



Evaluation of the Current School-Parent Association Policy in Two Public Primary Schools*¹²

Yürürlükteki Okul-Aile Birliği Politikasının İki Devlet İlköğretim Okulunda Değerlendirilmesi

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Öz. Bu çalışma, Okul-Aile Birliği Yönetmeliği işleyişinin paydaşlar tarafından nasıl algılandığını anlamaya yönelik temellendirilmiş bir durum çalışmasıdır. Analiz birimi olarak Ankara'nın bir ilçesindeki iki devlet okulundaki Okul-Aile Birlikleri seçilmiştir. Veriler, öğretmen, veli, okul yöneticileri ile yarı-yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yoluyla toplanmıştır. Tümevarım içerik analizi sonucunda dört ana tema ortaya çıkmaktadır. Bunlar; 1) okul profili; 2) hesap verilebilirlik; 3) okul aile birliklerinin görevleri 4) ve sorun ve önerilerdir. Araştırma bulguları, Okul-Aile Birliklerinin özellikle başta finansal girdilere dönük çalışmalarda bulunmakla beraber, program ve program dışı etkinliklerin niteliğini geliştirme çabaları açısından katkı sağlamaktadırlar. Uygulamada, paydaşların beklentileri ve Okul-Aile Birliği işleyişi arasında dikkati çeken farklar bulunmuştur. Sonuç olarak, Okul-Aile Birliği destek sistemlerinin okula özgü mikro politikalarla uygulanması önerilmektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Okul-aile birliği, eğitim politikası, ilkokul yönetimi, durum çalışması

Abstract. The purpose of this study was to explore how current School Parent Association (PTA) operates based on stakeholder perceptions through an embedded case study. Units of analysis were two public primary schools' PTA program in a district of Ankara. The data were obtained by semi-structured interviews with teachers, parents, the school administrators. Inductive content analysis yielded four main themes; 1) school profiles; 2) accountability; 3) functions of PTAs; and 4) issues and suggestions. Findings indicate that the PTA was effective in improving the quality of curricular and extra-curricular activities, especially, in the provision of financial inputs to operate those activities. Critical implementation gaps were present between the stakeholders' expectations and the current PTA operation. The study suggests the implementation of school-specific micro policies through PTA support systems.

Keywords: Parent-school association, educational policy, primary school administration, case study

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ÖZET

Araştırmanın Amacı ve Önemi

Okul-aile birliklerinin öğrenci ilgi ve motivasyonunu artırmasının yanında ailelerin okul yönetim süreçleri ile ilgili olarak eğitim programı ya da finansal konularda karar alma ve uygulama süreçlerine aktif katılımlarında rol oynadıkları görülmektedir. Ayrıca özellikle ulusal alanyazında okul-aile birliklerinin eğitim-öğretim üzerindeki sınırlı rolü dikkat çekmektedir. Finansal konuların, birliklerin gündeminde geniş bir yer tutması ailelerin okul-aile birliklerine karşı ilgisiz kalmalarına yol açmakta ve üyelerin temel sorumluluklarını yerine getirmelerine engel olmaktadır. Okul-Aile Birliği Yönetmeliği'nin 2012 yılında temel bir ihtiyaç analizi yapılmadan değiştirilmesi okul aile birliğinin işleyişini politika yapımcılar ve paydaşların ilgi ve ihtiyaçları arasındaki uyum açısından incelemeyi gerekli kılmaktadır. Dolayısıyla, okul-aile birliklerinin mevcut görev ve faaliyetlerini anlamaya yönelik kapsamlı çalışmalara ihtiyaç duyulmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, Ankara'da bulunan iki devlet ilkokulunda Okul-Aile Birliği Yönetmeliği'nin işleyişinin paydaşlar tarafından nasıl algılandığını değerlendirmektir.

Yöntem

Yerleştirilmiş çok katmanlı (embedded) bir durum çalışması olan bu araştırmanın analiz birimini Ankara'nın bir ilçesindeki iki devlet ilkokulundaki okul-aile birlikleri oluşturmaktadır. Ayrıca, okul-aile birliği politikasının okullarda nasıl işlediğini anlamak ve etkililiğini incelemek için mikro sistem analizi yaklaşımı tercih edilmiştir (Etheke & Mahoney, 2017). Katılımcılar amaçlı örnekleme yoluyla okul-aile birliği üyelerinden seçilmiştir. Öğretmen, veli, müdür ve müdür yardımcılar ile yapılan yarı-yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yoluyla veriler toplanmış ve okulların buldukları bağlam hakkında kapsamlı bilgi edinmek amacıyla saha notlarından yararlanılmıştır. Görüşmelerin analizinde tümevarım içerik analizi yöntemi kullanılmıştır.

Bulgular

Paydaşlarla yapılan yarı-yapılandırılmış görüşme notlarının analiz sonuçları incelendiğinde okul-aile birliklerinin mevcut işleyişi dört ana tema etrafında toplanmıştır. Bu temalar sırasıyla okul profili, hesap verilebilirlik, okul aile birliğinin görev ve sorunları ve nihayet önerilerdir. Bu bağlamda, paydaşların beklentileri ile okul-aile birliklerinin işleyişi arasında önemli farklı görüşler bulunmuştur. Ayrıca, velilerin, sosyoekonomik statü farklılıkları ve katılımcı okullardaki öğrenci sayısı azlığından dolayı okul-aile birliklerine finansal destek sağlamada yetersiz kalmaları, velilerin okul-aile birliği üyesi olmayı istememeleri ve okul-aile birliklerinin program dışı etkinliklerde bazı yetersizlikler yaşamaları vb. durumlar uygulamada göze çarpan eksikliklerdir.

Tartışma ve Sonuç

Okul-aile birlikleri genel anlamda okul ve aile arasında güçlü bir işbirliği oluşturulmasında kritik bir rol oynamaktadır. Bu kapsamda, okul-aile birliklerinin önemine yönelik farkındalığı artırmak, birliğin görev ve sorumlulukları üzerine veli ve diğer paydaşları bilgilendirmek için çeşitli seminer ya da konferansların düzenlenmesi gerektiği vurgulanmıştır. Çalışmadan elde edilen bulgular neticesinde özellikle dezavantajlı yoksul ilçelerdeki okulların finansal olarak desteklenmesine ihtiyaç duyulmakta ve okul-aile birliği destek sistemlerinde okula özgü mikro politikaların uygulanması önerilmektedir.

INTRODUCTION

Parent School Association (PTA) is an inevitably growing policy in the schooling process of children since the schools cannot be the sole systems to be accountable for the education of the children. Such a partnership is evidenced to have an impact on interest and achievement on students. Also, the partnership has a role beyond enhancing student interest or motivation. It includes parents' active engagement into the school's administrative processes up to its curricular or financial decision-making processes and actions. Although much has been written in the literature, there is rare literature that delves into this issue for the Turkish case. In the current study, we attempted to explore how the Parent School Association Policy operates in public schools through an embedded case-study design. In the proceeding section, we provide a theoretical framework for the school parent partnership and review the related literature.

