School Projects from the Perspectives of the Project School Teachers

Proje Okulu Öğretmenlerinin Bakış Açısından Okul Projeleri

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ABSTRACT: This research aims to identify the views and reflections of teachers working in project schools on the meaning and impact of the projects carried out in Turkish schools. The research was designed in the case study model. The data of the research were collected through semi-structured interviews with 10 teachers working in project schools in Muğla. The interviews were evaluated under the themes of "the underlying meanings of projects", "the reasons for teachers to involve in projects", "the effects of projects on teachers" and "the effects of projects on students". According to the research results, the participants defined projects as works that focus on quantity rather than quality, as works only for display, as incompatible with the education system, as a discredited concept, and as drudgery. The participants stated that the teachers participated in the projects due to the pressure from the school principals and central education system as well as aiming to put forth useful work, execute the task perfunctorily, and gain an advantage. In addition, the participants expressed that the projects carried out in schools have positive effects for teachers such as increasing job satisfaction, providing personal development opportunities and enabling collaboration with colleagues, as well as negative effects such as burnout, waste of time, inefficiency and not contributing to professional development. Finally, the participants asserted that while the projects provided positive effects for students such as socialization, motivation, self-confidence, and teamwork, they had negative effects such as not supporting academic success, disruption of lessons, boredom, and incorrect learning of science.

Keywords: Project, project school, teacher, neoliberalizm

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ÖZ: Bu araştırmada, Türkiye'de okullarda yürütülen projelerin, anlamı ve etkilerinin, proje okulu öğretmenlerinin görüşleri ile belirlenmesi amaçlanmaktadır. Araştırma, durum çalışması modelinde desenlenmiştir. Araştırmanın verileri, Muğla ilindeki proje okullarında görev yapan 10 öğretmen ile gerçekleştirilen yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler ile toplanmıştır. Yapılan görüşmeler, "proje kavramının anlamı", "öğretmenlerin projelere dahil olma nedenleri", "projelerin öğretmenler açısından etkileri" ve "projelerin öğrenciler açısından etkileri" temaları altında değerlendirilmiştir. Araştırma sonuçlarına göre katılımcılar, projeleri, nitelik yerine niceliğe odaklanan, göstermelik, eğitim sistemiyle uyuşmayan çalışmalar, itibarını kaybeden bir kavram ve angarya olarak tanımlamaktadırlar. Katılımcılar, öğretmenlerin projelere, okul müdürlerinin zorlaması, merkezi baskılar, faydalı bir çalışma ortaya koymak, verilen görevi yapmış olmak ve avantaj elde etmek gibi nedenlerle katıldıklarını ifade etmişlerdir. Ayrıca katılımcılar, okullarda yürütülen projelerin öğretmenler açısından, iş doyumunu artırma, kişisel gelişim imkânları sunma ve meslektaşlarla iş birliğine olanak sağlama gibi olumlu etkilerine rağmen; tükenmişlik, zaman kaybı, verimsizlik ve mesleki gelişime katkı sağlamama gibi olumsuz etkilerinin olduğunu ifade etmişlerdir. Son olarak, katılımcılar, projelerin, öğrenciler açısından, sosyalleşme, motivasyon, özgüven ve takım çalışması gibi olumlu etkiler sağlarken, akademik başarıyı desteklememe, derslerin aksaması, bıkkınlık ve bilimin yanlış öğrenilmesi gibi olumsuz etkileri olduğunu belirtmişlerdir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Proje, proje okulu, öğretmen, neoliberalizm

1. INTRODUCTION

With the neoliberal policies implemented throughout the world since the 1970s, public institutions and employees have been exposed to significant changes. As a result of these policies envisaging the privatization of public services or their management through private sector practices, employees have been faced with more flexible, precarious, and uncertain working conditions. Thus, it is aimed to create a favorable environment of inequality, uncertainty, temporariness, and risk. The effects of neoliberal policies on education have started to appear in Turkey, especially since the 2000s. The most prominent of these effects are the increase in the number of private schools, the introduction of policies supporting the wealthy, the transformation of the teaching profession, and the emergence of different types of schools (Çolak, 2021). In terms of different school types, "Project Schools", formed in upper-secondary education in Turkey, can be considered as a neoliberal transformation in education (Çolak, Aysel, Yorulmaz, & Altınkurt, 2021). These schools mainly aim to carry out national or international projects. It is thought that the examination of the projects through the views of teachers working in these schools can be crucial in order to evaluate the projects in the context of neoliberal policies and understand their place in the education system.

Neoliberal policies have implemented a "new management" approach for the transformation of social welfare state institutions. Public organizations have adopted the management techniques used by the private sector and assume an entrepreneurial identity (Brown, 2018; Deem, 1998). This situation has important reflections on schools, which are also social state institutions. The management approach of schools, based on public interest and expertise, has left its place to an understanding that focuses on customer demands and competition. The projects are also thought to have a significant impact on this transformation as the projects carried out with private sector practices in schools can be used as a tool to increase the visibility of schools and increase the culture of competition among schools (Kılıç & Tunç, 2022). This understanding leads schools to move away from the aim of providing quality education and to transform them into institutions that compete with each other by producing a higher number of projects.

Projects' coming to the forefront in education is closely related to the fact that education has become a commodity that can be bought and sold with neoliberal policies (Altınkurt & Aysel, 2016; Şimşek, 2018). Kılıç and Tunç (2022) draw attention to the emergence of the concept of "project fetishism" as one of the indicators of the commodification and marketization of education. Project fetishism refers to the transformation of the main purpose of schools from being places of acquiring knowledge to a view that knowledge provides an economic return. Neoliberal practices lead to the establishment of a culture of project fetishism in organizations and cause organizations to focus on project success in a narrow sense. This culture is characterized by the race to get results quickly and show it, taking the easy way out and exaggerating the results (Bayraktar, 2017). The establishment of a project culture in schools causes schools to become institutions that commodify information, produce customer-oriented projects and compete with each other to show their results (Kılıç & Tunç, 2022). In this respect, labelling some schools as "Project School" is one of the indicators that this understanding is gradually coming to the fore in education.

