts among students and among other stakeholders in the school environment, assessing students' academic success, etc.). It is, therefore, possible that decision-makers frequently find themselves in an ethical dilemma when making decisions in such situations. Hence, it is necessary to be aware that ethical dilemmas are a part of school life.

Teaching is, by nature, the art of responding to the demands and needs of many different stakeholders, such as the school administration, students, and parents. Teachers carry out their profession by acting according to the behavioural patterns expected of them. Stakeholder expectations are more of an issue in private schools than in public schools. Indeed, in private schools, teachers are asked to work at full capacity and respond to high and challenging expectations (Yilmaz, Altinkurt, 2011). Empirical studies identifying the problems private school teachers face have reported problems such as dissatisfaction with difficult working conditions, work/salary imbalances, having to perform tasks outside of the job description, having to perform tasks that contradict their personal values due to the fear of losing their job, and future anxiety (Cimen, Karadag, 2020; Ugras, 2009; Yilmaz, Altinkurt, 2011). Teachers often act as a balancing element between the parents and school administration. This exacerbates stress at work (Karakose & Kocabas, 2006). Yilmaz and Altinkurt (2011) attribute the main reason for private school teachers' negative working conditions to the problems in teacher employment in Turkey. Although Turkey has a shortage of around 150 thousand teachers, according to the official figures of 2020, the number of teachers expecting to be employed by the government in public schools is around 460 thousand (Guler, 2021). Many teachers who cannot be appointed to public schools work in private schools despite the unfavourable and challenging working conditions. In such dynamic and complex interactions, it is quite possible that teachers' personal values will conflict with those of other stakeholders and for various tensions to arise as a consequence. Because of the fear of losing their jobs, private school teachers experience ethical dilemmas in situations that run counter to their personal values. Given the working conditions in the above-mentioned private schools, we can expect that the ethical dilemma experiences of teachers working in these schools will differ to some extent from those working in public ones. Taking these as the starting point, the present study aims to examine in detail the ethical dilemmas faced by private school teachers. There are few studies on the problems of private school teachers (Cimen, Karadag, 2020; Ugras, 2009; Yilmaz, Altinkurt, 2011) and no study has so far been conducted to examine their ethical dilemmas. Furthermore an examination of the studies on the ethical dilemmas experienced by teachers (Celik, Saban, 2020; Erdogan, 2019; Erdogan, Sezgin, 2020; Ozivgen, Karacam, 2020; Tezcan, Guvenc, 2020) revealed that none of them looked at private school teachers. Therefore, the present study is important in that it addresses teachers' ethical dilemmas in the context of private schools and seeks to present a picture of the ethical dilemmas specific to private schools. In this respect, it can be said

that this study is exploratory in purpose. To avoid narrowing the interview data by being constrained by the various classifications of ethical dilemmas in the literature (Catacutan, de Guzman, 2016; Erdogan, 2019; Shapiro, Stefkovich, 2016; Zubay, Soltis, 2005), an inductive perspective was adopted, where the aim was to create new categories and themes. Therefore, the study explores the ethical dilemmas of private school teachers in the context of Turkish culture. The compatibility of the new categories and themes emerging from the data with the existing theoretical structure was examined, with the aim of providing a holistic perspective on ethical dilemmas.

Method

This study, which aims to examine in depth private school teachers' experiences of ethical dilemmas, employs a phenomenological (phenomenology) design, based on the qualitative research method. Phenomenological research focuses on individuals' perceptions of the phenomenon under study – how they define it, what they feel about it, what is their experiences, how they make sense of it, how they judge and remember it, and how they talk to other people about it (Patton, 2014). In the present study, the private school teachers' experiences of ethical dilemmas are described as phenomena. A holistic perspective was adopted, through in-depth interviews, to reveal the essence of their dilemmas.

Participants

The sample of the study consisted of 15 volunteer teachers working in private schools in a city in southeastern Turkey. In selecting the sample of the study, the maximum variation sampling method was preferred to reveal the insights and feelings of a variety of teachers who had experienced ethical dilemmas. From this perspective, it was assumed that participants whose characteristics differed (e.g., school type, subject matter, teaching experience, and gender) experienced different ethical dilemmas. Details about the sample were given in Table 1.

