

Research Article

**Organizational Problems Challenging the Capacity of Open Vocational High Schools in Dealing with the School Dropouts**

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**Abstract**

Increasing the student enrolment in schools is very important in today's knowledge economy, which makes education systems one of the most prominent factors of economic development for all the countries in the world, especially the developing ones like Turkey. However, school dropout is one of the major obstacles in front of the advancements. Every nation has got a kind of structure in their education system to deal with school dropouts, particularly in secondary education level in which major dropout issues occur. In Turkey, open high schools constitute of the major alternative for the students who left formal high schools early and want to continue their education or to get a high school diploma. The aim of this study is to examine the organizational problems of Vocational Open High Schools in Şanlıurfa, regarding these schools as a backup system for school dropouts, based on the opinions of the school managers. Using a case study design, the data was collected through semi-structured interviews with the managers of open vocational schools in Haliliye, Karaköprü and Eyyubiye counties. According to the results of the study, organizational problems can be categorized into three main themes as administrative, academic and legal problems. At the end of the study, there are some suggestions to the authorities.

**Keywords:** *School dropout, secondary education, open vocational high schools.*

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## Açık Meslek Liselerinin Okul Terkleriyle Başa Çıkma Kapasitesini Zorlayan Örgütsel Sorunlar

### Öz

Eğitim sistemlerini dünyadaki tüm ülkeler için, özellikle de Türkiye gibi gelişmekte olan ülkeler için en önemli faktörlerden biri haline getiren günümüz bilgi ekonomisi toplumunda, öğrencilerin okullarını arttırmak çok önemlidir. Bununla birlikte, okul terki, eğitimsel gelişmelerin önündeki en büyük engeldir. Her ulusun, eğitim sisteminde, özellikle de önemli terk sorunlarının yaşandığı ortaöğretim düzeyindeki okul terki sorunu ile başa çıkmak için geliştirdiği çeşitli sistemler mevcuttur. Türkiye'de ise açık liseler, resmi liselerden erken ayrıldıktan sonra eğitimlerine devam etmek veya lise diplomasına sahip olmak isteyen öğrenciler için başlıca bir alternatif haline gelmiştir. Açık liseler bu bağlamda bir yedekleme sistemi olarak ele alınabilir. Bu araştırmanın amacı Şanlıurfa Açık Meslek Liselerinin okul terkleri ile başa çıkılması anlamında örgütsel sorunlarını, okul yöneticilerinin görüşleri doğrultusunda incelemektir. Araştırma durum çalışması olarak desenlenmiştir. Araştırmanın verisi, Haliliye, Karaköprü ve Eyyubiye olmak üzere Şanlıurfa'nın üç merkez ilçesinde bulunan açık meslek liseleri yöneticileriyle yapılan yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yoluyla toplanmıştır. Araştırmanın sonuçlarına göre, Şanlıurfa'daki açık meslek liselerinin kapasitelerini daha etkili bir şekilde kullanmalarını engelleyen idari, akademik ve yasal sorunlar olarak üç temel tema ortaya çıkmıştır. Araştırmanın sonunda yetkililere bazı önerilerde bulunulmuştur.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Okul terki, ortaöğretim, açık meslek liseleri.

## **Introduction**

In today's world, education systems have been playing a more vital role in the development of countries than ever before. As knowledge provides more added value than any other resources, the importance of education becomes more salient. In this context, aims and projects towards increasing the schooling rates in each level of the education system and enhancement of the average time spent in education are high on governments' political agenda, especially in developing countries.

These issues have been taking place in international policy documents and are also supported by supra-national institutions, which brings about the increase of expenditure and investments in education. According to the Dakar Framework for Action eight education goals are mainly on expanding and improving early childhood education, ensuring access of all children to compulsory education and young and adults to continuing education, improving literacy, numeracy and essential life skills are agreed internationally by the UNESCO partner countries (UNESCO, 2000). Also, United Nations member countries emitted Millennium Declaration about a new global partnership to reduce extreme poverty the in the world and set up some goals. The related goal for education is "children everywhere, boys and girls alike will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling and that girls and boys will have equal access to all levels of education" for development and poverty eradication (United Nations Millennium Declaration).