The term "Project School" in Turkey first appeared in 2014 in the Law No. 6528 named "The Amendment of the Basic Law of National Education and Some Laws and Decrees [Millî Eğitim Temel Kanunu ile Bazı Kanun ve Kanun Hükmünde Kararnamelerde Değişiklik Yapılmasına Dair Kanun]" (Resmî Gazete, 2014). Then, with the "Regulation on Educational Institutions Implementing Special Programs and Projects" [Özel Program ve Proje Uygulayan Eğitim Kurumları Yönetmeliği] published

in 2016, the requirements for schools to be categorized as projects schools and for teachers and administrators to be appointed in these schools were declared (Ministry of National Education [MoNE], 2016). Gradually, all of the Science High Schools and Social Sciences High Schools in the upper-secondary education institutions were transformed into project schools. Among the project schools, there are also some schools from Anatolian High Schools, Vocational and Technical Anatolian High Schools and Anatolian Imam Hatip High Schools. When the regulation that underpins the project schools is examined, it is noticed that these schools are responsible for carrying out national or international projects and their studies will be examined by the Ministry of National Education every year. Therefore, it would be appropriate to claim that the ultimate establishment purpose of project schools is to develop and implement projects. "The Regulation on Appointing Teachers and Assigning Administrators to Educational Institutions Implementing Special Programs and Projects under the Ministry of National Education" [Millî Eğitim Bakanlığına Bağlı Özel Program ve Proje Uygulayan Eğitim Kurumlarına Öğretmen Atama ve Yönetici Görevlendirme Yönetmeliği], published in 2023, defines the concept of project as follows:

These are the studies proposed by the school directorate, provincial directorate, district national education directorate or the relevant general directorate in order to increase the quality in the academic, vocational, social, artistic, and cultural fields that will be carried out within a certain period of time in the educational institution within the framework of cooperation agreements with domestic and foreign institutions at home and abroad. (MoNE, 2023, Article 3)

As can be seen, the projects that project schools are responsible for carrying out according to the regulation include studies to be created in cooperation with domestic and foreign organizations in a wide range such as academic, social, vocational, cultural, and artistic fields. Therefore, the projects expected from the project schools are defined in a very general way, and no further explanation is given regarding their objectives, boundaries, nature, duration, budget, and planning. Currently, many school-wide, local, national, or international projects could be conducted both in project schools and in other schools. The types and numbers of projects carried out over the years are increasing, and even these numbers can be regarded as an indicator of the quality of education. The reason for this can be explained by the increasing impact of neoliberal policies on education in recent years as such policies put private sector practices at the forefront and strive to establish inequality, risks, insecurity, and competition in every field. In order to disguise and sustain these changes, fancy concepts that are easy on the ear such as "project" can be used (Çolak, 2021). Standing (2019) draws attention to the fact that neoliberal policies try to hide the negative aspects of concepts by naming them in a posh manner. Labelling some school names with "project" in Turkey in recent years and the projects produced to increase the quantity can be regarded as reflections of such a "posh categorization" process.

The concept of a project is defined by the Turkish Language Association as "a scientific study design that has been planned and programmed in different areas, the cost has been calculated, approved by the governing bodies of institutions and organizations" (TDK, 2023). As can be seen, in this definition, projects are emphasized to be planned and budgeted studies based on a scientific purpose and process. However, in line with the aim of neoliberalism to undermine every concept and use it for its own purposes, the concept of "project" has also been transformed into a very convenient structure and has taken its place in the education system. That is to say, project, which was a concept that used to express important research, development, or invention by applying scientific methods in a long, planned and systematic process in the past (Çubukçu, 2014), is now turning into a simpler, more ordinary, ambiguous, and easily adaptable concept.

In essence, the project is a scientific research design. In schools, feeding students' sense of curiosity and directing them to science and scientific research are among the important goals of education. However, in order to create a project, in addition to being knowledgeable, it is also necessary to have a high level of competence in the concept of science, scientific paradigms, science ethics, scientific research process, scientific research methods and techniques (Özsoy, 2014). To attain such competencies, it is necessary to go through a solid education. Therefore, teachers who will conduct projects in project schools and guide students who are expected to produce projects should be competent in this regard and have received training in this area. Teachers are appointed to the project schools for a period of four years with the approval of the Minister of National Education. When the prerequisites for those who can be appointed as teachers to these schools are examined, it is seen that there are no requirements regarding the qualifications of the teachers, their expertise on projects, or their education levels (MoNE, 2023, Article 4). Therefore, it can be argued that some problems may arise if the teachers working in these schools are not competent in projects and scientific research (Atalmış, Selçuk, & Ataç, 2018). For example, such incompetence may harm the viewpoint towards science by causing fast and inattentive studies, turning to mystical and metaphysical subjects that cannot be in the field of science, and adopting practices contrary to science ethics. As a matter of fact, in some project competitions, it is possible to come across projects examining the effects of horoscopes on students' success or dealing with fortune-telling, magic, and necromancy (TÜBİTAK, 2019).

The concept of the project discussed in this research refers to a broad category of projects carried out in schools. Currently, projects such as Erasmus (European Region Action Scheme For The Mobility Of University Students), eTwinning, TÜBİTAK (The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey), and TEKNOFEST (Aerospace and Technology Festival) are conducted in project schools, as in other schools. In addition, school-wide, local, national, and ministry-initiated projects, the number of which is increasing day by day, can also be implemented in these schools. The projects can cover a wide area from scientific research projects to science fairs, competitions, school partnerships, and social responsibility activities. Although most of these projects are mainly carried out by students under the guidance of teachers, projects involving only teachers can also be implemented. It is evident that each project has a separate purpose, study subject, and target audience. However, the focus of the current research is not to consider and analyze the place of various projects in education separately. Instead, by considering the term project as an umbrella concept, the research focused on the position of projects in the education system in general and their impact on teachers and students. In other words, in this study, regardless of its specific content, it is aimed to examine the place of project concept in the education system and its reflections in general from the perspectives of project school teachers. Therefore, this concept has been handled throughout the research in a way that covers all the studies and practices conducted under the name of the project in schools. Although similar projects are implemented at all levels in the education system, the reason for including the teachers in the project schools in the study group of this research is that these schools are legally responsible for producing projects (MoNE, 2023) and that a large number of projects are executed in these schools.