As can be inferred from Table 1, participants' teaching specialty areas show a heterogeneous distribution. There is a balanced distribution in terms of gender. Most of the participants have a bachelor's degree, and their teaching experience varies between 3 and 21 years.

Table 1. Personal information of the participants

Code	Branch	Gender	Graduation	Experience (Year)
T1	Turkish Language and Literature	Male	Bachelor's degree	9
T2	Counsellor	Female	Bachelor's degree	4
T3	Maths	Male	Bachelor's degree	5
T4	Primary School	Male	Bachelor's degree	16
T5	Turkish Language and Literature	Male	Ph. D.	5
T6	Turkish Language	Male	Master's degree	8
T7	Science	Male	Master's degree	4
T8	Maths	Male	Bachelor's degree	6
T9	English	Female	Bachelor's degree	3
T10	Geography	Male	Bachelor's degree	15
T11	Counsellor	Female	Bachelor's degree	7
T12	Science	Female	Bachelor's degree	8
T13	Pre-School	Female	Bachelor's degree	20
T14	Primary School	Female	Bachelor's degree	21
T15	Visual Arts	Female	Bachelor's degree	5

Data collection and analysis

A semi-structured interview form was developed by the researchers to examine in depth the ethical dilemmas faced by private school teachers. In phenomenological studies, the most basic data collection instrument was the interview. The semi-structured interview form developed for this study contains detailed questions regarding the participants' ethical dilemmas and decision-making processes. The interview form was submitted to three experts with expertise in field of educational sciences and to a Turkish language expert for evaluation. Based on their evaluation and feedback, the necessary changes were made to the form. Ethics committee approval was obtained for the study. Due to the pandemic, the interviews were conducted online via a video chat app. Before the recording began, the participants' consent was obtained, and they were informed that they could discontinue the interview and/or recording at any time.

The data obtained from the interviews were analysed using phenomenological analysis. The interview data were read three times to generate codes. When creating the codes, the concepts used by teachers were used as living

(in vivo) codes. The researchers also created some codes and utilise them to conceptualize the meaning of the data. In the next step, the codes with the same feature and/or similar meanings were gathered under the same category. Later, these categories were compared with the others to obtain the themes.

To ensure internal reliability (consistency), the analyses were conducted at different times, and codes/categories/themes with consensus and dissensus were revealed and discussed. Direct quotes were taken from the teacher's opinions to ensure the internal validity (plausibility) of the analyses and findings. To increase the transferability (external validity), each phase of the study is described in detail so the reader can better understand and visualize each phase of analysis. Lastly, the codes (T1, T2, etc.) were assigned to all participants.

Results

The categories and themes in Figure 1 were obtained by analysing the ethical dilemmas experienced by private school teachers.

As can be inferred from Figure 1, the ethical dilemmas of private school teachers were categorized under the themes of "parents," "students," "school administration" and "co-workers."

The parent dimension of ethical dilemmas

Teachers whose views fell under the category of "Grade-grubbing" under the theme of "parents" stated that some parents pressurized them to raise their child's grades. Due to the great importance they give to course grades, some parents unethically ask teachers to raise their child's grades. This often puts teachers in an ethical dilemma. The views of T3 that fall under this category are as follows:

> "I remember one time a parent visited the school and talked to me for about 40 minutes. I tried to explain to him for 40 minutes that I could not do that because of the rules. Later, when I was summoned to the administration, of course, they ordered me to raise the child's grade. These are things that make you feel guilty. That's why I was always indecisive. Should I quit or not? I knew that if I quit, I would be unemployed. That's why I always changed my mind about quitting. But I was always in a dilemma." (T3)