Besides, in such a global and changing knowledge economy era, borders have become more permeable and all nations in the world have become more open to new technologies and values (Youngs, 2007). In such a chaotic world, countries need better human resources having creative skills and ideas to survive and maintain their power (Boyacı, 2013). Hence, they need to equip the new generations with 21st-century skills emphasized in literature, national and international policy documents (Greenhill, 2010; Wagner, 2010) and tested by some international exams like PISA and TIMSS. What is expected from new generations in such a knowledge economy age is to generate new and innovative ideas, applications or products that have a broad capacity to affect people and produce an economic value (OECD, 2008). So, education systems try to raise students with needed critical thinking, problem-solving and decision-making skills. However,

students who dropout from their schools due to various reasons constitute a major obstacle to the prospective benefits of education (Rumberger, 1987; Stearns & Glennie, 2006). In order to eliminate the undesirable outcomes of school dropout, countries have different solutions aiming school completion or constituting pathways for the workforce based on either formal or distant way of education.

### **Dealing with the School Dropouts**

Most of the school dropouts occur during the secondary education. Secondary education is an important level in the education system because it is a prerequisite for higher education. And graduating from a higher education institution increase the opportunities of earning more money for individuals. People with a bachelor's degree may be more effective in the development of their countries. According to OECD (2013), the unemployment rate of people who have a university diploma is 4.8%, but the unemployment rate of high school graduates is 12.8%. Hence, increasing the share of people holding an undergraduate degree is very important, especially for developing countries, figuring out the compulsory education covers secondary education in most of the OECD countries (2013), although the effect of compulsory education on the development of nations is controversial.

School dropouts occur in different ways in different countries. The main reason for that is differentiating of countries from each other based on the professional and technical courses, program diversification, institutional segregation and enrollment types that students are placed in different schools or tracks (Lamb & Markussen, 2011). Thus, they offer different programs and pathways to school completion:

- In France, during the democratization reforms of the 1960s and 1970s mixed type schools of lower secondary education has been transformed into a new type of school: the collège (junior high school) and that ensured the greatest access to senior high school and baccalaureate during 1980s. Apart from that, the General Transition Mission (MGI, Mission générale d'insertion) was established in 1992 and had a general goal as to reduce failure at school, prevent dropout and facilitate workforce transition which is closely related (Blanchard & Sinthon, 2011).

- In England, compulsory education is until the age of 16. After that young person can choose to remain in full-time education in school or college, studying part-time at college, entering full-time or part-time employment, entering government supported work-based learning – apprenticeship or a pre-employment program or may not choose any of the above. So, defining the school dropout or school leaving is an actual hard job for the UK. But, to encourage full-time participation of the young people, there is an Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) worth up to £30 per week that young people whose parents/guardians earn less than £30,000 a year can apply (Sullivan & Unwin, 2011).
- In Germany, various programs and projects have been focused on preventing school dropout by trying to support individuals, to increase school quality, to improve teacher skills and counseling services at schools. These projects like ‘Learning Regions’, are useful for both enabling the transition to the workforce and completing the Secondary General certificate. In general speaking, dropout prevention programs and projects are organized to eliminate the dropout problems in micro (individual), mezzo (organizational) and macro level (system) policies. Individual-level is related to developmental support strategies for students, organizational strategies focus on the accountability regarding the legal, organizational and professional responsibilities of schools, training organizations and relevant personnel, and lastly the systemic strategies are about the institutional factors causing broad changes in the schools’ teaching and learning culture with a concentration on the historical, regional and political conditions (Reupold & Tippelt, 2011).
- In the United States, students drop out at secondary level because of individual and institutional factors. Individual factors are associated with students’ attitudes, behaviors, school performance and background; institutional factors are related to the students’ families, schools, and communities (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). There are mainly three approaches (programmatic, comprehensive and systemic) to respond the dropout crisis. Programmatic approaches consist of providing supplemental services to students within an existing school program or an alternative school program, either in an existing comprehensive high school or in a separate facility. Comprehensive approaches include school reforms changing school environment for enhancing student outcomes. According to this approach, there are two options either developing a comprehensive school reform (CSR) in the existing school or creating a new school or

adopting an external school model. Systemic approaches involve the changes in the whole educational system at federal, state or local level of government. (Rumberger, 2011).

