

Evaluation of the Current Education System in TRNC According to the Opinions of School Managers at Secondary Education Stage

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to examine the structure of the current secondary education system in Northern Cyprus and identify the views of school administrators (principals and vice-principals) regarding teacher motivation. The research employed a case study design, one of the qualitative research approaches. The study group consisted of 40 school administrators working at the secondary education level under the Ministry of National Education in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). As a qualitative data collection tool, a semi-structured interview form was used, which was developed to include a preliminary information section and seven open-ended interview questions. For data analysis, descriptive analysis and content analysis techniques were applied.

The research findings show that the education system in the TRNC has not entirely adapted to modern requirements, particularly in areas such as physical infrastructure, updated curricula, teacher competencies, and motivation. Although some school-based practices have been introduced to improve teacher motivation, there is still a need for more comprehensive and sustainable policies at the systemic level.

The study recommends revising curricula and instructional programs to align with the requirements of the 21st century. It also suggests restructuring educational policies and prioritizing practices aimed at enhancing teacher motivation. Additionally, the study emphasizes the need to strengthen the existing physical and technological infrastructure of schools.

Keywords: Northern Cyprus, School Administrator, Inspector, Education System

INTRODUCTION

In the current century, education is a dynamic process designed to help individuals acquire knowledge, skills, and values, which in turn foster their adaptation to society and promote personal development. A widely accepted definition of education is that it is the process of intentionally prompting positive changes in an individual's behavior through personal experiences (Fidan, 1986).

In developing countries like the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, education is considered the cornerstone of social development. An education system is a cohesive framework in which educational activities within a society are organized according to specific principles and objectives, allowing educational institutions to work together effectively. This system encompasses a set of policies, programs, and practices designed to foster students' academic, vocational, and personal development. Education systems can differ significantly from one country to another and are typically shaped by legal regulations, curricula, and teaching methods (Turan, 2019). Moreover, the educational process should be seen as a crucial mechanism that enables individuals to adapt to society and promotes their development. However, the successful continuation of education is closely linked not just to the quality of educational processes, but also to how these processes are managed. In this context, educational processes should be grounded in strategic thinking and effective decision-making. As noted by Çelebi (2023), strategic thinking involves effective communication, quick decision-making, and strong problem-solving skills.

In the current century, education systems are continuously evolving to adapt to technological, economic, and social changes. The main goal of this transformation is to create a framework that supports individual development

and equips learners with skills that meet the demands of the modern world. A study by Öznacar and Dericioğlu (2017) highlighted the challenges faced by school administrators in public schools in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) regarding their physical and technological infrastructure. It was observed that the education system in Northern Cyprus does not fully meet contemporary standards, and many schools lack the technological equipment and infrastructure necessary for today's educational needs (Dericioğlu & Öznacar, 2020). To address these issues, it has been recommended that the Ministry of National Education collaborate with secondary-level schools in the TRNC to improve the quality of education (Dericioğlu, Öznacar & Köprülü, 2022).

Evaluations conducted by school administrators regarding the current secondary education system typically focus on several key themes: the feasibility of educational policies, the effectiveness of curricula, the competencies of teachers, and the levels of student achievement. Domestic studies indicate that school administrators often express dissatisfaction with centralized control in education (Kara, 2020). In contrast, some international studies have shown that educational policies that adopt decentralized governance tend to yield more successful outcomes (Harris & Jones, 2019).

Teacher motivation is a crucial factor that directly impacts the effectiveness of the educational system. School administrators emphasize that both material and moral incentives play a vital role in enhancing motivation (Yılmaz & Kamile, 2021). In particular, elements such as workload, opportunities for professional development, and internal support mechanisms are key in shaping motivation. International studies indicate that opportunities for professional development significantly contribute to improving teacher motivation (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Research conducted in Turkey indicates that the majority of administrators perceive teacher motivation as generally low (Öztürk, 2023).