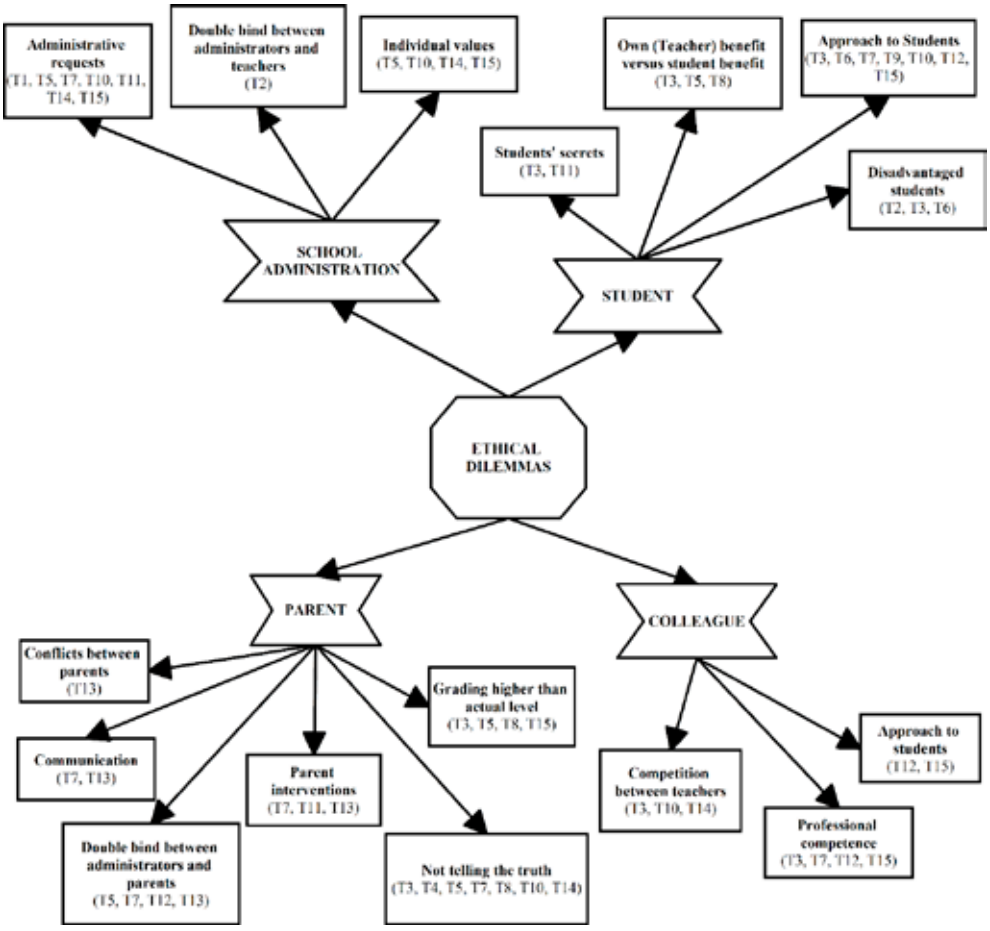


Figure 1. Private school teachers' ethical dilemmas

Grade-grubbing, which is one of the dilemmas frequently faced by private school teachers, leads teachers to lose respect for themselves and feel humiliated and often leads them to make unethical decisions.

In the "Not Being Open to Parents" category some teachers stated that they had had ethical dilemmas about reporting students' poor academic performance and/or misbehaviours to parents. In such dilemma situations, a large number of teachers stated that they talk the parents what they want to hear. The views of T3 are as follows:

> "The child is not engaged in the lesson, does not understand the lesson or, how shall I put it, does not listen to the lesson. In such a case, we can't say this directly to the parent. We just can't say 'Your kid

> doesn't understand the lesson' or 'Your kid is disrupting the lesson.' We must always praise the kid in front of the parent, which leaves me in a dilemma." (T3)

T7, on the other hand, mentioned the possible consequences of telling the parent the truth.

> "You can't tell the parent the truth. And why is that? If you constantly report a problem (about the student) to the parent, the parent will not register the child in your school the following year. If the number of registered students decreases, the school will face financial difficulties. So, it's not because we are thinking of the kid that we don't tell the truth." (T7)

If a teacher complains about a student's poor academic performance or misbehaviour, in some cases that may be interpreted as the failure of the teacher, while in other cases the teacher may become an unwanted person in the eyes of the school administration. Since this may make it difficult for the teacher to stay at the school, teachers often find it difficult to make ethical decisions when faced with these frequently encountered dilemmas.