### **School Dropouts and Turkey**

In Turkey, secondary education became compulsory for all citizens in 2012. It consists of four-year lower secondary and four-year upper secondary education (high school) level. There are distinct general directorates for vocational and general secondary education in upper secondary education level.

Along with the rapid economic development in the last 10 years, Turkey has focused on investing in human capital as the fundamental dynamic of medium and long-term development. In this economic context, important progress has been achieved in the quantity of educational services. Within this frame, the proportion of the budget allocated from public resources for all stages of education to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has increased from 2.25% in 2001 to 6.0% in 2012. The biggest share in the public budget has been allocated to education services for the last 4 years (TurkStat, 2016a). The share of research and development (R&D) expenditure in GDP have increased from 0.48% to 1.06% between 2003 and 2015 (TurkStat, 2016b). All these expenditures have turned into an increase in the number schools, classrooms, and teachers. Between the 2000-2001 and 2015-2016 educational year, the net schooling ratio, the number of schools, the number of teachers and the number of students in secondary education increased from 43,95% to 79,79%; from 6291 to 10550; from 140969 to 335690 and from 2362653 to 5807643 respectively (TurkStat, 2017). Despite the above quantitative advancements in the education system, school dropout is standing as a vital problem for the educational attainment of individuals.

In 2010, the graduation rate for secondary education was 54,5% in Turkey. In 2015, it was 73,4% (OECD, 2017). In OECD's conceptualization, the graduation rate is the presentation of estimated percentage of people who will graduate from a specific level of education over their lifetime. However, when age population and the number of graduate students from secondary education compared, there is a huge gap between individuals who didn't graduate. Table 1

shows the percentages of individuals graduated in the same age population by years in secondary education (TurkStat, 2017).

Table 1  
*Percentages of Secondary Education Graduates in the Same Age Population by Years*

Years	% In the Age Groups								
	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-64	65+
2009	27,90	24,03	17,78	15,08	14,96	11,56	8,48	5,99	3,74
2010	29,43	25,77	20,13	17,72	16,35	13,68	9,30	6,54	3,95
2011	29,66	26,89	21,90	18,87	16,80	15,20	10,05	7,21	4,27
2012	30,29	26,94	23,12	19,18	16,94	16,00	10,78	7,79	4,48
2013	28,60	25,07	23,13	18,78	16,72	16,32	11,45	8,30	4,67
2014	28,87	25,77	25,08	19,97	17,78	17,11	12,87	9,31	5,07
2015	28,37	25,74	26,05	21,07	18,65	17,19	14,31	9,97	5,44
2016	28,37	26,11	26,44	22,20	19,37	17,31	15,66	10,52	5,79

**Source:** Generated by authors using National Education Statistics and Address Based Population Registration System data from TurkStat. <http://www.turkstat.gov.tr/UstMenu.do?metod=kategorist> (Accessed on 11/22/2017).

Besides, school dropout leads to waste of investments made on education. Spending on education per student in secondary education in Turkey is 3268 US dollars in 2014 (OECD Education Spending). According to 2017 Performance Program of Ministry of National Education (MoNE), 5,47% of students in secondary education got out of formal education (PoSD, 2017). In the 2016-17 educational year, the total number students in secondary education are 5849970 (MoNE, 2017); so, 319993 students went out of formal education. Considering the latest OECD data on education spending, more than 1 billion US Dollars were wasted in 2017.

Despite the school dropout fact, Turkey provides and maintain the lifelong learning opportunities and this may be helpful for the transition to the workforce of dropped out students. In this context, one of the most important and organized institutions is public education centers. For all citizens from all the ages, there are reading-writing, vocational, social, arts, economic, sports and cultural courses for free. There are also other activities such as educational meetings, symposiums, conferences, festivals, panels, art shows. Besides, people can take modular courses for general and vocational-technical education with vertical and horizontal transitions.