In the literature, there are studies that independently examine the projects carried out in schools such as TÜBİTAK (Atalmış et al., 2018), eTwinning (Gündüz Çetin & Gündoğdu, 2022) and Erasmus (Demirer & Dak, 2019). In addition, there are also studies dealing with the projects implemented in preschool education (Aslan & Köksal Akyol, 2006) and with the importance of projects in science and mathematics education (Dede & Yaman, 2003). In recent years, it is observable that research on project schools has increased. Those studies reveal the reflections of the project schools on education and society (Kurul, 2016), the roles and competencies of the project school principals (Usul, 2020), the qualifications

of the project schools (Meşeci Giorgetti, Çeven, Topaloğlu, Gülen, & Garip, 2018), the organizational commitment of the teachers in the project schools (Koç, 2019), job rotation in project schools (Aslan, 2018), and the structure and functioning of project schools (Kaya, 2019). Çolak et al. (2021), in their study on project schools, examined the views of project school teachers on the concept of "project school". However, no research has been found in the literature regarding the projects conducted in project schools according to the views of teachers. Through this research, the place and effects of the projects in the education system have been revealed from the perspectives of teachers. In addition, this research has shed light on the functioning and effectiveness of project schools and has reflected teachers' views on the purpose of these schools. Therefore, the research is thought to make an important contribution to the literature. In this context, this research aimed to reveal the views and reflections of teachers working in project schools on the meaning and impact of the projects carried out in Turkish schools. Within the scope of this primary objective, answers to the following questions were sought:

• What do teachers think of the underlying meanings of projects?

• What are the reasons for teachers to be involved in the projects?

• What are the effects of the projects on teachers according to teachers' perspectives?

• What are the effects of the projects on students according to teachers' perspectives?

2. METHOD

2.1. Research Design

A qualitative research approach was used in the research. The research was designed in the case study model. A case study is the presentation of a current phenomenon in the context of real life (Yin, 2002). Case studies are based on how and why questions and provide an in-depth examination of a phenomenon or event that the researcher cannot control (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). In this research, the experiences of the teachers working in the project schools regarding the "projects" are considered as the case. In this context, teachers' experiences and observations on projects were analyzed using the data obtained from the interviews.

2.2. Study Group

The study group of the research consists of 10 teachers working in project schools in Muğla in the second term of the 2021-2022 academic year. Criterion sampling and maximum variation sampling techniques were used to determine the study group. Criterion sampling refers to including all cases according to a range of criteria determined beforehand while maximum variation sampling involves forming a relatively small sample group which reflects the maximum diversity of the participants considering the aim of the study (Büyüköztürk, Kılıç Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz, & Demirel, 2014; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). In line with the purpose of the research, the inclusion criterion of currently working at a project school in upper-secondary education was determined to select participants for the study. Within the scope of maximum variation sampling, participants from different project school types such as Anatolian high schools, Science high schools, and Imam Hatip high schools were included in the research. In addition, including teachers with different professional seniority and subject areas in the study group helped to provide richer data on the projects and to reveal the opinions of teachers with varying characteristics about the projects. Thus, the objective was to promote diversity in terms of

participants. Table 1 presents detailed information about the participants of the study that involved face-to-face interviews.

Table 1. *Study Group*

Participant Code	Gender	Seniority (Years)	Subject Area	Projects Conducted	School Type
P1	Male	33	Turkish Language and Literature	TÜBİTAK	Imam Hatip High School
P2	Male	25	Physics	TÜBİTAK, Patent	Science High School
P3	Female	12	Guidance	Erasmus, TÜBİTAK, Local Projects	Science High School
P4	Male	15	Information Technologies	TEKNOFEST	Imam Hatip High School
P5	Male	26	Turkish Language and Literature	TÜBİTAK, Local Projects	Anatolian High School
P6	Male	30	Biology	TÜBİTAK	Science High School
P7	Male	20	English	Erasmus, eTwinning, Local Projects	Anatolian High School
P8	Female	25	Biology	TÜBİTAK, Erasmus	Science High School
P9	Female	10	Chemistry	TÜBİTAK, TEKNOFEST	Science High School
P10	Male	26	Turkish Language and Literature	TÜBİTAK, Local Projects	Science High School

2.3. Data Collection Tool

The data of the study were collected using a semi-structured interview form prepared by the researcher. During the development of the interview form, first of all, the literature on the subject was reviewed and a draft form was prepared. In order to develop and evaluate the draft form, expert opinion was sought from four academics. The interview form was rearranged in line with the suggestions and corrections from the experts. The interview form consists of nine questions. Alternative options were created for some questions to be used in cases where they were not sufficiently understood or sufficient feedback could not be obtained. Some of the questions in the interview form are as follows: "What do you think about the meaning attributed to projects in the education system?", "Why are teachers involved in projects?", "What do you think about the effects of projects on teachers?".

2.4. Data Collection Process and Data Analysis

The data of the research were acquired through interviews. The interviews were conducted face-to-face with the participants by the researcher and were completed between April and May 2022. In order to collect data, institutional permission was granted by Muğla Provincial Directorate of National Education dated 08.03.2022 and numbered E-70004082-604.02-45272326, and ethics approval by Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee dated 22.03.2022 and numbered 43. Appointments were arranged to conduct interviews with the teachers who were within the scope of the study group and agreed to be interviewed. Great care was taken to ensure that interviews were conducted in a quiet environment where the participants would feel comfortable. Before the interviews, the participants were informed about the scope and purpose of the research. All

interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants. In line with the flow of the conversation, the order of the interview questions was changed when necessary. During the interviews, due consideration was given to direct the questions in the interview form to the participants in an impartial manner and to make the interviews in a conversational atmosphere. The duration of the interviews varies between 20 minutes and 43 minutes. The audio recordings obtained from the interviews were converted into text by the researcher. In this context, a 61-page interview transcript was acquired. Descriptive analysis technique was employed in the analysis of the data. A descriptive analysis is the presentation of the data according to the themes revealed by the research questions or the questions used in the interview processes. Thus, the data are organized under themes and described in a systematic and clear way (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). In this context, the data derived from the interviews in the research were organized and explained within the framework of the sub-objectives of the research by drawing inferences from the data. Sub-themes were created to present the relations in a more understandable and systematic way.