The whole development of a child is based upon the relationship between the systems that children are engaged in is defined by Bronfenbrenner (1977) as the "Ecological Systems Theory." According to this theory, there are layers in the environment which are nested within each other and entitled as microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. Putting the microsystem to the center as the closest one to the child, families and the schools are the microsystems of children which are interconnected with each other and the bi-directional relationships among these microsystems constitute the basic components of the mesosystem. The exosystem, on the other hand, is the outer layer of the mesosystem that children do not have a direct relationship, but its elements might influence their microsystems. Finally, the macrosystem is the outermost layer with interaction with other systems. Having included the beliefs, values and the norms, macrosystem plays a critical role in the cultural, religious and socioeconomic structure of the society (Etheke & Mahoney, 2017).

In line with this theory, schooling processes do not occur in a vacuum; in other words, schools are in a close relationship with many other institutions in the society rather than functioning in isolation from the society. In fact, schools and various social institutions are closely interdependent within society. This interdependency refers to the open system approach in education, which includes input, process and output mechanisms and an ongoing relationship between immediate and secondary environments affected via feedback loops (Ballantine, 1989). Students, teachers, administrators, and parents who have specific roles and responsibilities within the social construct the inputs for this open system and are the key elements necessary for the maintenance of healthy processes within educational organizations. PTA is an appropriate form of an organization which enables the social interaction between the educational organizations and the immediate environment of the schools. This interaction provides opportunities to ensure a healthy feedback mechanism within the elements of the education system so that the school dynamics operate under the supervision of its beneficiaries.

There are salient examples of PTAs in both national and international contexts. Their functions vary from having a voice in academic issues to providing financial support to the schools. Having examined these functions, ensuring parental involvement, in a general sense, might be viewed as the basic roles of such bodies although there is a clear-cut difference between parental involvement in the management of a school and involvement in contribution to the whole development of a child (Okeke, 2014). In the literature, "parental involvement" is defined by Castro (2015) "as the active participation of parents in all aspects of their children's social, emotional and academic development" (p.34) while Kaplan, Toren, and Seginer (2015) defines it as "a multidimensional construct, including parental educational aspirations, plans for their children, educational decision-making, and support with school work, parental knowledge and parental participation in the school" (p. 812). Therefore, the parental involvement was conceived as both providing support for the learning and academic success of students and taking part in various school functions (Feuerstein, 2000). As Okeke (2014) points out the studies mostly focused on the individual and collective involvement of parents for cognitive, affective and psychomotor development of the child. However, the arrangements done to provide parents to take part in the management of schools seems to be less undertaken and should be considered as well.

Epstein's (1995) overlapping spheres of influence model and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995)'s model of parental involvement process, in fact, attempt to raise parents' awareness toward current school policies and the decisions made in the schools. In Epstein's (1995) model, there are six types of parental involvement which are parenting, communicating, learning at home, volunteering, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. Each involvement type has its practices, challenges and different consequences for students, parents, and teachers. Among each type of involvement, the involvement of "volunteering" asserts the participation of parents in providing supports for schools and classrooms while "decision-making" type of involvement attempts to include parents in decision-making processes at schools. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995) process of parental involvement model, on the other hand, supports the idea that parents are involved in school learning of their students when their role construction and efficacy beliefs promote involvement. There are contextual motivators such as invitations from the school, the teacher and the student to encourage their involvement; and the contextual variables including knowledge, skills, time and energy of parents and the family culture. Accordingly, parents tend to be involved in the learning activities both at school and home environments and contribute to the interactions between parent, teacher, and the school, which in return, contribute to student learning and academic success (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

Eccles and Harold (1996) proposed a model for parental involvement in their study of the Michigan Childhood and Beyond (MCABS). Similarly to Epstein's model above, there are mainly five dimensions of parental involvement: monitoring, volunteering, involvement, contacting the school about the progress of the children and about how to provide extra support. Corresponding to the functions of each dimension with other models, the participation of the parents to the activities and the events held by Parent-Teacher organizations are seeking out in "volunteering" dimension. Upon considering the abovementioned models, parents not only to contribute to their children's whole development but also take part in the decision making and management processes of the schools via PTAs.

Parent School Association in the International Context

Along with the theoretical frameworks on the involvement of parents, the role of PTA cannot be neglected for the interaction and the communication processes between parents and schools as its impacts are evidenced in the literature through higher student interest and achievement in education. In addition to the function of enhancing student interest and motivation, PTAs struggle for providing active engagement of parents to the curricular and financial decision-making processes and taking actions, and the processes related to school administration. To better understand the functions of PTAs at international educational contexts, current practices in different countries held by parents and the school community are elaborated. Accordingly, the structure and the functions of PTAs in Australia, Canada, United States, Ireland, Kenya, Nigeria, and Hong Kong were examined respectively. School councils in Australia had distinct roles ranging from accountability, finance, policy development and to the selection of principals pointing out the role of parents in decision-making processes (Gurr, Drysdale & Walkey, 2012).

Similarly, school boards in the United States (US) have a considerable influence in the policymaking process, monitoring and shaping the school curriculum, and recruiting the teaching staff. Therefore, they might be regarded as the micromanagers in the school community (Ehrensall & First, 2008; Onderi & Makori, 2013). Partnering with the school community in Canada, school councils work for supplying breakfast and lunch programs, meeting the infrastructural and technological needs, holding educational programs for parents and seeking for funds for their schools to promote the excellence in education (Richards, 2017). The parent partnerships in Ireland have a variety of roles. These roles range from providing continuous communication between parents and the school by sharing the school news and the relevant information about education to having a voice in the school policy and educational issues through becoming a partner with the teachers in curricular and extracurricular activities (National Parents Council Primary, 2004). There are also differential practices carried out by PTAs at African and Far East countries. For example, PTAs and board of governors in Kenyan schools are responsible for the

management of the school budget, recruitment of the non-teaching staff, monitoring the progress in school performance and raising the financial funds for equipment, scholarships and school development projects (Onderi & Makari, 2012). In Nigeria, PTAs have a role on the raise of the funds, the organization of the extra-curricular activities and meeting the stationary and sanitary needs of the schools (Nnebedum & Akinfolarin, 2018). Having promoted to have been working in cooperation, PTAs in Hong-Kong provides a kind of opportunity for parents to take part in policy-making processes to speak out their voices in educational issues (Chang, 1995).