The other one is the open schools. Open general, vocational and technical high schools are mostly chosen by young dropped out students. Actually, open schools are taken as a part of formal education by the MoNE. However, functionally, these schools deliver a kind of distance education, except some courses needed practice in the programs of open vocational and technical high schools.

### **Open High Schools in Turkey and Problem Statement**

Open High School was founded in 1992, and it provides high school education using distance learning technologies. In 1998 by Law No. 4359 open high school services were gathered under the General Directorate of Educational Technologies. After that in 2011 by the decree law No. 852 open high school operates under the Lifelong Learning General Directorate.

Open high school program content (curriculum) is the same with the formal education institutions. But, it operates differently and uses the basics of distance education. Besides, it is administrated directly by the MoNE. All educational institutions in Turkey are administrated by the MoNE centrally, but open high school all around the country are treated like just one school. It has central examination system and all exams for all open high schools are done at the same time in the whole country. There are 1.554.938 (26,6%) students in open high school and 219.492 of them are in open vocational high schools (MoNE, 2017).

Open schools have got an essential role in sustaining the student persistence in the secondary school system. Although, open schools are regarded as a part of formal education by the MoNE, they serve as an alternative to the formal education, especially for young high school dropouts. In this regard, open high schools have got a latent function as offering a second chance to high school dropouts to continue their secondary education and to get a high school diploma.

Similar to the open high schools, open vocational schools provide dropouts with the same opportunities, but they operate differently. Students in open vocational high schools take some courses in real teaching-learning environment because these courses are needed practice. Such courses are held in the buildings and ateliers of the formal (daytime) vocational high schools after the casual school day in the evenings and weekends. Such timing makes open vocational high schools vulnerable to several organizational problems; sometimes even more than a

similar formal high school. Lack of guidance in admissions and student affairs, inadequate amount of educational materials, lack of motivation among teachers, staff shortage, classes composed of students from different ages and backgrounds are some examples of these problems affecting the operation of open vocational schools and the process of teaching and learning (Çiçek, 2005). Besides, organizational problems also hinder the academic success of students. Traditionally, factors affecting student achievement can be categorized in two main items as student level (Coleman et al., 1966) and school level (Edmonds & Frederiksen 1977) factors. So, organizational problems of open vocational schools both jeopardize the positive effect of school level factors that contribute the student achievement and the chance of school completion of high school dropouts. Hence, the examination of the organizational problems of open vocational schools becomes prominent. However, there is a lack of literature related to this topic in Turkish context.

In this regard, the aim of this study is to examine the organizational problems challenging the capacity and the role of Vocational Open High Schools in dealing with the school dropouts based on the opinions of the open vocational high school managers. In this study, Vocational Open High Schools in Şanlıurfa province (Haliliye, Karaköprü, Eyyubiye) are selected. The main reason for choosing Şanlıurfa is its high rates of high school dropout and correspondingly high enrolments in open schools in Turkey. In Şanlıurfa, 1002 students of 121 open educational institutions are taking face to face education (Yüz Yüze Eğitim Veren Kurumların Kontenjan Bilgileri Ekranı 2017-2018).

## **Methodology**

This study focuses on the deep understanding of a complicated phenomenon and uses a deductive approach to reach the goal (Audet & Amboise, 2001). In this context, this study is designed as a case study which is used to investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context and in which multiple sources of evidence or data exist (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2008). A case study research is an empirical inquiry of the ‘target case’ deeply and extensively focusing on the questions ‘how?’ and ‘why?’ (Yin, 2003), or ‘a detailed examination of one setting, or one single subject, or one single depository of documents or one particular event’ (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

The target case or the setting in this study is composed of the open vocational schools in Şanlıurfa (Haliliye, Karaköprü, Eyyubiye) province. Haliliye, Karaköprü, Eyyubiye are the central districts of Şanlıurfa province. There are also some other open educational institutions giving face to face education like multi program high schools, schools for imams and preachers and vocational training centers. However, this study only focused on the organizational problems of open vocational high schools, so the single case study design is employed for this research (Yin, 2003).