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the current education system in secondary schools within the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) from the perspective of school administrators. This evaluation aims to identify factors that influence the motivation levels of both teachers and administrators, ultimately contributing to the development of educational policies. The main research question guiding this study is: "What are the views of school administrators regarding the current education system in the TRNC?" In line with this main research question, the sub-objectives of the study are as follows:

1. What are school administrators' evaluations of the physical infrastructure and technological equipment in public schools in Northern Cyprus?
2. How do school administrators assess the structural and operational aspects of the current education system in Northern Cyprus?
3. What are school administrators' views on the feasibility of transitioning to a full-day education model in Northern Cyprus?
4. Considering the requirements of the 21st century, what do school administrators think about the content of the current curriculum implemented in Northern Cyprus?
5. What internal and external factors affect the motivation of teachers working in secondary schools under the Ministry of National Education in Northern Cyprus, and what solutions do school administrators propose for these factors?
6. How do school administrators in secondary schools under the Ministry of National Education in Northern Cyprus perceive the administrative, bureaucratic, and professional conditions that influence their own motivation?
7. What evaluations do school administrators have regarding the impact of issues in the current education system of secondary schools under the Ministry of National Education in Northern Cyprus on the motivation of both teachers and administrators?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In this study, a qualitative research approach was utilized. Qualitative research is a method in the social sciences that aims to examine human behavior, experiences, and the meanings individuals assign to them in depth. This approach explores how people perceive and interpret the world (Creswell, 2013). Unlike quantitative research, which emphasizes numerical data, qualitative research focuses on verbal information and is primarily exploratory in nature (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative studies are typically conducted in participants' natural settings, allowing for the collection of data within real-life contexts (Patton, 2002).

Study Group and Sampling

In qualitative research methods, the study group consists of individuals whom the researcher interviews or observes. This group is chosen based on the research questions and objectives. It is crucial to select the study

group carefully and to build trustworthy relationships between the researcher and the participants, as the study group is considered a vital component of qualitative research (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021).

The study group for this research included school administrators, specifically principals and vice-principals, from public secondary schools affiliated with the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) of the TRNC. These schools are located in the districts of Nicosia, Famagusta, Kyrenia, Güzelyurt, and İskele during the spring semester of the 2024–2025 academic year. For this study, the snowball sampling method, a type of purposive sampling technique, was employed. Snowball sampling is beneficial in qualitative research for exploring groups that are difficult to access or relatively hidden. In this method, a few initial participants recommend other individuals who share similar characteristics, allowing the participant pool to grow progressively, similar to a rolling snowball (Noy, 2008).

Data Collection Tool

In this study, a qualitative data collection tool was utilized, consisting of semi-structured interview questions. The researcher developed the interview form based on a review of relevant literature and expert opinions, which included a total of seven questions. This form aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the perspectives of school administrators—specifically, principals and vice-principals—regarding the current education system in secondary schools in Northern Cyprus. The questions were designed in an open-ended format, allowing participants to express their experiences freely and openly.

The purpose of using structured interview forms in qualitative studies is to enable participants to share their experiences and perceptions without being limited by predetermined constraints. This approach facilitates the collection of more authentic information (Merriam, 2013). The semi-structured interview form used in this study was developed in consultation with experts and subsequently tested in a pilot study. Based on the feedback received during the pilot study, the form was revised, which improved the effectiveness of the data collection process (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021).

Data Collection Process

The required permissions were obtained from the TRNC Ministry of National Education, specifically from the Primary Education Department (see Appendix 1). An application was also submitted to the Ethics Committee of the Institute of Social Sciences at Mediterranean Karpaz University, including all necessary documents. The study group consisted of school administrators, such as principals and vice-principals, working in secondary education institutions under the Ministry of National Education across the districts of Nicosia, Famagusta, Güzelyurt, Kyrenia, and İskele in the TRNC. The selected schools were visited, and interviews were conducted. During these interviews, the semi-structured interview form created by the researcher for school administrators was utilized.