The studies conducted internationally point out the parents'role in policy making and school management processes, their contribution issues related to curriculum and instruction, and of differential needs and provision of financial support to schools. In the Turkish educational context, on the other hand, parents' contribution to the schooling processes is mainly limited to financial aid instead of having a voice in educational issues (Yolcu, 2013). That might be due to the visible changes around the world and in Turkey over the last three decades. Although the education right is one of the responsibilities of a social state, since 1980, there has been a decline in the allocated financial resources for education in Turkey. Due to the rapid decrease within the government budget on the assigned sources in education, the educational services has been supported mostly by local authorities, non-governmental organizations and the donations of parents (Yolcu, 2013). Therefore, public schools might experience several difficulties such as lack of physical equipment, infrastructure, and non-teaching staff to provide a quality education (Özmen & Yalçın, 2011). In this regard, the financial support of parents is deemed to be invaluable for the well-functioning of schools, so PTAs become prominent to fulfill different needs of the schools.

Parent School Association Policy in Turkey

The Parent School Association policy (PTA), which is regulated based upon the National Education Basic law in Article 1739 changed in 2005 and 2012 respectively. The current policy (Official Gazette, Art number 28199, 2012) necessitates the establishment of Parent School Association in all ministerial schools. According to the Ministry of National Education (MONE), the main goals of "School-Parent Partnership" are a) realizing the integration of the school and the families, b) providing communication and cooperation between the parents and the schools, and supporting the activities that improve education, and c) meeting the vital educational needs of schools and students in need.

In the light of the above, the on-going communication and collaboration between parents and the school and the financial support and contributions of the association are underscored (Beycioğlu, Özer & Şahin, 2013). Taking these goals as a reference point, several studies investigated the roles, functions, and problems of the implementation of current PTA from the viewpoints of different stakeholders in the Turkish context. They indicated the malfunctions due to the misconceptions on the role of parents that might stem from financial constraints (Kılınçalp, 2007; Nural, Kaya & Kaya, 2013) and not having adequate knowledge and skills to run PTA (Akbaşlı & Kavak, 2008; Ereş, 2009; Kebeci, 2006; Özgün & Aydın, 2010). On the other hand, the research that claims that PTA does not smoothly function in Turkey and parents are less effective in fulfilling the financial expectations (Ereş, 2009). PTAs in the Turkish context are also found to fail in monitoring their children's learning processes (Kılınçalp, 2007) and participating in school meetings and activities (Gökçe, 2000; Özgün & Aydın, 2010). Furthermore, the contributions of PTA were just seen on the monetary issues (Akal, 2010; Bayrakçı & Dizbay, 2013; Karataş, 2008; Kebeci, 2006; Özdem, 2007) while the partnership is found to be ineffective in curricular dimensions (Akal, 2010; Bayrakçı & Dizbay, 2013; Çınkır & Nayır, 2017; Özdem, 2007), and developing a positive school climate (Beycioğlu, 2016). There are also studies revealing the problems between the school and parents due to the socioeconomic status of school regions (Porsuk & Kunt, 2012; Yolcu, 2011; 2013), the student population and the ineffectiveness of school-parent meetings (Porsuk & Kunt, 2012).

To sum up, the studies mentioned above are mostly based on the perceptions of school principals, teachers or parents although some research includes viewpoints of multiple stakeholders on the functions and the implementations of PTAs. Accordingly, Nural et al., (2013)

attempted to determine the common problems of the PTA and the possible solutions from the viewpoints of school principals, heads of the PTAs and several inspectors in education. The most critical issues of PTAs are found to be related to the lack of financial support, inaccurate perception of the PTA roles, the difficulties about finding volunteer parents, parents' lack of confidence and their nonattendance to PTA meetings, and the knowledge and skill deficits of parents to fulfill the requirements, respectively. Similarly, in Ereş's (2009) study, PTA members are deemed to occasionally fulfill the responsibilities of PTA by providing financial support, making contributions for the physical improvement of the schools, and the arrangement of social activities. Additionally, parents are found to be ineffective during extra-curricular activities and tasks that aim to socialize the students and improve their learning process. Corresponding to the findings of this study, parents, teachers and the school administrators' opinions toward the implementation of the functions of PTA unraveled the incapability of PTAs in organizing activities and providing necessary materials to improve the quality of teaching and learning process (Akbaşlı & Kavak, 2008).

Akal (2010) and Kebeci (2006) pointed out the reality of the contributions of PTAs which are mainly related to the financial issues or procurement of schools' physical and technical needs. However, the members rarely participated in the educational processes. In line with findings of Akal (2010)'s study, PTA members generally took part in financial issues such as identifying and controlling the extra-budgetary income of the schools, solving the possible problems of school buses, determining the needs and providing financial support for the technical aspects of the school (Bayrakçı & Dizbay, 2013). Although PTAs are deemed to have a critical role in the procurement of the differential needs of schools, they were portrayed to be ineffective in teaching and learning dimensions regarding the current literature.

Contrary to the roles and functions of PTAs in the international contexts, the national literature addresses the fundamental role of PTAs in education as providing financial support to the schools. In Turkey, the PTA regulation changed in 2012 by adopting a top-down approach, and therefore it yields important to examine the alignment between the decisions of policymakers and the needs and interests of the stakeholders. Be that as it may, informal meetings with the stakeholders (teachers and parents) in several public primary schools implied that the financial issues outweighed the agenda of PTA more than anything. For this reason, the parents displayed a kind of apathy toward the PTA which might prevent the members from carrying out the essential responsibilities in the new regulation.

The literature reveals that most of the studies conducted related to school-parent partnerships in Turkey utilized a quantitative or survey method (e.g., Akbaşlı & Kavak, 2008; Bayrakçı & Dizbay, 2013; Ereş, 2009; Genç, 2005; Özmen & Yalçın, 2011) and were examined in schools located in advantaged or city centers that are likely to come across some malfunctioning or financial restrictions, however, there seems to be little said of what happens in schools that are financially disadvantaged, and that are located in poor neighborhoods. Consequently, in the light of the literature reviewed, the current PTA policy in the Turkish context needs deeper scrutiny to understand how the PTA operates from a qualitative perspective and how it is implemented in disadvantaged neighborhoods from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders. More specifically, we attempted to explore how the current PTA policy functions as perceived by its intended users in two public primary schools in an embedded context in Ankara by initiating answers to the following research questions:

- a) What are the general functions of PTAs from the perceptions of multiple stakeholders (namely principals, teachers, and parents)?
- b) How effective is the implementation of the current PTA policy from the perceptions of multiple stakeholders?