### **Participants**

In the study, participants were determined by criterion sampling method. The selection criteria was that each participant must have at least 3 years of work experience as a manager in the same open vocational school. The criterion sampling method was applied because of the importance of work experience in the same school. Experienced school managers working in the same school for a while would be more familiar with the students and teachers, and the open vocational school system.

Participants of the study are composed of 14 school managers in Şanlıurfa in the 2016-17 educational year. There are eight open vocational schools in Haliliye, Karaköprü, Eyyubiye districts in total. However, one school manager and one vice manager were selected in seven open vocational schools. The other two managers were newly attended to an open vocational high school located in Haliliye district.

Characteristics of the participants are given in the below table. All names were coded as P1, P2, P3... P14, where P is for the participant.

Table 2  
*Characteristics of the Participants*

<i>Participants</i>	<i>Professional years in current school</i>	<i>Total professional years (as manager)</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Gender</i>
<b>P1</b>	5	11	40	Male
<b>P2</b>	5	9	38	Male
<b>P3</b>	3	10	47	Male
<b>P4</b>	4	21	58	Male
<b>P5</b>	6	12	44	Male
<b>P6</b>	5	21	55	Male
<b>P7</b>	4	8	41	Female
<b>P8</b>	5	10	48	Male
<b>P9</b>	3	5	37	Male
<b>P10</b>	3	12	42	Male
<b>P11</b>	6	16	40	Male
<b>P12</b>	5	13	51	Male
<b>P13</b>	4	9	50	Male
<b>P14</b>	3	6	50	Male

### **Data Collection Instruments**

In the study, the data was collected through semi-structured interviews and they were tape recorded by the researchers. It's possible to control the course of the interview while maintaining the free speech of the interviewee by semi-structured questionnaires (Creswell, 2003) and they reduce prejudice and effect of the researcher (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993). The questionnaire consists of 3 open-ended questions. For the study, 14 school managers from open high schools were interviewed. The interviews took place at each 3 school and lasted about 35 minutes.

Interview questions were prepared in accordance with the literature. Then, two interviews were performed with school managers. Then, interview questions were reexamined after having suggestions of two faculty members in educational administration field. At the end, the final semi-structured questionnaire form was created.

In addition to field experts' opinions, a consent form was prepared and given to the participants. Consent form consists of a text which states the purpose of the study, the participation is voluntary, and guarantees the recordings will be kept confidential. Asking field experts and the consent form is very useful for the trustworthiness or the internal validity; criterion sampling method and detailed results are also good for the external validity of the study (Merriam, 1998).

## **Data analysis**

The study employs a descriptive-analysis technique. Data were analyzed through the transcription of interviews, preparation of coding keys and comparison of coding and finally creating the themes by taking the opinions of field experts again (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Patton, 2002). Creating the themes in this order in accordance with the goal of the study, research questions, codes, expert opinions and literature and keeping them for audit trail makes the analysis more reliable (Merriam, 1998).

### **The transcription of interviews**

For this stage, everything was transcribed and written down on interview forms. Interview form is composed of two sections. First section involves personal information related to the place, date and hour, interviewee, interviewer, interview number and page number. Second section involves descriptive index, line number, interviewer comment and page comment. Everything was written in descriptive data section and then, coding keys were prepared.

### **The preparation of coding keys and coding**

In this stage, transcription was read and related principles were written in the descriptive index section. This was done by the researcher and an expert in the field. The expert and the researcher both developed descriptive index independently. Based on the descriptive index, both the researcher and the expert marked the suitable theme for each purpose and then compared the coding and then reliability analysis was done.

### **Comparing coding and reliability**

The researcher and the expert determined the consensus and dissension numbers. Here, if either the researcher or the expert marked the same theme or not marked any theme, this was considered consensus. If either the researcher or the expert marked the different themes for the same purpose, the marking that was done by the researcher took as a base but this was considered as dissension. The validity of the study is calculated by the formula  $\text{Validity} =$

Consensus/ Consensus + Difference of Opinion (Miles & Huberman, 1994). According to this calculation, the validity was found 0.87.

## Findings

According to the research questions and results of the study, the opinions of school managers can be gathered into three themes which are ‘administrative problems’, ‘academic problems’ and ‘legal problems’.