T13, whose views fell under the category of "Conflicts among Parents," stated that she had had ethical dilemmas about what to do when faced with conflicts among parents. During class or free time in school, students may be physically or psychologically aggressive to one other; T13 stated that in such cases, she was seen as the "complaints authority," caught in the crossfire between the parents and did not know how to react.

> "Since these (the students in our school) are small children, they sometimes bite or scratch each other. We have to warn the parent that they must pay more attention to their kid's behaviours. On the other hand, the other parent complains, saying 'Why did you let this happen?' So, this situation puts us in a dilemma." (T13)

T13 stated that she was uncomfortable with being exposed to conflicts among students' parents. Teachers' attitudes in such situations are important for both parents and the administration.

Teachers whose views fell under the category of "Interfering Parents" stated that parents interfered with the functioning of the school and that they had the ethical dilemma of whether to object to them doing so. To represent

the teachers in this category, the views of T11, who is the school counsellor, are given below:

> "For example, we had to change the class of one of our 7th-grade teachers. We had to assign another teacher to the class at a parent's request." (T11)

As seen in the excerpt, the school counsellor, who was consulted on whether the teacher should be removed from the class at the parent's request, was caught in the dilemma and had to finally decide in favour of the parent. Many parents with children in private schools interfere with the functioning of the school (e.g., which teacher will be assigned to a class, how teachers should teach the lesson). In addition to reducing teacher professionalism, such interventions leave teachers and administrators faced with ethical dilemmas in decision-making as they reduce motivation.

Findings that fell under the category of "Communication with Parents" indicate the ethical dilemmas that teachers face when parents, who are seen as "benefactors," talk to them in a disrespectful manner. T13 stated that parents mostly communicated with a lack of empathy and that they had ethical dilemmas about how to respond to them:

> "The kid injures himself or someone hits him or pulls the kid's hair. In such cases, we have to face the parent. The parent says, 'Why don't you take care of my kid?' But they are only kids. What they do here in school, they do the same things at home, too." (T13)

As seen in the excerpt, the parent blames the teacher for what happened to the child. The teacher, on the other hand, wanted to say to the parent, *"Sometimes the kids come to school with bruises, then we have to ask the parent, 'Why don't you take care of your kid?' The kids can have accidents at home, too."* However, the teacher, as she stated, had to talk to the parent in a restrained manner.

Teachers whose views fell under the category of "Being Involved in Disputes between Parents and the School Administration" stated that they had ethical dilemmas when faced with incompatible demands from the school administration and parents. To represent the teachers in this category, the views of T5 are given below:

> "I remember one time we were holding the second-term parent-teacher

> conference, and most of my parents knew that I was engaged to be married. They knew that I was getting married and moving to another city. Before the meeting, I was summoned by my principal, and he told me not to tell the parents that I was going to get married. He asked me to tell them that the date of my marriage wasn't set yet if anyone asked and not to tell them that I would not be working in this school next year. The principal said that because the parents had said that if the classroom teacher changed, they would not register their kids in the school. So, I had to lie to the parents that my date of marriage was not set yet and that I would be working at the school next year. It was a very difficult situation. You become a liar in the eyes of the parents." (T5)

As seen in the above excerpt, teachers may have ethical dilemmas when faced with incompatible demands from the school administration and parents. Being the "piggy in the middle," teachers may not be sure about what to do.

The student dimension of ethical dilemmas

Teachers whose views fell under the category of "Students' Secrets" stated that they had ethical dilemmas about whether to share students' secrets with parents and the school administration. The views of T11 under this category are as follows:

> "One of my students was having psychological problems. His problems affected his relationships with his peers, his parents, and the student himself. His parents, who hadn't spoken to me about their kid, asked the school administration to ask me to have a talk with the student. The school administration communicated the parents' request to me. So, I had to have a talk with the student. Then, I had to tell the school administration and the student's parents what the student had told me. It was difficult for me, and I am often faced with such situations." (T11)