The research process began after receiving ethical approval from the Ethics Committee of the Institute of Social Sciences at Mediterranean Karpaz University. The interviews took place in March of the 2024–2025 spring semester, following the required permissions from the Ministry of National Education. They were conducted at times and locations that were convenient for the participants.

Data Analysis

In this study, we utilized descriptive analysis and content analysis techniques as qualitative data analysis methods. Data analysis is a crucial stage in the research process, as it provides in-depth answers to research questions, helps interpret the collected data, and offers contextual insights (Creswell, 2013). The analysis of qualitative data is typically conducted through a descriptive and interpretive approach, requiring the researcher to actively engage at every stage of the process (Merriam, 2009).

Qualitative data analysis is inherently exploratory and interpretive in nature. This means that researchers interpret the collected data not based on predetermined hypotheses, but instead according to the dynamic nature of the research process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). As a result, qualitative analysis is more flexible and adaptable. Descriptive analysis, in particular, allows for the systematic presentation of data collected under predetermined categories, such as participants' demographic information. In this approach, data are organized into specific themes and sub-themes, supported by direct quotations. For instance, variables like participants' roles (teacher, vice-principal, inspector, etc.), levels of education (undergraduate, graduate), and years of service—which can be expressed statistically—were analyzed within the framework of descriptive analysis (Karahan et al., 2022).

In this study, we employed inductive analysis, which is a standard method in content analysis. Inductive analysis involves uncovering fundamental concepts and their relationships through the coding of qualitative data. This process organizes the complex data collected during qualitative research, making it meaningful through

abstraction and interpretation. By utilizing exploratory and creative thinking skills, this approach allows researchers to reveal hidden connections and themes within the data (Kıncal et al., 2015).

Validity and Reliability

In this study, several strategies were used to ensure the validity and reliability of the qualitative data collection and analysis processes. Validity and reliability are essential parts of qualitative research because they support the scientific quality of the study and the trustworthiness of its results (Creswell, 2013). Since qualitative research depends on subjective data, it is important to collect, analyze, and interpret this data accurately and consistently (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Validity pertains to the extent to which a study achieves accurate results aligned with its purpose (Merriam, 2009). In qualitative research, validity indicates how well the collected data effectively address the research questions. Internal validity in qualitative research involves assessing whether the data collected and the interpretations made by the researcher truly reflect reality.

Reliability relates to the consistency and reproducibility of the collected data (Patton, 2018). In qualitative research, reliability concerns the accuracy of the data and the likelihood of obtaining similar results under the same conditions. It is also an important criterion for the scientific rigor of the research and the consistency of its findings. Reliability can be achieved through strategies such as coding consistency, clarity of the researcher's role, audit trails, and member checking.

Findings

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Gender	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Female	22	55
Male	18	45
Total	40	100

Distribution of Participants by Position

Position	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Principal	16	40
Vice-Principal	24	60
Total	40	100

Distribution of Participants by Years of Service

Years of Service	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
12–19 Years	10	25
20–24 Years	20	50
25 Years and above	10	25
Total	40	100

Total Years of Experience in Administration

Duration	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
0–4 Years	12	30
5–9 Years	20	50

Duration	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
10 Years and above	8	20
Total	40	100

According to the demographic information shown in Table 1, 55% of the participants were female and 45% were male. Additionally, 60% of the participants served as vice-principals, while 40% held the position of principal. Regarding years of service and teaching experience, 50% of the participants had 20–24 years, 25% had 12–19 years, and another 25% had 25 years or more of professional experience. In terms of administrative experience, half of the participants (50%) had served as administrators for 5–9 years, 30% for 0–4 years, and 20% for 10 years or more. Data were collected from a total of 40 educational administrators representing 15 different schools. Since the number of participants from each school was relatively balanced, comparisons across institutions were possible; moreover, including general high schools, vocational high schools, and secondary schools allowed for the assessment of administrative practices across various types of educational institutions.