METHOD

A multiple embedded case study design was employed in two public primary schools in a district of Ankara. Case studies generally focus more on an in-depth exploration of the actual "case" or a bounded system (e.g., an activity, event, process, or individuals) based on extensive

data collection (Creswell, 2007). Upon considering the research problems, we aimed to explore the actual use of the recent PTA policy to reveal how it is implemented at primary schools and evaluate its effectiveness from a microsystem by putting the center as the closest one to the child (Ethekeal & Mahoney, 2017). In other words, we looked at the bi-directional relationships among the members of the PTA as the microsystem: the administrators, teachers, and parents (Figure 1)

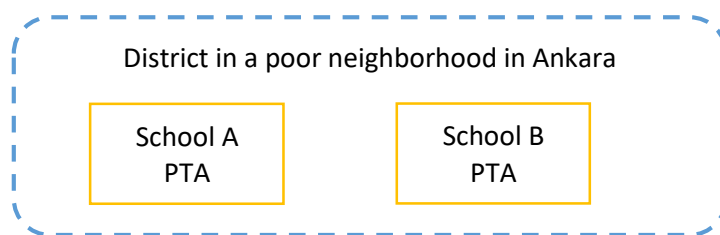


Figure 1. The embedded case study

Participants

Using Patton's (2002) typology, criterion sampling served the main selection strategy to include the key informants based on predetermined criteria and to portray their perceptions about the phenomena thoroughly within this variance (Patton, 2002; Marshall & Rosmann, 2006). The studies in the literature focused on the school managers' (Bayrakçı & Dizbay, 2013, Nural et al., 2013) or parents' perspectives (Akbaşlı & Kavak, 2008; Gökçe, 2000; Kebeci, 2006; Özmen & Yalçın, 2011), separately, so the primary selection criteria were selecting the members and the non-members of PTA in the targeted schools from both parties to comprehensively portray the perceptions toward the functioning and malfunctioning aspects of PTAs. In this regard, four school administrators, six teachers, and six parents participated in this study (Table 1). However, the parents from School B although ethical consent was taken by the Human Subjects Board, we the school administrative board did not consent to have parents interviewed. Therefore, to meet propriety standards, we excluded the parents as participants in one of the schools and consider this as a significant limitation in our study.

Table 1. Participants' demographic information

Code	Gender	Level of Educ.	Job Type	Work Experience (year)	Experience in Current Sch. (year)	PTA Experience (year)	Membership / Responsibility
A1	M	B.A.	Vice principal	18	4	3	-
A2	M	B.A.	Principal	20	3	8	-
A3	M	M.A.	Principal	34	3	16	-
A4	M	B.A.	Vice principal	34	2	15	-
T1	F	B.A.	Teacher	22	7	1	-
T2	M	B.A.	Teacher	16	4	1	-
T3	F	M.A.	Teacher	20	4	-	-
T4	F	B.A.	Teacher	27	1	5	-
T5	F	B.A.	Teacher	25	2	7	-
T6	F	M.A.	Counselor	15	1	No	-
M1	F	High sch	Housewife	-	-	2 months	Yes/No
M2	F	High sch	Housewife	-	-	2	Accounting
M3	F	High sch	Cosmetic specialist	-	-	1	Substitute
M4	M	Primary sch	Janitor	-	-	1	Substitute
M5	F	Middle sch	Housewife	-	-	No	No
M6	F	High sch	Housewife	-	-	No	No

Data Collection and Analysis

In this study, the data is collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with members and non-members of PTAs in the selected schools. In-depth interviews generally provide an opportunity for more in-depth explanations and descriptions of the experiences when the phenomenon or the case cannot be directly observed or simply and briefly explained (Creswell, 2008). The interview protocols for each stakeholder (teachers, administrators, and parents) are developed by the researchers based on an extensive literature review, informal telephone calls with PTAs of schools located in different districts and consulting with an expert in the field. Before finalizing the instrument, a panel discussion was carried out with eight researchers with M. S. degrees in Curriculum and Instruction, and expert opinion was obtained from one expert with a Ph.D. degree in the field to ensure the content validity of the protocol. The final interview protocols for teachers, administrators and parents mainly comprised of three parallel sections: demographic information, school context, and questions about PTA. For the demographic information part, both parties are asked questions about their educational and professional career background. The school context part, on the other hand, included questions to understand the student, graduate student, and parent profiles, the extracurricular activities carried out by the school, strengths, and shortfalls of the schools in a general sense. The last part focused on questions to understand the functioning and malfunctioning aspects of PTA, the interactions among stakeholders and the management of financial sources of PTA to evaluate the general functions and the effectiveness of PTA from the perceptions of multiple stakeholders. A sample item for the interview schedule is "What are your basic goals at PTA meetings?" "What are the general activities carried out by PTA in your school?", "What are the challenges you experience carrying out the tasks of PTA?", "What are the possible reasons for these challenges?", "What might be done to overcome these challenges?". The interviews generally took 40-45 minutes within two weeks of the 2013 Spring semester for both units of analyses. In addition to this, the interviews carried out took place at office rooms of the administrators, teachers' room and a schoolyard for school principals, teachers and parents, respectively. Teacher interviews took place in their free time during a specified period of the school day by the participants themselves.

In addition to the semi-structured interviews, on-site observations were done to obtain contextual information about both schools and the relations among teacher and students, and if available at that time their interactions with parents and administrators. Although the interview protocols had a specific part including questions to describe the school context from the perspectives of both teachers, school administrators, and the parents, the interviews were stated to be a limited source of data that might be influenced by personal bias, emotional states and interviewees' reactions (Patton, 1990). Therefore, on-site observations were carried out to describe and understand the school context well through short memos. For this aim, the school environment considering their nearby places, the schoolyard, and the school building, physical conditions and the infrastructure, the student and the parent profile were closely examined and included in short memos. Regarding the time and duration of this process, the observations were only done when students were in their classes, and during class hours, and also during recess time in the morning and afternoon routines to describe, the dynamic in the school contexts at different times.

Qualitative data analysis refers to organizing data, breaking them into manageable parts and uncovering specific themes and patterns at the end of this process (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). In this regard, inductive content analysis was employed. Firstly, the transcribed sheets were coded systematically, and the codes were organized under meaningful categories. Then, the codes organized were classified under the themes that they generate, and the final decision was made by the researchers after carefully examining whether the emerged themes reflect the coded sheets. Finally, relevant quotations in the data are selected to describe the findings in a more explanatory way while reporting and interpreting the derived themes. Memos are used to provide an overall picture of the schools.

Trustworthiness

Several strategies were used to ensure the validity and reliability issues in this study. To ensure the credibility of the findings, systematic observations were carried out two times per week for two weeks the day the interviews took place to make an overall judgment of the school's infrastructure and interactions among stakeholder. Triangulation of data is considered to verify findings and understand issues from multiple perspectives (Akar, 2017). To ensure transferability, the researcher concentrated on the thick description of the phenomena by providing quotes from the interview data (Patton, 1990). The perspectives of each stakeholder were compared to understand whether the data coming from different sources reconcile with each other or to elaborate on why there are differences among the results (Patton, 1990). Findings of this study are expected to be transferable to the similar case or cultural contexts. Therefore, we attempted to provide a thick description of the schools in the embedded case study. One limitation is that we were not allowed to reach parents in School B although we were given initial consent by the PTA administrative board, which may have limited the transparency of the research findings in one school.