T11 stated that although she knew about the ethics of counselling students, she had to share the student's secrets with the parents because of the pressure she felt. She also noted that because she shared the student's secrets with his parents, the student came to her and said, "*So, you told them all my secrets*." That student, the teacher said, did not share any more secrets with her. Another category that emerged under this theme was "Approach to Students." Teachers whose views fell under this category stated

that they were unable to develop a consistent behavioural pattern towards their students and that they experienced ethical dilemmas as a result. The views of T10 under this category are as follows:

> "I mean, telling a student with limited capacities, 'You can do it,' or 'You can reach your goals' puts me in a serious ethical dilemma." (T10)

In the above excerpt, the teacher has an ethical dilemma about whether to tell the truth about his students or not. The teacher is afraid that if he tells the truth, he will demotivate the student. However, he is also worried that praising students would mean giving false hopes to them. T9 stated that her ethical dilemma was whether to positively discriminate in favour of successful students who were interested in her lessons. Thinking that she sometimes favoured students who are interested in her lesson over others, she questioned whether such an approach is right or wrong.

Teachers whose views fell under the category of "Students with Special Needs" stated that they had ethical dilemmas because they did not know how exactly to approach students with special needs. T6 views in this category are as follows:

> "Monitoring the students with special needs closely during lessons, having them sit at desks near me... I don't practice positive discrimination for other students." (T6)

As seen in the above excerpt, the teacher gives students with special needs an advantage; however, she also has an ethical dilemma – whether such an approach to these students leads to the unfair treatment of other students. Teachers whose views fell under the category of "Being Stuck Between Students' Interest and One's Own Interest" stated that they had experienced the ethical dilemma of having to choose between giving up the onerous job of working in a private school and leaving at an awkward time for their students. The ethical dilemma T8 faced was as follows:

> "At one of the schools where I taught, I could not get my salary, and because I could not get my salary, I wanted to quit in the middle of the semester. Quitting in the middle of the semester would of course be bad for the students, so I found myself in a dilemma. I mean, I wanted to quit, but then when I thought of the students, I decided not to. In the end, I did not quit and worked there until the end of the semester." (T8)

As seen in the above excerpt, the teacher wished to quit in the middle of the semester because of not being paid; however, thinking that this would negatively affect students, she decided not to. This excerpt shows that the teacher faced an ethical dilemma between her own interests and those of the students. T3 and T5 also stated that they had left for similar reasons and that before doing so, they had had ethical dilemmas about whether they should or not.

The school administration dimension of ethical dilemmas

Categories consisting of ethical dilemmas experienced by teachers in their relations with the school administration are included under this theme. Teachers whose views fell under the category of "Demands of the School Administration" stated that the demands from the administration sometimes contradicted their personal values, as a result of which they faced ethical dilemmas about whether to fulfil their demands or not. T1 stated that he had an ethical dilemma about whether to object to the frequent changes made by the school administration in the class schedule:

> "Sometimes, there are differences between the class schedule in the e-school application and the actual class schedule. We are sometimes forced to participate in school events on holidays." (T1)

As seen in the above excerpt, problems may arise in private schools that have a dynamic structure, due to the fact that teachers' working hours are not determined clearly. Teachers often have ethical dilemmas about whether to reject such demands from the school administration.

T2, a school counsellor whose views fell under the category of "Being Stuck In Between the School Administration and Co-workers" stated that she faced ethical dilemmas arising from her role as a mediator in the school administration's relationships with other teachers:

> "For example, the administration asks me to check whether one of my co-workers is keeping watch over students during break time. This is one of the things that disturbs me most. They may even ask me to warn that teacher about doing his duties." (T2)

As seen in the above excerpt, the school administration in question wishes to use that school counsellor as a 'tool.' The teacher stated that although she did not want to be in such a situation against her co-workers, she had

to do the task assigned by the school administration. Consequently she is stuck in between the school administration and co-workers.