2.5. Validity and Reliability

Validity in qualitative research implies that the accuracy of the findings is checked by the researcher through certain processes (Creswell, 2016). In other words, validity refers to reflecting the researched phenomenon as it is. In order to ensure the validity of this study, a thorough explanation was provided regarding how the data collection process was carried out, the characteristics of the study group and how the data were analyzed. Also, the expert review was used to develop the interview form. The criterion sampling method was used to reveal the investigated phenomenon in accordance with its nature which has contributed to ensuring transferability (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). Frequently including direct quotations under the themes served to convey the research data to the reader without commenting. Another way to secure validity in qualitative research is to reveal the stance of the researcher (Merriam, 2015). The researcher worked as a teacher in a project school for 10 years. This shows that the researcher had experience in the researched subject for a long time and was able to observe it closely. In the interpretation of the findings of the research, the researcher benefited from these experiences. Reliability in qualitative research indicates the consistency of the researcher's approach (Merriam, 2015). In order to ensure consistency and the suitability of the themes and sub-themes, two other researchers also examined the findings. Later, in the meeting held with these researchers, the compatibility of the themes with both the sub-themes and the quotations associated with them was discussed and the meeting continued until a consensus was reached.

3. FINDINGS

This research aimed to determine the views and reflections of teachers working in project schools on the meaning and impact of the projects carried out in Turkish schools. The data obtained from the semi-structured interviews with the teachers were examined under the themes developed within the framework of the sub-objectives of the research. These themes are (1) the underlying meanings of projects, (2) the reasons for teachers to be involved in the projects, (3) the effects of the projects on the teachers, and (4) the effects of the projects on the students.

3.1.   The Underlying Meanings of Projects

Teachers' views on how they made sense of the projects carried out in schools are expressed under this theme. In this context, teachers, as practitioners, made assessments on the place of projects in education. The opinions of the participants on this issue are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. *The Underlying Meanings of Projects According to Teachers*

The Meanings Attributed to Projects	Participant Codes
Works that focus on quantity rather than quality	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, P8, P9, P10
Works only for display	P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P10
A concept incompatible with the education system	P3, P5, P6, P8, P9, P10
Drudgery	P2, P3, P4, P6, P8, P10
A discredited concept	P1, P4, P5, P6

The participants describe the projects as works that focus on quantity rather than quality, as works only for display, as incompatible with the education system, as a discredited concept, and as drudgery. The primary issue raised by the participants is that projects focus on quantity rather than quality. Participants are of the opinion that producing a large number of projects in every field increases the number of projects developed, while reducing their quality. It should be pointed out that a few teachers (P2, P3, P4) use the metaphor of "project dump" to describe this situation. The opinions of certain participants regarding the view that the projects are studies that focus on quantity rather than quality are as follows:

> The quality is no longer a concern. Here, is it good quality, is it bad, is it useful, etc. We passed that part. It is only important that the numbers increase. To be able to say that we have done so many projects, we have done 100 projects… If someone comes to realize and says that even a primary school kid won't do it, that's right. Our aim is to increase something statistically… It matters how many you do rather than what it is for (P2).

> We always focus on quantity rather than quality. In other words, the people at a higher level use them in this way... They only participate for the sake of numbers. That is, it happens because the administrators want to say that "Oh, our school should have an application, too," or they want to tell the higher-ups that "We have applied with so many projects" … We ended up in a "project dump" this way (P3).

Many participants pointed out that the projects are only for display. Teachers stated that although the quality of the projects is low, the schools are in an effort to bring the projects to the fore. In this context, they defined the projects as "show", "advertisement", "eye-filling", and "pretend works". Some of the participants who regard the projects as being solely for display have the following views:

> Projects are carried out for advertising purposes. They are conducted to have done it, in the sense of advertising, to say here it is, to impress, to prepare on paper. This is actually a very serious problem (P7).

> Projects are for display. Everything is for display. You will photograph everything you do. The show part is important. The content is empty, but the show part is very fancy. You will shoot

videos, take photos, and show that you did it in every way. Even if you haven't done it, you will pretend you did it (P2).

Advertisement… In other words, the school principals consider it completely as an advertisement (P4).

As a matter of fact, I think what we have seen in recent times is the act of taking images, spreading, and advertising rather than the content of the project or the emotional impact it has on the student and the teacher… Two photos one project, two sentences one project. But it's nice to appear and talk about it. How else can you show yourself? (P3).

Some participants expressed their opinions on the fact that the projects did not match the realities of the education system. At this point, the teachers pointed out that the intensive curriculum and the central examination-oriented nature of the education system contradicted the projects. The opinions of certain participants with regard to these contradictions are as follows:

To tell the truth, we all know that with the current education program, children are going through a process towards the university entrance exam. In other words, especially in schools like ours, it is difficult for the child to turn to preparing a project when he is completely focused on the exam… These have nothing to do with the process of the university selection exam that the child will take tomorrow. The child will truly earn his living according to this exam. In what way will your projects help the child at this stage? (P6).

After all, we have an exam that we aim for, we have an intense curriculum that we have to follow. For example, my students had to skip their classes while they were going to their project work. Either this kid will miss his course, or he will miss his lesson. In other words, children try to get away from education and the curriculum to carry out projects (P9).

In addition to the fact that the projects did not align with the realities of the education system, some participants stated that they had difficulty in allocating time for such studies as they had a very busy work schedule in schools. Also, teachers see projects as "drudgery" because they think that there is no return for them and their students. Some of the participants' views on this situation are as follows:

As a teacher, speaking for ourselves, we have 30 hours of classes. We don't have a free day anyway. Plus, education doesn't just end at school, we continue at home. Like question preparation and stuff... The teacher will have a course, he will be on duty at boarding schools. When will this man produce a project? Therefore, if we look at the projects at schools from the point of view of teachers, I think of it as drudgery for most of them (P10).