Table 2: Evaluation of Educational Administrators Regarding the Physical and Technological Infrastructure of Schools

Themes	N	%
Insufficient physical and technological infrastructure	37	92.5
Adequate physical and technological infrastructure	3	7.5
Educational policies implemented in our country are not compatible with the requirements of the 21st century	40	100.0
Total	40	100.0

As shown in Table 2, according to the views of the educational administrators who participated in the study, the physical and technological infrastructure of schools does not meet the requirements of the 21st century. Additionally, the disconnect between educational policies and current needs is seen as a fundamental systemic issue. This reveals that administrators have a highly critical outlook on the current education system. A total of 92.5% of the participants (37 administrators) reported that the physical and technological infrastructure in their schools was inadequate. This finding indicates that learning environments in schools do not fulfill the demands of modern educational methods. The lack of technological equipment, which is crucial for promoting equality of opportunity in education and supporting student-centered teaching, was identified by school administrators as a serious problem.

Table 3: Evaluation of Educational Administrators Regarding the Structure of the Current Education System

Themes	N	%
Structural characteristics of the education system	40	100.0
Administrative flexibility and autonomy	6	15.0
Applicability and richness of curriculum content	30	75.0
Teacher training and development programs	4	10.0
Effectiveness of the student-centered approach	8	20.0
Assessment and evaluation methods	37	92.5

As shown in Table 3, all participants (100%) shared their opinions about the structural features of the education system, indicating a strong awareness of its overall function and organization. The most emphasized theme was the relevance and richness of the curriculum content, with 75% of participants stressing its vital role in the system's operation. This suggests that educational administrators critically examine issues like the curriculum's currency, its relevance to real-world situations, and how well teachers can apply it. The second most emphasized theme was assessment and evaluation methods (92.5%), highlighting notable criticisms of examination systems, student

performance assessments, and the adequacy of evaluation tools. Conversely, themes such as administrative flexibility and autonomy, as well as teacher training and development programs, received comparatively less focus. However, this does not mean these areas are less important; instead, it indicates that administrators see structural challenges within the system and curriculum-related issues as more urgent.

Table 4: Evaluation of Educational Administrators Regarding the Full-Day Education Model in Secondary Education

Themes	N	%
Applicability of the full-day education model	40	100.0
Adequacy of school infrastructure	40	100.0
Contribution to the quality of education and instruction	40	100.0
Consideration of student and parent opinions	2	5.0
Need for financial and logistical support	4	10.0
Impact of extended education time on academic achievement	35	87.5
Total	40	100.0

As shown in Table 4, all participants (100%) expressed views regarding the applicability of full-day education, its contribution to the quality of teaching and learning, and the inadequacy of current infrastructure to support this model. This indicates that educational administrators possess both awareness and willingness toward the transformation of the system. Regarding the impact of extended instructional time on academic achievement, 87.5% of the participants (35 administrators) provided opinions, highlighting that administrators place significant importance on how increased time affects students' academic development. In contrast, only 5% of participants emphasized the consideration of student and parent perspectives. This suggests that participatory processes in the formulation of educational policies are limited, and the voices of families and students are not sufficiently taken into account in decision-making mechanisms.

Table 5: Evaluation of Educational Administrators Regarding the Motivation of Teachers Working in Secondary Education

Themes	N	%
Financial incentives and rewards	3	7.5
Professional development and in-service training	36	90.0
Improvement of the working environment	4	10.0
Psychological support and motivational activities	5	12.5
Participatory management and involvement in decision-making processes	20	50.0
Total	40	100.0

As shown in Table 5, the participants expressed their views on which supportive factors they considered most important for teachers' job satisfaction, motivation, and productivity, as well as the initiatives they undertook as school administrators to enhance teacher motivation. A total of 90% of the participants emphasized *professional development and in-service training* as the most effective factor in supporting teacher motivation. This finding indicates that administrators strongly recognize the contribution of improving teacher qualifications to the education system. The second most frequently highlighted theme was *participatory management and involvement in decision-making processes*, emphasized by 50% of participants. This reflects a growing understanding that teachers should not only be viewed as implementers of the curriculum within the classroom but also as active contributors to decision-making processes. Such a perspective demonstrates that a significant proportion of administrators have developed awareness of the importance of transitioning toward a democratic school culture.