Teachers whose views fell under the category of "Personal Values" stated that they faced ethical dilemmas as a result of the incongruence between their own approaches to education and the meanings they attributed to education and those of the school administration. The views of T5 under this category are as follows:

> "As a teacher, you want to raise and educate students in line with the student profile in your mind and heart. However, the school administration, who think they operate a business, want to save the day and ensure students' enrolment in the school for the next year by not upsetting the parents (or by even giving them not fully accurate information). Yes, they sometimes use you as a tool (to achieve this goal)." (T5)

As seen in the above excerpt, the priority of the school administration is to protect the financial interests of the school rather than improve the educational processes. Since this is not compatible with any philosophy of education, the teachers have ethical dilemmas. T15 stated that the school administration interfered a lot with his teaching styles:

> "So, you are planning to have a beautiful, very modern, and creative teaching activity with your students. But the school administration, even some older classroom teachers, want to interfere. For example, they asked me to do potato printing instead of an interesting, unconventional activity I wanted to do with the students. Potato printing is not a common practice in this modern age. It belongs to the past. There are more modern methods, but we can't use them because of the dominance of old-fashioned teachers in the administration, which is more common in private schools." (T15)

The fact that private school administrations impose their education approaches on teachers causes some problems. As can be understood from the examples, the administration's education approach differs from that of the teachers. However, their approach affects the teachers' approach to education, the tools they use, and most importantly, their personal values. When their teaching styles, methods, materials, etc. contradict those of the administration, teachers face dilemmas.

The co-worker dimension of ethical dilemmas

This theme includes the categories of ethical dilemmas teachers face in their relationships with other teachers. Teachers whose views fell under the category of "Approach to Students" stated that they had ethical dilemmas about whether or not they should warn their co-workers or report them to the administration when they mistreat students. The views of T12 under this category are as follows:

> "One day, while I was on duty to watch over students during the break time, I saw one of my co-workers, who is older than me, yelling at a student. But at that moment, I could not intervene with a person older than me. After all, he was older than me, and it was not possible for me to intervene with it. For a second, I wondered if I should intervene, but of course, I didn't." (T12)

As seen in the above excerpt, the teacher witnessed a co-worker mistreating a student but was hesitant to talk about it. It can be said that this teacher, who found herself in an ethical dilemma in the decision-making process, acted with the motive to protect her co-worker. Teachers whose views fell under the category of "Professional Competence" stated that although they received complaints from parents and students about some of the other teachers' professional incompetence (which they also observed themselves), they had ethical dilemmas about whether to report this to the school administration or talk to the teachers being complained about. To represent the teachers in this category, the view of T3 is given below:

> "I constantly receive complaints from students about other teachers, but since they are all my friends, I cannot report them. Of course, this would not be ethical behaviour. I also cannot tell my teacher friend about the complaints, thinking that he will be sad." (T3)

As seen in the above excerpts, despite complaints about the incompetence of her co-worker, T3 acts with the motive to protect him. The category of "competition among teachers" comprises ethical dilemmas arising from conflicts due to competition among teachers. To represent the teachers in this category, the views of T10 are given below:

> "One of the teachers started rumours about two other teachers. I revealed that it was a lie, a slander, and I had him fired. I asked myself, 'If I get him fired, will he have any economic difficulties? But If I hadn't

done what I did, then, this time, a bigger problem would arise in the school."

As seen in the above excerpt, the teacher, taking into account the different aspects and parties of the incident in the decision-making process, does the right thing through ethical reasoning. It is observed that the excessive pressure put on private school teachers by the school administration and parents leads to competition among teachers and causes undesirable consequences.

Discussion, Conclusion and Implications

Attempting to provide a holistic perspective on private school teachers' ethical dilemmas in the context of Turkey, this study adopted an exploratory research design, given that there is no such study in the current literature. Inductive analyses carried out in the study revealed that the ethical dilemmas of the participating private school teachers were grouped under the themes of "parents," "students," "school administration," and "co-workers." The theme with the most categories was "parents," and the teachers' views mostly fell under this theme. The reason why this theme contains more categories than other themes may be the pressure put on private school teachers by parents interfering with the school's functioning. Faced with parents' demands to raise their children's grades, teachers found themselves in an ethical dilemma. The relevant literature shows that this situation is not specific to private schools (Barret et al, 2012; Erdogan, Sezgin, 2020; Ilhan et al, 2017; Tezcan, Guvenc, 2020). On the other hand, the current research results revealed that private school teachers are more exposed to the phenomenon of 'grade-grubbing' than their counterparts in public schools. The current research result are supported by the studies conducted by Tezcan and Guvenc (2020) and Erdogan and Sezgin (2020) with teachers working in public secondary schools, where it was pointed out that grade inflation in private schools leads to injustices against students who study in public schools. Public school teachers stated that they faced the ethical dilemma of whether to raise their students' grades to eliminate this injustice.