It is an extra burden. Many of them are not prepared by students anyway. It brings a drudgery. That is, it has no purpose. Many things were done just for the sake of doing them... Now everyone is so fed up with many drudgeries that they can even write one themselves by saying "Let's do it for display" (P3).

Some participants do not associate the projects currently being carried out in schools with the real concept of the project. Therefore, the participants drew attention to the fact that the concept of the project has lost its credibility with the increase in projects that focus on display and quantity in schools. Some of the participants' views with regard to this issue are as follows:

The project name has already lost its credibility. You know, some words are like that, you can use them... If someone says project, I think of it as a trivial thing, a made-up thing. Our biggest problem is that we contaminate words, that is, we devalue them (P1).

The word project has started to be used like such a magic word. Now, think about the simplest thing such as buying something for school. They say that "Let's turn it into a project". There will be garbage bins in a few places, gardening will be done in the school, and these were also called as a project. However, these are normal routines. When everything is called a project, projects have become worthless like this, and they have turned into garbage. Projects were also emptied, that is, even in normal works, they started to be named as this project or that project (P4).

When evaluated in general, it is seen that teachers attribute negative meanings to projects within the education system. Almost all of the interviewed participants do not consider the projects to be sufficient in terms of quality, however they draw attention to the fact that many projects continue to be produced in schools. Teachers associated this fact with the effort of schools to use the projects as a tool to come to the fore.

3.2. The Reasons for Teachers to Involve in Projects

This theme includes the opinions of the participants with regard to why teachers take part in projects carried out in schools. The reasons for teachers' involvement in the projects are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. *The Reasons for Teachers to Involve in Projects*

The Reasons to Involve in Projects	Participant Codes
Pressure from the school principals	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10
Pressure from the central education system	P3, P4, P5, P8, P9, P10
To put forth a useful work	P1, P4, P8, P9, P10
To execute the task perfunctorily	P3, P5, P6, P7, P8,
To gain advantage	P1, P2, P4, P9

The participants stated that the teachers participated in the projects due to the pressure from the school principals and central education system, putting forth useful work, executing tasks perfunctorily, and gaining advantage. It is significant to note that all of the participants expressed that the teachers participated in the projects because of the pressure from the school principals. The opinions of certain participants with regard to view that school principals force teachers to develop projects are as follows:

Administrators and school principals, in particular, exert pressure. It exists in this school as well as in previous schools. It is done unwillingly because of the administration or just because someone wants it... Let alone the project schools, as they are named as the project the teacher comes by taking it into consideration, even in primary schools, secondary schools, and regular high schools, this pressure has started to occur against teachers (P4).

…and there is pressure, okay? Everyone is under pressure. And when the man writes to you, he doesn't say "Do you want to do a project?". He says that a certain number of projects will arise from Physics and Mathematics, and a certain number of projects will arise from Chemistry. He orders you, as you see. You have to do this. No one asks if the students really want this (P2).

It has been mentioned that there are central pressures regarding projects in addition to the pressure exerted by school principals. In this context, teachers stated that they were forced to participate in the projects due to the pressure of the district and provincial education directorates and the Ministry of

National Education on schools. Some of the participants' views with regard to pressures from the central education system are as follows:

> Currently, there is pressure from the National Education on schools in terms of projects. We are the project school you know…. National Education puts a lot of pressure on TEKNOFEST. So, they urge you to apply (P9).

> Almost all projects come with imposition. I mean, you know, someone in a higher authority is producing a project… It was the same when I was writing projects in the district, so you write in the district, you plan the project, you plan the activities, and you say that this will be implemented in all primary schools... It comes from the higher-ups (P3).

> The district directorate says that you are a project school, and you will participate. The school principal is coming, he says we will join, and they said so. Thanks to this obligation, this work is carried out (P5).

Aside from pressures, some participants stated that teachers choose to participate in projects in order to put forth useful work. In this context, some teachers can carry out projects to improve themselves in their profession and to be beneficial to students. Some of the participants who think that one of the reasons for teachers to participate in the projects is to put forth useful work have the following views:

> Maybe there are those who say that I should do something sincerely and diligently… We have friends who are curious about science, curious about their own field, trying to do something, well-intentioned and diligently working… As I said, there are those who say that I should sincerely improve myself and have a say in my field (P1).

> Now, what I see is a group that really wants that. There is an idealistic group. They think it is really useful (P4).

Some participants stated that the projects were done in order to execute the task perfunctorily, since the teachers did not have any expectations from the projects and did not participate voluntarily. Therefore, these participants are of the opinion that the teachers do the projects to fulfill their duty and remove their duty from their responsibilities. The opinions of certain participants with regard to the view that the teachers participate in the projects in order to execute the task perfunctorily are as follows:

> Look at the projects currently being done at this school. How are they performed? Discharge the work and get rid of it... Now, if teachers like us are given this, we will not expect anything because if I don't have an interest, I don't expect anything. I expect to finish the job and get rid of it (P5).

> Teachers do things just to say they have done them… The current environment, that is, most of the friends I see around do not want to do it… Teachers think of how we can do it in the simplest way (P8).

> Many things were meant to be completed… Then, you get into this system you criticize and you start pretending. That is to say, the system somehow takes you inside its functioning. Oh, you're saying, I'm doing it, it doesn't work, and moreover you get a lot of criticism. In fact, there's no return for it. Then, you don't take it seriously (P3).

Finally, relatively few participants stated that some teachers decided to participate in projects to gain advantages. In this context, they stated that teachers do projects with the thoughts of staying at the project school and contributing to careers. Some of the participants who claimed that teachers were involved in the projects in order to gain an advantage assert the following views:

Another reason why they're involved is that it may help them in the future… He accepts the pressure beforehand as project schools offer attractive opportunities to people. It offers quality education, offers good students. It offers good opportunities and grants. So, the teacher takes these into account and does the project even if he is reluctant, even if he does not want to... I think that teachers are doing it to say in the future that "I have done a project" or to have an impact on their careers (P4).