Table 6: Evaluation of Educational Administrators Regarding the Effects of the Full-Day Education Model on Teacher Motivation in Secondary Education

Themes	N	%
Effect of the full-day education model on teacher motivation	40	100.0
Administrative support in enhancing motivation	5	12.5
Contribution of physical and infrastructural improvements to motivation	5	12.5
Impact of working hours in full-day education on motivation	40	100.0
Contribution of social and professional support to motivation	5	12.5
Prolonged instructional time and increased workload	17	42.5
Communication between administrators and teachers and its effect on motivation	6	15.0
Total	40	100.0

As shown in Table 6, participants regarded the impact of the full-day education model on teacher motivation as significant. The themes “Effect of the Full-Day Education Model on Teacher Motivation” and “Impact of Working Hours on Motivation” were the most prominent (n=40). This suggests that administrators believe full-day education has a direct influence on teachers. A total of 42.5% of participants highlighted that extended instructional hours and increased workload negatively impact teacher motivation. This finding indicates that implementing full-day education creates not only theoretical but also practical pressures regarding workload for teachers. Lengthening working hours may lead to both physical and emotional burnout, indicating that teachers’ physical and psychological limits are being pushed to the limit. It further suggests that continuous instruction may, at some point, reduce efficiency. Additionally, when teachers’ job satisfaction drops, their performance is likely to decline as well; therefore, sustainable motivation policies are crucial.

Table 7: Evaluation of Educational Administrators Regarding the Adequacy of the Current Curriculum, the Need for Transformation, and the Requirements of the Contemporary Era

Themes	N	%
Currency and relevance of the curriculum	40	100
Alignment with technology and digitalization	19	47.5
Presence of a skills-based approach	12	30
Inclusion of critical thinking and problem-solving skills	17	42.5
Flexibility of the curriculum and compatibility with localization	5	12.5
Incorporation of student-centered learning approaches	28	70
Challenges faced by teachers in implementing the curriculum	3	7.5
Total	40	100

As indicated in Table 7, all participants (100%) stressed the importance of evaluating the current curriculum to ensure its relevance and up-to-date content. This indicates that administrators recognize the crucial need to equip students with the knowledge, skills, and values required in today’s world. Additionally, 70% of administrators highlighted the need for student-centered learning approaches to be incorporated into the curriculum. This significant percentage reflects a growing belief among administrators that education should focus on active student engagement rather than passive learning.

Regarding the theme of alignment with technology and digitalization, 47.5% of participants shared their opinions, while 42.5% noted that the curriculum does not sufficiently develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills. This suggests that many curricula still rely on traditional knowledge transfer models, which may hinder students' development of higher-order thinking skills. Fostering these skills is essential for individuals to tackle the complex challenges of the 21st century effectively.

Discussion

The research findings show that school administrators in the TRNC have a strong awareness of the current education system and teaching methods. A consensus has formed that the core parts of the education system—such as the curriculum, teacher qualifications, school facilities, and educational policies—must be reevaluated to match the needs of today's era better.

All participants agreed that curricula need to be updated and aligned with digitalization. These views align with Trilling and Fadel's (2009) framework of 21st-century skills and the curriculum alignment studies of Voogt and Roblin (2012). It was highlighted that the curriculum should be designed not only with content richness but also with a clear emphasis on implementation flexibility, skills-based learning, and individualized instruction.

On the other hand, the findings about teacher motivation show that administrators mainly focused on professional development opportunities and participation in decision-making. At the same time, structural supports like physical conditions, reward systems, and social support mechanisms were mostly ignored. Herzberg's two-factor motivation theory (1959) is especially relevant here: just as motivators boost motivation, the lack of fundamental hygiene factors can harm employee productivity.