This research revealed that parents with children studying at private schools interfere not only with their children's grades but also with the assignment of teachers to classes and with the teaching of lessons. Teachers who are exposed to such parental attitudes stated that they faced ethical dilemmas about whether to oppose the parents, while wanting to protect the dignity of the teaching profession. Tezcan and Guvenc's (2020) study

on teachers working in public secondary schools also reported that parents interfered with the classroom seating arrangement and classroom assessments and that teachers had ethical dilemmas when faced with such attitudes. Similarly, research by Shapira-Lishchinsky (2011) reported that tensions between parents' demands and school rules created ethical dilemmas. In contrast, a study conducted by Celik and Saban (2020) with classroom teachers concluded that indifferent, uninvolved parents did not support their kids' educational processes. Elementary school teachers stated that in such situations they found themselves in the ethical dilemma of whether to make sacrifices for the development of students who are ignored by their parents. Based on all these results, it can be said that parents who support teachers by respecting their autonomy (Colnerud, 1997) positively affect the education and training process.

In the study, it was observed that private school teachers were sometimes faced with the ethical dilemma of whether to tell parents the truth about their children's poor academic performance or misbehaviours. Parents' approach to private schools and, in particular, them seeing education as a commodity bought for a fee may have an impact on the emergence of this situation. Indeed, the majority of private school parents hold the teacher first and then the school administration responsible for any problems their children may have. Making a negative evaluation about a student brings the risk of conflict with the parent. Here, teachers face the ethical dilemma of whether to inform the parent about the student's poor academic performance or misbehaviours. Therefore, teachers may feel that they have to tell parents the things they want to hear and not the truth about their children's situation at school. This may be the reason why teachers prefer to put on a brave face rather than tell parents how disappointed they are with their child's progress.

In the study, participating teachers stated that they had ethical dilemmas about whether to share their students' secrets with the parents or the school administration. It has been emphasized in many studies that students, feeling close to their teachers, share their secrets with them and that teachers may face the ethical dilemma of whether to keep their secrets (Camadan, 2018; Erdur-Baker, Cetinkaya, 2007; Erdogan, Sezgin, 2020; Tezcan, Guvenc, 2020). Although school counsellors working at private schools want to fulfil their responsibility for keeping the secrets of the students consulting them, they may be forced by the school administration and parents to reveal students' secrets. It is obvious that, in such a situation, a school counsellor at a private school, who is both concerned about losing professional ethics

and losing his/her job, will not be able to make a decision easily. From this point of view, it can be said that school counsellors at private schools usually fail to resist the pressure from the administration or parents to disclose students' secrets. In contrast to this study, the study conducted by Tezcan and Guvenc (2020) concluded that school counsellors who did not share students' secrets with anyone were uncomfortable at not being able to share them. Unaware of the difficulties or problems that a problematic student is having, teachers may mistreat that student. However, if other teachers also know about that student's problems, they will probably be more understanding towards the student. Therefore, the school counsellor has an ethical dilemma about whether to share the student's secrets with other teachers (Tezcan, Guvenc, 2020).

Another finding obtained in the study is related to teachers' ethical dilemmas about how to treat students with special needs. Teachers stated that they had ethical dilemmas about whether positive discrimination of students with special needs led to injustice for other students. Besides, it was found that teachers who favoured students who were more interested in their lessons questioned whether doing so was the right behaviour. Similarly, the study conducted by Tezcan and Guvenc (2020) found that teachers who gave more opportunities to students who actively participated in their lesson were not sure whether their behaviour was right.