And you can't say you won't. In a way, you say, if we are a project school, this will be done, then let's do it. Our subject area also requires it. I prepare my projects regarding them as laboratory studies or something (K9).

At least you can stay as a teacher in the project school for 4 years (P2).

When the opinions of the participants under this theme are evaluated in general, it is revealed that the projects produced in schools are not based on volunteerism but are carried out mostly due to coercion. In this context, the participants pointed out that the pressures from school principals or central authorities were the most important reasons for teachers' participation in projects.

3.3. The Effects of the Projects on the Teachers

The views of the participants regarding the effects of the projects carried out in schools on teachers are included under this theme. These effects are categorized into two groups as positive and negative. The effects of the projects on teachers are given in Table 4.

Table 4. *The Effects of the Projects on the Teachers*

Effects on Teachers		Participant Codes
Positive Effects	Job satisfaction	P5, P6, P9
	Personal development	P8, P9
	Collaboration with colleagues	P7
Negative Effects	Burnout	P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10
	Waste of time	P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P8
	Inefficiency	P1, P3, P5, P8
	Not contributing to professional development	P2, P4, P5, P10

Participants are of the opinion that the projects carried out in schools have positive effects on teachers such as increasing job satisfaction, providing personal development opportunities, and enabling collaboration with colleagues. The opinions of some participants with regard to the positive effects of projects on teachers are as follows:

Just as there is a debate club, there can also be a project club, and as he enjoys doing it, he may want to join that group voluntarily. Its return may be that he becomes satisfied when he puts something forward (P5).

For example, while doing a TÜBİTAK project, together with the child you can research a subject and learn different things about it as well. There may be different results here. Its contribution to the teacher may be in the form of satisfying his own curiosity individually (P8).

We have a project team of three people. We are working together. Here we act together in administrative and technical matters. They have very serious advantages (P7).

Despite the positive effects of the projects on the teachers, many participants also pointed out the negative effects of the projects on the teachers. In this context, the participants stated that the projects had negative effects such as burnout, waste of time, inefficiency and not contributing to professional development. The opinions of some participants regarding the negative effects of the projects on teachers are as follows:

People are very nervous because of these projects. I mean, as somebody asks why you did it; why didn't you do it, why you weren't on the list, teachers are already very nervous. Teachers are now fed up, they withdraw... Now there is a state of burnout, "No matter what I do I can't". They have to deal with lots of projects, and when it comes to their main job, a feeling of fatigue and burnout occurs… So maybe you can't teach classes as well as before (P3).

Unnecessary waste of time. Now he will either allocate time from the lesson to the project, or he will allocate time from his personal schedule if the lesson is over... So, you are taking the teacher's time as it is not something done voluntarily (P5).

I think that the current projects are a bit of inefficient work… I think doing the same thing over and over again causes a waste of time, boredom, and decreased motivation for the teacher (P8).

Just because it is done with the understanding of fulfilling the task and because teachers don't believe it much, it doesn't produce very good things. That's why I don't think that the projects, in today's sense, develop teachers that much (P10).

As can be seen, the participants stated that the projects conducted in schools can have positive and negative effects on teachers. However, it should be emphasized that many participants held the opinion that the projects had more negative than positive effects on teachers. In addition, the projects also have some effects on students.

3.4. The Effects of the Projects on the Students

The opinions of the participants regarding the effects of the projects carried out in schools on students are included under this theme. These effects are categorized into two groups as positive and negative. The effects of the projects on students are given in Table 5.

Table 5. *The Effects of the Projects on the Students*

Effects on Students		Participant Codes
Positive Effects	Socialization	P2, P4, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10
	Motivation	P2, P3, P7, P9, P10
	Self-confidence	P4, P7, P8, P10
	Teamwork	P7, P10
Negative Effects	Not supporting academic success	P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P9, P10
	Disruption of lessons	P1, P2, P3, P6, P7, P8, P9
	Boredom	P3, P4, P5, P6
	Incorrect learning of science	P1, P4

Participants stated that the projects carried out in schools have positive effects on students such as socialization, motivation, self-confidence, and teamwork. While the participants expressed the positive effects of the projects, they drew attention to the fact that only projects that were compatible with the aims of education and met the necessary qualifications had these effects. The opinions of some participants regarding the positive effects of the projects on students are as follows:

So, you are trying to choose the best students so that instead of resting for an hour and two, they come here and communicate with each other. We do not want him to deal with this project. We want him to do his job by socializing (P2).

The fact that our students prepare a presentation among foreign students and present it to us makes a great contribution… That's why these projects really have great contributions in terms of motivation (P7).

For example, we conducted TÜBİTAK 4006 project, in the simplest form. Even the children's presentation and telling of it had an impact on their self-confidence. So, the children said that "we are able to do that". In fact, it was simple stuff, but to explain it and be appreciated is effective on children, I think (P8).

They gather information, there are interviews sometimes, they enter social environments, and they talk. They bring together what they collect and make a synthesis and create a product. There can be a fusion in the name of teamwork spirit. Maybe there is such a benefit (P10).

Despite the positive effects of the projects on the students, some participants also expressed their opinions about the negative effects of the projects on the students. The participants stated that the projects carried out in schools have negative effects on students such as not supporting academic success, disruption of classes, boredom, and incorrect learning of science. Some of the participants' views regarding the negative effects of the projects on students are as follows:

The questions in the university exam are not in parallel with the projects here. Now, it has such a negative effect. Unfortunately, students who are too immersed in these works do not get the grades they want when they take the university entrance exam (P10).

For example, my students had to skip their classes while they were going to their project work. Because how will they go? Either this kid will miss his course, or he will miss his lesson. In other

words, children try to get away from education and the curriculum in a way to carry out projects (P9).

I have a project idea in mind. But I can't find motivated students. Students are also coming in with new frustration. They come with project frustration, that is, with project fatigue. This is because they are asked to make projects, projects, and projects in those schools from a young age (P4).

…he thinks that this is the right thing, he thinks that the simple thing he does is scientific work… It is not science, it is a futile distraction, and it is a loss in fact (P1).