The findings on the full-day education model reveal gaps in systemic planning. Due to issues with infrastructure, meals, rest opportunities, social activities, and staffing, implementation has proven to be ineffective in practice. Additionally, teachers' motivation was observed to decrease because of the increased workload. These results support Fullan's (2016) warnings that ignoring practitioners in systemic reforms is likely to lead to failure.

Another notable finding of the study is the significant criticisms aimed at assessment and evaluation methods. Most participants stated that the current system emphasizes exam preparation more than measuring students' individual growth. This underscores the need to better incorporate Black and Wiliam's (1998) concept of assessment for learning (formative assessment) into the education system.

Most administrators pointed out the lack of sustainability in educational policies, their frequent changes, and the limited involvement of teachers and administrators in decision-making as key weaknesses of the system. This highlights once again the importance of governance in education (OECD, 2019).

Results and Conclusions

This study revealed that participants believe the current secondary education system in Northern Cyprus lacks adequate physical and technological infrastructure and equipment to meet the demands of the modern era. It also concluded that the current full-day education model is neither practical nor efficient when considering educational and social aspects. Additionally, the curricula in use are seen as falling short of meeting the needs and expectations of the contemporary age.

School administrators stated that the current education system fails to meet the needs of the modern era in both content and practice, thus requiring a comprehensive overhaul. A strong consensus was reached on the need to update the curriculum's relevance, flexibility, and skills-based focus. Student-centered approaches, critical thinking, and digital skills were identified as lacking. Although the full-day education model is supported in theory, its practical implementation has been hindered by deficiencies in physical infrastructure, social facilities, financial resources, and human resource planning.

It was revealed that supporting teacher motivation requires a comprehensive approach, not only through in-service training and participation in decision-making, but also by improving working conditions, offering psychosocial support, establishing reward systems, and improving communication quality. Additionally, assessment and evaluation methods should move away from an exam-centric focus toward a more process-oriented and developmental perspective. Administrators stressed that educational policies should be developed independently of political changes, aiming for long-term, sustainable, scientifically evidence-based solutions that address local needs.

Recommendations

Practical Recommendations for Implementation

- Development of the Education and Training Curriculum: It is recommended that the curriculum be redesigned with flexible structures that are responsive to local needs and aligned with the requirements of the digital age. The revised curriculum should be skill-oriented, promote critical and creative thinking, and foster competencies relevant to the 21st century.
- Replanning the Duration of Full-Day Education: Full-day education practices should be comprehensively planned in terms of physical infrastructure, staffing, social activity areas, and nutrition facilities. A phased transition model is recommended to ensure effective implementation.
- Developing New Policies to Enhance Teacher Motivation: In addition to in-service training, policies should focus on balancing workload, establishing reward systems, strengthening social support mechanisms, and clarifying professional career pathways to improve teacher motivation.
- Adopting a Participatory Governance Approach: Structures should be established to ensure the active participation of school administrators and teachers in decision-making processes, with an emphasis on school-based management.
- Renewing Assessment Systems: Rather than grade-oriented evaluation, systems should be developed that support students' individual development and rely on alternative assessment tools such as projects and portfolios.

Recommendations for Future Research

- Expanding Perspectives Beyond Administrators: Since this study's findings are based on the views of school administrators in the TRNC, it is advisable to conduct similar research from the viewpoints of teachers, students, and parents.
- Employing Mixed-Methods Research on Teacher Motivation: Mixed-methods studies exploring the relationship between teacher motivation and factors such as school climate, leadership style, and working conditions are recommended, as they may offer more comprehensive data.
- Conducting Comparative Cross-Country Research on Educational Policies: Comparative studies focused on the consistency, continuity, and applicability of educational policies are suggested. Such research could identify structural models that may serve as references for the TRNC education system.

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