RESULTS

For the current study, the contextual description of the schools is portrayed considering the findings of on-site memos and the semi-structured interviews. In addition to the contextual description, the findings merged into four main themes. These themes are a) School Profiles, b) Accountability of PTAs, c) Functions of PTAs, and d) Issues and Suggestions.

School Context

In this study, the schools are named School A and School B to ensure their confidentiality. Accordingly, School A is located in a region in which the majority of the residents were blue-collar workers and civil servants, and composed students mostly of low socioeconomic status. Although there are some parents with high school degrees, the level of education for most of the parents was at the primary school level. The socioeconomic status of the school neighborhood, on the other hand, had been dramatically changing with the increase in the number of big apartment buildings around the slums near the schoolyard. Having used to be village school before, School A had a big schoolyard with an asphalt floor, two basketball hoops and distinct playgrounds drawn in oil paint on the floor (e.g., hopscotch). Besides, it was a tiny two-story building including nine classrooms with about 12-13 students in each. On the first floor, there were classrooms and a small kitchen. The PTA meetings were held in the kitchen as there was no other space in the school to carry out these meetings. On the second floor, there were the principal, the vice principal, and teachers' rooms and other classrooms. Before the latest legislation towards the schooling system in Turkey called as "4+4+4" school system grading policy which corresponds to four year primary, four year lower secondary, and four year higher secondary schools. School A had students from both primary and lower secondary school level; however, the school started to include only primary graders after the policy change.

School B is also located in the same district with School A where the residents were small business owners and temporary blue-collar workers, and migrants from rural areas. The school had a considerable number of students from single-parent families, so the guardians of those students were generally their grandparents. Regarding the physical qualities of the school, School B had a three-story building involving 12 classrooms with 28 students in each. On the ground floor, there was a canteen, a room for cleaning workers, toilets and a physical activity room. The PTA meetings were stated to be held in this physical activity room. On the second floor, there were classrooms and the principal's room. The school library and the counselor rooms were on the third floor. The school library was used for multi-purposes such as for charity bazaars. The counselor room was also designed by the psychological counseling and guidance teachers as a toy library. During on-site observations to the school, it was noticed that there was a shortfall of technological facilities for some of the classrooms regarding the Internet connection and projection devices. Besides, although the lavatories looked clean or hygienic, soap dispensers

were empty, and some plugs of worn-out toilet flushes did not work properly. Apart from the physical and infrastructural qualities of the school, School B had a big schoolyard with several symbols on the ground and shape setups for physical education classes. The front yard of the school was asphalted and crossed with lines so that students could play volleyball, futsal, and football in this area as there was no sports hall in the school at all.

School Profiles

In addition to the contextual description of the schools, the semi-structured interviews with the stakeholders revealed in-depth information in comprehensively describing the school profile. This information was clustered around three main factors, which were about the school population, shortfalls of basic services and facilities at schools, and students' expectations and the tendency for further education.

Both schools had a small student population. One of the teachers highlighted that this fact was both a positive and negative situation for student-teacher communication and parents to have a voice in the school administration. It was positive in that the teachers and the school administrators mentioned that student-teacher communication could be more active with a small number of students, and in return, would have a positive influence on students' motivation and emotions. The teachers also mentioned that the small student population also strengthens the communication between the teacher and parent communication as they consider that the effective communication between school and the parents would facilitate the management of PTA as well.

On the other hand, the school administrators and teachers addressed the backwash effect of having a small student population restricting school income amounts. In this regard, the school administrators and teachers mentioned that the PTA functioned as the main monetary source provider of schools; however, parents could not financially support the schools as the majority of them were from low socioeconomic backgrounds. In addition, the small parent population, they added, would put an additional burden on PTAs to look for possible donations or other monetary support for the schools to fulfill their needs.

The findings also revealed a lack of basic needs for these schools. Accordingly, for both schools infrastructure problems related to sanitary and hygiene and other shortfalls based on the infrastructural facilities were mentioned. In addition, needs were listed as healthy food provision, security or gatekeeping services. One teacher (T4) complaint:

The cleaning services are not that adequate. There are physical shortcomings here [meaning in this school]. For instance, my students are first graders, and they are physically disturbed by older students even while they are in the toilets. The toilets for smaller kids are on the first floor, and the problem gets bigger during break time since older ones also use the toilets to drink water. By the way, water is another source of the problem here. The water they bring is not enough, and they have to drink water from the taps in the lavatories!

For the teachers, the reason for this problem was the inadequate numbers of janitors and inadequate school facilities. Because the schools could not provide any budget to hire more personnel to resolve the problems related to cleaning including recruiting guardians as security services. This unavoidably caused an increase in the workload of the school administration. Also, healthy food provision was another issue in both schools. Both stakeholders pointed out the need to improve facilities for lunches at school. For instance, there was no canteen in School A; therefore, parents argued that opening a canteen or an appropriate space for lunches may alleviate this problem in School A. During on-site observations to describe the school context, three-member parents in School A had brought lunch and tableware to the students to have their lunches in the kitchen that did not operate. They mentioned that parents had been alternately bringing lunch for students. This activity was based on the voluntary act and was cooperatively carried out. Actually, the parents were not fully aware of the fact that such an organized activity was an example for a "healthy diet activity."

The infrastructural facilities of both schools had several deficiencies related to curriculum activities too. For example, School A had no studio or space to carry activities related to arts or physical education and the school administrator (A1) exclaimed:

This building is not enough although there is a small number of students. There should be enough equipment and other things in all buildings such as an adequate number of classrooms and art studios. Our school used to be an old village school and positive changes are made until today ... but there should be a new building where sports and art activities could be comfortably carried out, and we have a big garden to construct one there.

Teachers, on the other hand, mostly focused on the instructional facilities in both schools. In School A, teachers expressed also needs to run instructional activities such as lack of Xerox machines and printing devices. Although the Internet connection in classrooms was provided with teachers' efforts, there was still no projection device in some of the classrooms. Besides, many teachers highlighted the stationery needs of some students could not be sufficiently met by their parents. The stationary for students in need, in fact, was attempted to be fulfilled by the school PTA themselves.