As can be seen, the participants stated that the projects performed in schools can have positive and negative effects on students. In general, although projects have positive effects on students in terms of social aspects, they have negative effects in terms of academic aspects.

4. RESULT and DISCUSSION

This research aims to identify the views and reflections of teachers working in project schools on the meaning and impact of the projects carried out in schools. In line with the purpose of the research, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 teachers working in project schools. The data obtained were analyzed through descriptive analysis within the framework of the sub-objectives of the research. The following themes were developed within this context: The underlying meanings of projects, the reasons for teachers to be involved in the projects, the effects of the projects on the teachers, and the effects of the projects on the students.

The first sub-objective of the research reveals the place of the projects developed in schools in the education system through the underlying meanings of projects. According to the results, it was concluded that the projects were not sufficient in terms of quality, they were made only for display and a large number of projects were produced. As can be seen, the neoliberal approach regarding emptying of concepts by giving them posh names (Standing, 2019) is implemented through projects in schools. Project numbers are regarded as an element of competition and schools are pushed into a race for "success" and visibility in this way. Indeed, competition is one of the main strategies used by neoliberalism (Brown, 2018; Lazzarato, 2014). A structure created within inequalities increases competition and competition reproduces inequalities (Çolak, 2021). The reflection of this in education is the emergence of a culture of competition among schools in every field. In addition to the competition between schools that is currently created by the central exams based on rankings (Buyruk, 2013), there is also intense pressure on schools to be visible by producing a large number of projects in every field. This situation fosters a culture of project fetishism (Bayraktar, 2017) to settle in schools. Within the project fetishism, schools are transformed into educational institutions that produce many visibility-oriented projects and compete with each other through projects.

The focus on competition in education leads to the commodification of education and knowledge (Vatansever & Yalçın, 2016). Commodification in education means that educational institutions act within the logic of profit and business. A typical example of this situation is the charter school practice in the United States (USA). Charter schools are based on the competitive and efficiency strategy of the private sector. These schools can use a number of marketing and eye-washing methods to show themselves as successful (Şimşek, 2018). In addition, the commodification of education may force schools to become entrepreneurs. This situation may cause the commercialization of schools (Aksoy, 2005). For example, public schools that cannot receive regular and sufficient funds from the central

budget can focus on projects due to the income they can generate (Kılıç & Tunç, 2022). With this idea, it could be argued that the projects produced in large numbers in schools but not sufficient in terms of quality indirectly increase the commodification in education. Also, fast, careless and unsupervised studies that attach importance to numbers can also result in the normalization of practices contrary to scientific ethics. This situation brings about a postmodern understanding such as "anything goes" that constitutes the ideology of neoliberalism. For example, as one participant stated, projects that should be conducted by students are done by teachers, or the increase in plagiarism in projects and having projects done by institutions outside the school can be shown among these improper practices. Institutional audits of projects such as TÜBİTAK and Erasmus and their expert referee process can prevent the negative effects that may arise in this sense. However, it is necessary to show this care in other studies such as school-wide or local projects. In fact, in order for the perception towards science and projects not to change, while the projects are being carried out, care should be taken to comply with ethical rules and follow the steps of the scientific research process, beyond just making an application.

The second sub-objective of the research is the reasons why teachers are involved in projects. In the research, it was concluded that the teachers were forced to participate in the projects, often without doing so voluntarily. This result can be clarified by the job insecurity created by neoliberal policies (Çolak, 2021) and its reflections on the project schools. Teachers are appointed to the project schools for a limited period of time and this may lead them to experience implicit job insecurity which refers to anxiety about the threat of losing valued job features (Çolak et al., 2021). Teachers who believe they could be reassigned to non-project schools for any reason may feel compelled to take on additional responsibilities and participate in the projects. In addition, the pressure and coercion that teachers perceive from school principals or central authorities can be explained by the precarization of labor. According to Vatansever (2013), precarization is the intimidation of employees to the extent that they accept being deprived of their rights, being deskilled, and being exploited due to the fears they feel under competitive conditions. Therefore, teachers' unwilling participation in projects could imply that they face precarization because of the insecurity or uncertainty they feel. In addition, the fact that all of the teachers participating in the current research were selected from project schools may be the reason why teachers feel more pressure about projects. In the literature, there are studies that overlap with this finding of the research. Similarly, Çolak et al. (2021), in their research conducted with project school teachers, concluded that the risks and uncertainties experienced by teachers in project schools weakened teachers and made them vulnerable to precarization. In his research, Yorulmaz (2021) concluded that the insecurity created by the project school practice weakened the teachers. In addition, the research carried out by Çolak and Altınkurt (2022) uncovered that teachers are exposed to pressure and coercion by administrators due to their explicit or implicit job insecurity.

In order to better understand the precarization experienced by teachers in project schools, the emergence of these schools and their appointment processes should be examined. In Turkey, with the project school regulation (MoNE, 2016) published in 2016, some schools that stand out with their features such as success and equipment have started to be included in the scope of project school. Thus, the exam requirement, which was previously mandatory for teachers to work in these schools, was abolished. Previous research in the field has found that the criteria for the appointments and assignments of teachers to these schools are not well-defined (Aslan, 2018) and do not value merit (Çolak et al., 2021; Yorulmaz, 2021). This situation does not align with the aims these schools are trying to achieve in terms of projects. This is because, in order for teachers in these schools to put forward qualified projects or scientific studies, merit must be the basic criterion in appointments. The lack of competence in

researching and advising students on projects at a sufficient level can also harm the viewpoint toward science.

Teachers' involvement in projects (even if they do not want to) can be attributed to the transformation in the teaching profession brought about by neoliberal policies. With the neoliberal policies implemented in education since the 1980s, the autonomy and status of teachers have been undermined. Due to the increasing centralized exams, teachers have begun to be seen as mechanical transmitters of exam knowledge and their performances have been assessed based on the number of exam questions their students solved correctly. Therefore, the idealistic Republic teacher has been replaced by the exam-oriented technician teacher (Ünal, 2005; Yıldız, 2014). However, it is evident that under neoliberal policies competition is not limited to exams anymore. Projects (especially the number of them) have become a new competitive arena for schools and teachers. Kılıç and Tunç (2022) conducted a study on the transformation in the teaching profession caused by neoliberal policies in Turkey and came to the conclusion that teachers are now required to create projects. In the present study, teachers also drew attention to the demands of the administrators and even their forcing them to carry out projects. Therefore, with regard to the transformation in the image of the teacher, it is seen that new neoliberal responsibilities are being imposed on teachers. In addition to being technicians who prepare students for the exam, teachers are now expected to produce a large number of projects.