Another noteworthy finding obtained in the study is the ethical dilemmas faced by private school teachers between their own interests and those of students. Teachers who wanted to quit their job because they could not get their salaries had difficulty making that decision as they thought their students could be negatively affected if they quit their job in the middle of the semester. The dilemmas faced by teachers, who, on the one hand, cannot get what they deserve for their work, while on the other hand, are uncomfortable with disrupting educational processes, are important in that they reveal the uniqueness of the ethical dilemmas experienced in private schools.

Teachers, who do not approve of some of their co-workers' approaches to students, find themselves in the ethical dilemma of whether to warn the teacher or report them to the school administration. Similarly, it was observed that teachers who received complaints from parents about some of their co-workers faced the ethical dilemmas of whether to discuss the complaints with them. Also, it was found that competition among teachers was another source of ethical dilemmas. On the other hand, when faced with

ethical dilemmas about their co-workers, teachers mostly acted with the motive to protect them. Indeed, the research conducted by Tezcan and Guvenc (2020) also concluded that teachers were inclined to protect their co-workers.

In the study, private school teachers stated that they had ethical dilemmas concerning their relationships with the school administration. Considering that private school teachers' contracts are renewed every year and given the high unemployment rates among teachers in Turkey, private school teachers are expected to avoid conflicts with the school administration. Some of the participating teachers stated that they chose not to resist inappropriate demands from the school administration, despite not being comfortable with them. In the relevant literature, it has been reported that teachers face ethical dilemmas about whether they should obey school administrations' unfair decisions (Dowd, 2012; Erdogan, Sezgin, 2020; Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011). Legal regulations are week in Turkey to protect teachers rights against unfair demands comes from school administrators. Some of the participating teachers stated that school administrations interfered too much with their teaching styles, methods, etc. and that they imposed their own approach to education. Teachers who were not happy with the school administration's interference stated that they had ethical dilemmas about whether they should oppose the school administration's interference. Based on these results, it can be said that when school administration practices and approaches to education contradict teachers' personal values, this puts pressure on teachers and creates dilemmas. In the relevant literature, it has been reported that ethical dilemmas arise when teachers' personal values contradict the values of the school administration (Campbell, 2000; Erdogan, Sezgin, 2020; Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011).

In conclusion, the ethical dilemmas experienced by private school teachers showed partial similarities with teachers working in public schools, but had unique qualities as well. Due to the high expectations from private schools, teachers working in these institutions are exposed to high workloads and work stress. Lack of job security negatively affects teachers' self-confidence, which, in turn, increases the pressure exerted by the school administration on teachers. Indeed, the fact that private school teachers mostly resolve their ethical dilemmas in line with the demands of the school administration can be evaluated in this direction. This study, whose primary purpose was to examine the ethical dilemmas faced by private school teachers, also revealed professional and workplace problems, especially with regard to teachers' personal rights. It is hoped that studies aimed at identifying the

professional problems of private school teachers will raise awareness on this issue. Based on the results obtained in this study, the following recommendations have been developed.

It was found that some parents asked teachers to raise their children's grades. Here the recommendation is to raise awareness in parents that grades are merely measurement and assessment tools and that the primary focus of education is on student learning, progress along with social, emotional, cognitive, and moral developments. It was found that due to concerns about steady student enrolment levels, private school administrations and teachers preferred not to tell parents the truth about their child's academic performance. Student progress can only be achieved if their true performance is acknowledged and appropriate interventions developed. It is, therefore, recommended that private school teachers and administrators should be bound by the ethical requirement to inform parents and students about the students' true academic performance. It was found that private school teachers were disrupted by the number of phone calls and text messages from parents, sometimes outside of working hours, who assume that they are always right. It is recommended that private schools stipulate the hours of parent–teacher communication so that parents do not intrude into teachers' private lives. It was found that some teachers faced ethical dilemmas regarding their treatment of students with special needs. Here the recommendation is to raise teacher awareness about practising positive discrimination towards students with special needs on certain issues, but not grade inflation. It was found that some private school teachers were exposed to complaints about some of their co-workers, which put them in an ethical dilemma. It is recommended that parents are made aware of the fact that the school administrations, not the teachers, supervise the professional competence of teachers at school.

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