The findings in both schools also addressed students' expectations and the tendency for further education, which might be influential to well describe the school profile and future aspirations. The school administrators and the teachers stated that most of their graduates preferred going to vocational high schools, but there were also some graduates who attended public or namely general (alias Anatolian) high schools. Although a small number of students became noticeably successful, the majority of them were unable to break the boundaries due to the differences in socio-economic status. It was clear from the statements that the schools were generally falling behind in helping to reduce the socio-economic inequalities in society. As a result, the responsibilities of PTAs should be beyond the budgetary and curricular issues such that they might play an active role on encouraging the school counselors to help students, parents, and teachers to assist students to help set higher goals for their future educational aspirations

Accountability of PTAs

The findings of the interviews with members and non-members of PTA showed that PTAs play a critical role in making the society accountable for the school needs. In other words, PTAs allocate the responsibilities equally to the stakeholders and provide a transparent financial environment by integrating the parents into the school context in both schools.

Both member or non-member stakeholders stated that the selection process for the members of PTAs was democratic and depended on parents' willingness to contribute. However, occasionally most of the parents appeared to be reluctant to be a member. In such cases, the school administrators and teachers tried to convince parents who had a good rapport with other parents to become PTA member. The non-member parents were reluctant to express their opinions about any issues about the PTA.

According to our findings, the PTA board tried to make decisions to meet all expectations, and accordingly, they would announce these decisions on the school bulletin board. The members were generally in contact with non-members and were cooperating with other members of the PTA to meet the needs of the schools. Therefore, all stakeholders agreed on a trustful relationship between the school administration, teachers, and parents regardless of being member and non-members of the PTA in the allocation of responsibilities. In this regard, each stakeholder was deemed to adopt a collective responsibility for the welfare of PTAs. One of the teachers (T1) mentioned this situation as follows:

We talk about deficiencies at the meetings and identify them. Then, we try to figure out from whom to find solutions and with whom to do it. In this case, the school principal is more helpful. He is well-organized, active, and successful in finding solutions for the deficiencies and distributing duties. We try to bridge the gaps through our means.

School administrators, on the other hand, mentioned that they could not regularly attend to PTAs' monthly meetings. However, they had a critical role in monitoring the implementation of the decisions made and informing the members of PTAs about prioritizing the schools' urgent needs such as repairing the heating system, which necessitates giving quick decisions. During the

decision making and implementation processes, school administrators attempt to ensure the harmony between teachers and parents for effective PTA functioning.

Data revealed that member parents have been taking active roles in collecting funds and donations and putting efforts on serving the needs of the schools. Teachers mentioned that PTAs provide an opportunity to form a healthy communication between the school and the parents. Taking care of the funds and the essential services for the schools would be easier with the help of PTAs. Two teachers (T1, T3) argued that parents' financial and other supports to the school contribute to their sense of ownership towards the school, which in return, might influence students' and teachers' motivation. T1 and T3 expressed this situation as follows:

Our parents, especially member parents work very hard in different tasks such as painting the wall and whitewashing or repairing the building as the government provides limited financial support and the school has no budget for these tasks. Our parents try to meet the needs with their efforts. (T1)

Our work is not limited to students, and we are satisfied when we see mothers and fathers taking part in our work. We are not alone, parents support us, and we become more successful. (T3)

All member parents posited the importance of promoting student motivation towards the school. They expressed that the collaboration with teachers and the school administration paves the way for detecting the needs of the school. The parents also uncovered that students might feel a sense of pride when they see their parents taking care of their school. Although they mentioned that they were always in collaboration with the school administration and the teachers with their presence and their supports they provide, some of the parents contended they were not supportive in contributing to the tasks given by PTAs towards meeting school needs. According to the stakeholders, these parents were indeed not fully aware of the fact that the collaboration with the school to find remedies for the problems identified would also have an impact on the quality of education. In line with these findings, most of the stakeholders mentioned about a need for seminars and conferences organized by PTAs to increase the awareness of parents towards the activities carried out by PTAs and issues related to education. The actions the member parents could take in this regard were voiced as follows:

A spokesman might be chosen from each classroom to reflect our needs. The parent who never comes should be responsible for participating in the meetings so that we can learn their decisions. (M1)

I would like to bring not only the student but also the parents together for educational purposes. I would like to organize educational meetings for both parents and students once in a month to have information about how to study, the importance of the educational field trips and the ways to improve the knowledge with these trips. (M3)

Functions of PTAs

The common functions of PTAs were categorized under two sub-headings: a) Financial function of PTA and b) Curricular function of PTA. Given the influence on the financial function of PTAs, all stakeholders mentioned that they have a crucial role in meeting almost all kind of school needs. One of the administrators stressed the importance of this function as follows(A3): "In primary education, the funding of PTA covers almost 70 percent of the school income," and expressed his gratitude to the PTA as it is because of the association that they could meet many essential needs of their students.

The financial supports of PTAs were given as covering the expenses related to cleaning, electricity and security staff (A3, A2), helping to find funds for sports and art clubs, and organizing educational field trips and helping financially disadvantaged students (A3, A2). It was also stated that PTAs mostly cover the stationery and technological expenses of the schools. However, the stakeholders also raised their concerns about this function. In this regard, they argued that although PTA has been playing a critical role in gathering monetary support, this role would unavoidably deteriorate the relationship among the stakeholders in the long run. The reason behind the reluctance of the parents to be a member was indeed related to parents' unwillingness to deal with monetary issues in the PTA (A4):

When money interferes with the relationships, parents come up against each other such as blaming one another on the condition of giving or not giving money. Then, some parents tend to expect the school management to impose a sanction on who do not donate. As a result, the voluntary duty of the membership turns out to be a repellent job for parents.

Corresponding to the lived dissatisfaction of member parents due to financial issues, the teachers also stated that the administration sometimes asked them to convince parents to make donations, and this process would induce problems between teachers and the parents because parents tended to see them as the managers of a business organization rather than being an educator. All teachers also expressed their discomfort of collecting money from the financially disadvantaged.

Beyond the monetary function, the PTAs also played a role on curricular issues in the schools. In this perspective, all stakeholders stressed the importance of extracurricular activities on students' educational development process. According to the findings, the extracurricular activities organized and financially supported by PTAs provide social learning contexts for both students and their parents, contributed to the socialization of parents and raised their awareness of educational issues. These activities were educational trips, sports and arts activities, school nights, charity bazaars and poem performances. Among these activities, social and cultural trips were asserted to foster students' experiential learning and their communication skills. In this perspective, teachers expressed their gratitude to PTAs as students develop lifelong learning skills with the help of such activities. One teacher (T4) exclaimed:

It is imperative to take the students out of the didactic learning environments from time to time. Enabling them to visit a museum, or a fire station, for example, will allow them to learn by experience. The children find an opportunity to go beyond their live experiences in their neighborhood, and it is something much more than academic gain thanks to the help of PTA.