The third sub-objective of the research is the effects of the projects on teachers. The effects of the projects on teachers were examined under two headings as positive and negative effects. Though limited, the results of the research show that the projects have positive effects on teachers namely enhancing job satisfaction, personal development, and collaboration with colleagues. Studies found in the literature have indicated certain projects can yield positive effects for teachers (Çetinkaya & Ayartepe, 2020; Demirer & Dak, 2019; Erdem, Başar, Toktay, Yayğaz, & Küçüksüleymanoğlu, 2021). However, in this study, it was determined that the negative effects of the projects outweighed the positive effects on teachers. In terms of negative effects, projects can prevent teachers from concentrating on their lessons, especially by causing a waste of time. In addition, the workload of a growing number of projects and the pressure of administrators can lead to burnout among teachers. According to research in the field, teachers' workload has been found to have a significant effect on burnout. In their research involving 92 teachers, El Helou, Nabhani, and Bahous (2016) found that excessive workload is one of the most important causes of burnout. In addition, Van Droogenbroeck, Spruyt, and Vanroelen (2014) revealed that teachers' nonteaching-related workloads have a greater impact on emotional burnout than the workloads that arise from the actual teaching duties. Thus, it can be concluded that the projects will raise the workload and burnout levels of teachers, leading to a decline in their job performance.

The fourth sub-objective of the research is the effects of the projects on students. Similarly, the effects of the projects on students are discussed under two headings as positive and negative effects. According to the results of the research, the projects have positive effects on students namely socialization, motivation, self-confidence, and teamwork which are primarily social in nature. Research in the field has shown that projects implemented at different levels of the education system improve students' communication and social skills (Arıkan & Kimzan, 2016), increase cooperation (Bozdağ, 2017) and motivation (Gündüz Çetin & Gündoğdu, 2022). However, very few studies evaluate such projects in terms of their negative aspects (Akdemir, 2017; Benzer & Evrensel, 2019). The participants in the current study emphasized that projects had a greater negative effect than positive effect on students. It is worth mentioning that the negative effects are mainly seen in lessons and academic achievement. According to studies in the literature, the most important and structural problem of the Turkish Education

system is the central exams (TEDMEM, 2023; Yılmaz & Altınkurt, 2011). The fact that the projects can disrupt the lessons, do not support academic success in terms of their content, and take time can negatively affect the academic achievements of the students and even their success in the central exams. In addition, many participants in the research pointed out that the projects were made for display and for this purpose, many photographs were taken and published during the projects. This situation is considered to have the potential to create ethical problems for students. Education Reform Initiative (ERG) researcher Salman (2022), in her article titled "Teachers, Social Media and Children's Rights", reveals the possible consequences of sharing videos and photos of children on social media. Due to these shares, the way students speak, their clothes and their behaviors become consumable material, and students' digital identities are formed against their will. In addition, some posts may result in behavioral problems such as bullying and may harm students' self-perceptions through the number of likes. Therefore, visuals shared in the course of creating, conducting and disseminating the projects by disregarding ethical rules and with the intention of highlighting the visibility may lead to the exploitation of the students and trigger unfavorable behaviors and actions from them.

As a result, nurturing students' scientific curiosity and directing them to scientific research is one of the important goals of education. In fact, Aristotle's (2018) metaphysics book begins with "Man naturally wants to know". In other words, knowing and researching is a natural feature of human beings. In order to achieve this, the scientific research competencies of the students and especially of the teachers who guide them in research, are considered to be important. Moreover, the purpose of science is not to produce pretend projects to be visible or to increase quantity. Projects only performed in compliance with their true essence or nature can be a way for students to meet science and put forward a scientific research design. In this context, projects should be regarded as studies in which students will develop their curiosity, creativity, and research skills by using the steps of scientific research.

5. LIMITATIONS and SUGGESTIONS

A potential limitation of the study is that only teachers working in project schools in upper-secondary education were included in the study group. Since project schools are given the responsibility of producing projects by regulation, many projects are carried out in these schools. Therefore, in order to collect rich and in-depth data on the projects, interviews were held with the teachers at the project schools. Nevertheless, some participants in the study noted that the meaning and reflection of the project concept align with that of other school types. Therefore, further research can be conducted with teachers working at non-project schools. In addition, scales that examine teachers' views on projects can be developed to reveal teachers' perceptions of projects in various dimensions.

The results of the research indicate that the projects carried out in schools are produced in large numbers lacking adequate quality and are only primarily intended for showcasing. Additionally, they do not appear to be based on voluntary participation and match the realities of the education system. Considering the results of the research, it is possible to make some suggestions for practitioners. In this context, instead of being considered as an area of competition and as the main determinant of organizational performance, projects should be based on a scientific basis and executed within the framework of ethical principles. In addition, they should consider the realities of the education system and focus on quality rather than quantity. In terms of teachers, projects should be carried out on a voluntary basis, and teachers who are willing to conduct projects in line with the needs of the school and students should be given the necessary support (such as budget, time, and place) and autonomy. Furthermore, teachers should be given the necessary opportunities to develop their scientific research

competencies in project execution and counseling students. In this context, a master's degree or doctoral education requirement may be introduced in the selection of teachers for schools that will implement scientific-based studies. From the students' point of view, the projects ought to be organized in a way that does not interfere with the lessons and be designed to benefit to the students without exploiting them through shared visuals. Finally, the education system should not be based on neoliberal concepts such as "project" and "project school", which are presented under an alluring illusion and have diverged from their real meanings. Instead, it is crucial to establish an education system based on policies that provide justice and a quality education for all members of society. Such a system should also support the holistic development of students in order to increase success.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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