Teachers also argued that these activities would provide an opportunity for parents to increase their sense of ownership and belongingness to the schooling process. Besides, teachers stated that PTAs provided a vivid social atmosphere using extra-curricular activities (i.e., organizing charity bazaars) in which parents could actively take part. In doing so, most of the single parents could also visit schools to socialize with teachers and other parents and would also talk about their children's academic development. This socialization process in school contexts would contribute to the development of parents' positive attitudes toward PTAs.

Regarding students' learning process, both principals emphasized the importance of the student-centered education approach and the whole development of students. That was deemed to be possible through teaching different life skills with the help of extracurricular activities. One principal's (A3) comment on this issue unravels their attention on this process:

Sometimes this happens ... a parent would come to my office room and demand his/her child to quit drama or other extracurricular activities. They think that these activities including the formal curriculum would become a cognitive load for children. In such cases, I would respond: 'Sorry, you have to quit this school completely if you are insistent on this matter!' If children cannot develop self-esteem, what is the point of trying to develop their academic skills? Our school is supposed to be a place in which the knowledge and life skills are learned together!"

Although PTAs had a key role in the organization of a variety of extracurricular activities, parents also complained about the insufficient occurrence of these activities due to lack of financial support. Semi-structured interviews with the parents illustrated that the activities such as educational trips to art and science museums, sports activities and theatres, poem performances at school, and having picnics were rarely organized because the PTA often could not cover the expenses by itself. Consequently, it was clear that the PTA budget was mostly allocated to schools' basic needs and if there is any left, extra-curricular activities could be considered.

Issues and suggestions

Stakeholders interviewed in both schools (school administrators, teachers, and parents) highlighted several areas that need attention and their suggestions to improve the functioning

process of the PTA. The main issues that they raised were a) the narrow scope of the duties and authorities PTAs are accountable for; b) confusion in understanding the donation policy, and c) financial barriers or lived difficulties for the well-functioning of the PTA.

The semi-structured interviews with the teachers and administrators revealed that they were uncomfortable with the unidirectional functioning of the PTA; in other words, the function of PTAs was viewed to be limited to mainly collecting money from the parents. They would like to see more active PTAs which focus more on educational issues rather than monetary ones. Both stakeholders believed this would also strengthen the school-parent relationship and awareness of parents, which may substantially increase student achievement.

Both the administrators and the teachers addressed the ambiguity in understanding the concept of being of a benefactor. As the schools were mainly in need of the financial supports of PTAs, the school administrators and the members of PTAs would put effort on persuading parents to fund the schools by acting as if it was almost a compulsory issue. One vice principal (A4) exclaimed that some parents were against providing monetary support to PTA as it was claimed to be on a voluntary basis and put as follows:

The Ministry mentions that parents are not expected to give money to the schools, but the PTA, in line with its foundation purpose, they try to gather money from the parents to meet almost all needs of the school. This is a dilemma.

The administrators argued that this conflict of interest might hinder the effective functioning of the PTA. They all complained about the money collection process as a necessity which might sometimes lead to unexpected reactions from parents. The donation process might cause possible conflicts between the parents as well as some of them financially contribute while others do not. In this regard, most of the parents and the administrators mentioned that financial concerns were the most critical barriers for the effective functioning of PTAs. One- member parent (M1) mentioned her point of view on this issue and groused:

You should arrange the environment for the students as well as make sure that the teachers are paid off. Here [meaning the school], if the students are failing in mathematics, the idea of providing additional courses for them is ideal; however, we cannot do such a thing. Because we have no money since there is a lack of parent donations. Recently, we hired one janitor for cleaning the classrooms, but again nobody wanted to give money. The small size of the school student population and the insensitivity of parents ... Tell me what the PTA can do about it?

The stakeholders made several suggestions to ensure the effective functioning of the PTA. The teachers highlighted that the income of the PTA was highly dependent on contextual variables such as parents' socioeconomic status. Therefore, they argued that this put the schools in the districts with low social and cultural capital in a disadvantaged position compared with better off ones. The teachers suggested that schools might be supported financially by the Ministry depending on their contextual needs. The presence of a proper budget would lessen the burden of the school administration, teachers and the PTA by funding them to meet the basic needs of schools. Finding financial support from non-governmental organizations and individuals were also among the suggestions stated by the administrators and the parents. The teachers believed that this way would enable the PTA to focus more on educational issues. Specifically, the teachers and the member parents suggested that the PTA might monitor and evaluate the decisions on curricular issues as well as having more control over planning extracurricular activities. The teachers believed that building strong communication and trust between the parents and the PTA is a basic precondition for the effective implementation of the PTA policy. Training parents through seminars was highly suggested by several stakeholders to satisfy the abovementioned conditions.

DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

This present study attempted to explore how the current Parent Teacher Association (PTA) policy functions from the perspectives of different stakeholders through an embedded case study in a disadvantaged district in Ankara. Based on the ecological systems theory we delved into

exploring how the PTA as a microsystem functioned in a disadvantaged school neighborhood and concluded the following.

The general functions of PTAs are mainly viewed as systems that provide financial support, ensure the accountability through forming a trustful relationship among stakeholders and in the organization of extracurricular activities. However, several issues were explored regarding the implementation process of the policy itself. Firstly, problems stem from the conflict between the policy and its implementation process. Secondly, insufficient financial support as a result of existing inequalities due to poor households of families. Thirdly, the small school size may also create problems and restrict sufficient funding for basic needs such as funding for repairing the sanitary infrastructure or hiring janitors. Fourthly, the reluctance of parents to become a member of the PTA or even participate in the PTA meetings. Lastly, the partial ineffectiveness of the PTA in organizing extracurricular matters stemming from the reluctance of PTA members in implementing the policy in our case.

Financial support was considered the most salient function of PTA. Upon considering the decline on the allocation of governmental sources in education, the majority of the public schools look for other opportunities to meet even their basic infrastructural needs with that regard the school administration or the PTA are expected to act as entrepreneurs. In this sense, local authorities, non-governmental organizations and the PTAs are regarded as substantial contributors of public schools (Yolcu, 2013). In addition, our study findings support research that reveals that most of the basic, technological and extracurricular needs of schools (i.e., electricity, hygiene, security, funding for sports and arts clubs) were met by the PTA (Akal, 2010; Bayrakçı & Dizbay, 2013; Kebeci, 2006; Özdem 2007; Yolcu, 2011; 2013).

In our case, PTAs seemed to create a trustful environment between the members and other beneficiaries as they were allocating responsibilities to members and even non-members of the school PTA. In both the schools of the embedded case, parents were equipped with the knowledge of how PTAs function, therefore, they were willing to support extracurricular activities such as educational trips, school nights, charity bazaars, poetry recitations, yet, when monetary issues were of concern, due to lack of funding infrastructural expenses were prioritized over extracurricular facilities. On the contrary, we found evidence that in some cases, parents' lack of knowledge related to the duties and responsibilities of PTA they may have some reservations to provide financial support to the association (Kebeci, 2006; Kılınçalp, 2007; Nural et al., 2013). Although this could be a result of the leadership skills of school administrators who are assumed to inform parents and teachers about how PTAs function, our argument has weak grounds due to the limited number of parent participants included in one school. We suggest further research to shed light on the knowledge level of core stakeholders regarding the policy and its functioning, in other words, future research is expected to delve deep into the understanding and perceptions of school administrators, teachers, and parents who are also non-members of the PTA or school board.

The current regulation indicates that the basic responsibilities of the PTA comprises both meetings the most prominent needs of the schools and students and strengthening the school-family cooperation and supporting the activities to improve the quality education (Official Gazette, Number 28199, 2012), several issues were regarded as problematic for its effective functioning. Although both financial and non-financial contributions of parents were indicated to be on a voluntary basis in the regulation, the PTA was viewed as one of the essential sources of schools to meet their basic infrastructural needs such as cleaning and gatekeeping. Undoubtedly, as explored in our study, this may create a conflict on people's minds toward the policy and its implementation in practice. Keskin and Demirci (2003) stated financial contributions of parents are 2.5 times more than the allocated budget given by the Ministry of National Education. Therefore, monetary support of parents is a kind of necessity for the well-functioning of the PTA and meeting the basic needs of schools that do not correspond with this policy at all. In the current study, parents' financial contributions were deemed to be insufficient due to their socioeconomic backgrounds. Considering the cultural capital theory of Bourdieu (1977), Laureau (1987) articulated how parental involvement differed across socioeconomic status (SES). Accordingly, the interaction and communication of parents with other parents and the school staff and their understanding of the

schooling processes tend to differ; in other words, parents with high SES are likely to be more involved than the parents with low SES. In line with this theory, there is evidence that voluntary contributions of parents, including financial support, from low and middle SES, are remarkably lower than the parents of schools located in districts with higher SES (Porsuk & Kunt, 2012), Yolcu (2011) and (2013). Then, we suggest it is crucial that the centralized policy implementation should provide a differentiated implementation policy for disadvantaged schools to be in line with the Equality of Opportunity Act (Law 1739). This idea was also supported by international research, in which was stated that while policy decisions and actions for the schools with unique contextual needs should be reconsidered (Björk and Browne-Ferrigno, 2016). In addition to this, the financial sources are devoted to curricular issues more for the schools holding student populations with medium or high SES profiles (Yolcu, 2011). Ultimately, parents' SES have a significant impact on parental involvement in education (Ünal, Yıldırım &, Çelik, 2010). While there is other research that contradicts with our findings and shows that voluntary participation of parents in activities within and outside of the school tends to increase as their level of SES decreases (Şad & Gürbüzürk, 2013), the current study findings align with research in that low family income is an encumbering condition for the involvement in education (Erdener, 2014), and some of the parents in public schools are unwilling to communicate with teachers or school administrators as they are obviously seen as financial source providers for schools (Erdoğan & Demirkasımoğlu, 2010; Özgan & Aydın, 2010).

Along with the SES of parents, the small student population in the target schools was another issue of having both positive and negative effects on the implementation of the PTA policy. The effective communication between the parents and the school staff due to the small student population in both schools was mentioned to contribute to the effective functioning of the PTA in attending school-based activities which comply with Porsuk and Kunt's (2012) study. However, the small student population of the schools in addition to parents' low SES was portrayed to be the most apparent reasons that parents' experienced problems when it came to financially supporting the PTA in our embedded case study.

The nonattendance of parents to meetings and the difficulty of finding volunteer parents to take part in the partnership are other barriers for the effective implementation of the policy. Since most of the parents do not want to deal with monetary issues, they usually prefer to remain a non-member. Along with the aforementioned problems, lack of financial support, inaccurate perception of the PTA roles, difficulty of finding volunteer parents to take part in the partnership and the non-attendance of the parents to meetings are provided as explicit reasons for the shortfalls of the PTA in disadvantaged neighborhoods (Akbaşlı & Kavak, 2008; Ereş, 2009; Gökçe, 2000; Kebeci, 2006; Kılınçalp, 2007; Nural et al., 2013; Özgan & Aydın, 2010).

Given the influence on the problems related to the implementation of the PTA policy, the board was also described as inefficient in organizing extracurricular activities due to financial constraints. Although activities such as visiting art and science museums, organizing poetry recitations, charity bazaars were arranged by the partnership, the low number of these activities points out the incapability of the PTA when located in a disadvantaged district with poor school resources. Therefore, the operations of the PTA in the target schools might be considered ineffective or malfunctioning (Akal, 2010; Akbaşlı & Kavak, 2008; Ereş, 2009; Özdem, 2007).

Along with the findings related to the school contexts, we found that both schools were deprived of infrastructural, technological and even some basic household needs. As Akar (2010) and Akar and Şen (2017) posited that financial resources might be devoted to meet basic needs and infrastructural deficits of the schools in disadvantaged neighborhoods by the MONE, this may also contribute to the enhancement of positive feelings of students such as self-worth and belongingness to the school and the community they live in. In this regard, if no differentiated policies implemented for disadvantaged schools, the PTA should have a say in monitoring the allocation of budget to different facilities beyond academic needs for the well-being of the students and school staff caused by complexities such as hygiene and sanitary facilities.

The present study uncovers the main issues, and the problems related to the current PTA policy through an embedded case study and the findings can be transferable to similar school contexts. The study contributes to the literature regarding the employed research design and the

included participants. To obtain in-depth information about the current conditions and to provide multiple solutions to the observed problems, the perceptions of different stakeholders were considered. Based on the findings, there is a strong need to generate a funding system to financially support the schools, especially in disadvantaged neighborhoods, by providing them with a budget in accordance with their unique contextual reality.

Future research might be conducted through including multiple cases studies in different contexts, and quantitative measures might be employed in addition to the qualitative methods to generalize the findings to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the implementation effectiveness of the PTA policy in the Turkish context. In conclusion, as the PTA plays a critical role in forming strong cooperation between parents and the school, it may help improve the quality of education by enabling educators to focus more on the education process in their schools and enabling parents to have a stronger voice in making unique school-based decisions beyond budgetary issues. In that regard, to increase awareness of the importance of PTA, seminars or conferences might be arranged to clearly describe its role and the responsibilities to the parents and other stakeholders. Moreover, district-level accountability systems could be established to share effective PTA models around the disadvantaged neighborhoods so that they may help contribute to the improvement of the PTA operations in similar schools. Such actions can be undertaken as part of school improvements in the international context as well, and through comparative studies, different approaches to operating PTAs can become models for individual cases.

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