### Opinions of School Managers on Administrative Problems

Concerning the administrative problems, participants were asked: “What obstacles do you face with during the school management process?” Opinions of school managers are varying, but they can be categorized as the problems of “human resources”, “school environment”, and the “administrative structure”.

First of all, all the school managers agreed on the problems of human resources management. However, they emphasized some different aspects. For example, P1 complained about the lack of service personnel by saying:

*“Our school is big and has five blocks. There is only one service personnel responsible for each block. And he works until the end of the formal high school. Students have their classes in the same buildings with the formal high school but in the evening. Most of the time the service personnel can’t clean the whole buildings. And we often find unclean classes.”*

And, P3 spoke of the lack of security personnel:

*“We have a huge campus because during the day there is a formal vocational high school and we use its buildings during the evening classes after 6:00 pm like all the other vocational open high schools in Şanlıurfa. During the daytime, there is only one security personnel at the entrance of the campus, but after that, he doesn’t stay for the evening.”*

Some other school managers emphasized the lack of administrative personnel and their workload. P2 said:

*“In our school, I am the only vice school manager responsible for the open high school and I also have to deal with some formal high school work. Especially at the beginning of each academic year during the admissions and at the end of each academic year we have a lot to do. So, during the academic year, I have to deal with both open high school work and the formal high school work. It is needed here another vice school manager.”*

Apart from that, some school managers expressed that the workload of the teachers is more than it should be because of that they haven't got enough teaching staff. P11 said that:

*“We have only evening classes in the open high school and most of the teachers don't want to work in the evening after their formal high school classes. The one working with us is generally the teachers needing extra money. Thus, of course, because of the few number of teachers and the long hours of working in the daytime in formal classes, teachers become tired and inefficient in the evening.”*

Secondly, school managers talked about the problems related to security and discipline problems in their schools. and P8 told about the discipline problems among students:

*“Most of the students attending open vocational high school are actually dropped out students. Mainly they dropped out because of failing in their previous courses back in formal high school or disciplinary problems. Most of them are unsuccessful in the formal high school and I think this made them unengaged to the school or education system. So, we have here students with problem behaviors and they often have no expectations from life. They just come here to get high school diploma.”*

Moreover, P10 and P6 emphasized the need of establishing a security system. P6 said: *“We have no security personnel for the evening classes and no cameras to watch people on a huge campus. At least we need a visual security system.”* Apart from that, P7 mentioned the drug abuse among students by saying:

*“We have some students using drugs. Sometimes, we saw some drug dealers during the evening time around the school. Sometimes, some students use drugs just nearby the campus and when we call the police for that, they also had trouble to deal with these students.”*

Thirdly, most of the school managers emphasized the need for a new administrative structure for open schools apart from the formal high schools. P8 spoke of the need for separate administrative and teaching staff for open high schools:

*“There are different students here in open high schools comparing the formal schools by age, job and marital status. So, we need teachers with different skills and more experience to manage these students in and out of the classroom.”*

Similarly, P2 emphasized the need for separate managers who only strive for open high schools. Moreover, P5 talked about the need for recruiting separate psychological counseling and guidance teachers for open high schools, figuring out the different characteristics of open high schools and the people in them.

### **Opinions of School Managers on Academic Problems**

Concerning the academic problems, participants were asked: “What obstacles do you face with during the teaching-learning process?” Opinions of school managers are varying. All of them agreed that there are some problems with “teaching-learning environment”, and three of them mentioned the problem of “division selection” of students. “Information technology (IT) problems” are also mentioned.

Regarding the problems related to teaching-learning environment, three of the school managers talked about the lack of learning materials. For example, P3 said that:

*“We use the same classes used by formal high school students. During daytime, they use materials, tools, and some other things. But, for the evening we often find a mess and even we can’t find a material that we need because it has been used before us.”*

Moreover, four of them mentioned the need for separate buildings, apart from the formal education buildings. P4 mentioned: *“We need a separate building instead of using the formal high school buildings, we need our own classes for students to do extra work individually. And we need our own materials.”* Besides, five of the school managers mentioned the student absenteeism. According to them, few students attain the classes regularly:

*“We lost most of the students that we registered at the beginning of the academic year because most of our students work in daytime (have a job) and study in the evening classes, which causes students not to track classes regularly.”*

According to five school managers having a job produces negative results for most of the students who are working. P12 detailed the negative results of having a job by saying:

*“Most of our students are adults and they have a family life, work life in addition to school life, which leads to lack of energy for school and enthusiasm for learning. Since they have to work all day long and come to school in the evening, they come to school unprepared with a lack of motivation, which makes our job more difficult”.*

Similarly, P7 mentioned:

*“Nearly half of our students work in a different job during the day time, and this makes them tired when they come to school in the evening. Having a job is bad for their academic achievement but, on the other hand, they want to support their family’s income”.*

Once again all of the school managers agreed on the problems of class homogeneity. The classes are made up of students from different age groups, backgrounds, expectations, needs and so on. They deal with the problems of classes composed of different age groups. For example, P14 talked:

*“Some of the students are older, some of them are younger and that’s why their expectations and learning styles differ from each other. Some are working and they come to class just for the sake of coming without any preparation for the class. Some of them haven’t got enough basic computer skills or study skills, which makes it very difficult to motivate them and address them all.”*

The last problem for this subtheme is the timing of classes. Classes generally in the evening, and most of the time, this is thought as a good situation for the students having a job. However, four of the school managers mentioned about evening classes are not efficient at all. For example, P13 said that:

*“For students, for teachers, and for us the timing of the classes is one of the important problems in our open vocational high school. It creates extra workload for me as vice principal and for teachers. Also, students are bored when they come to school in the evening, especially the ones who work during the daytime in a job.”*

The second subtheme of the academic problems is about the division selection of students. Frankly, there are no criteria for the selection of division, so students can choose which division they want. And this situation produces some problems. According to P1:

*“Some divisions offer more job opportunities, so all of the students want to choose these divisions and they become overloaded. We can’t find places for all students. This situation also causes lots of vacancies in other divisions. Then, we have to close some divisions and that is bad for students who want to choose those divisions.”*

Thirdly, all of the school managers dealt with the IT system problems. All of them complain about the problems of archiving the students’ data. For example, P9 told that:

*“Especially, we have problems with the old-age students since their grades are not in the open high school IT system. Grades are only in the written documents they took when they leave formal high school. So, we have troubles related to transfer of grades of those students. Also, we have troubles about the following the student attainment because the IT system is a new system and doesn’t work efficiently.”*

Moreover, P10 emphasized the problems with the integration of open high school IT system with the e-school system of formal education by saying:

*“We have troubles to reach the information about new coming students to open vocational high school, because the new IT system doesn’t work in a parallel way with the e-school system of the formal high school.”*

### **Opinions of School Managers on Legal Problems**

Concerning the legal problems, participants were asked: “What obstacles do you face with during the process of implementation of school rules or regularities?” Opinions of school managers are varying. All of them agreed on there are some problems with “lack of regularities for student discipline”, and three of them mentioned “degree equivalency problems.”

Firstly, all school managers mentioned the negative results of lack of regularities for student discipline. In open high schools, there are no discipline regulations for students like in formal high schools. In this context, P8 said:

*“We can’t apply any discipline punishment to the students like in formal high school because of the open high school regulation. Sometimes we face with misbehaviors of students or any action that require a discipline punishment but we have no legal option in return.”*

Secondly, three school managers talked about the degree equivalency problems of the open high school students. Degree equivalency is an important issue to pass the courses or replacing of the previously taken courses in formal high school. P11 mentioned that:

*“Students are accepted to open vocational high school when they leave from any level of formal high school. There is no age and grade limitation. So, when the time comes to which courses they should take, they don’t want to take any courses they took before and they don’t want to be responsible for these courses again. The decision about it is taken by the councils of teachers, which is different in each open high school. Then some councils accept what student want, some don’t, which creates confusion in the system. So, we need a regulation about it, but we don’t have it yet”.*

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

When they first started to education in 1993-1994 academic year, there were 17.454 students, in the whole country in open schools (MoNE, 2015). Yet, today, there are 1.554.938 students in open high school, 219.492 of them are in open vocational high schools, and, 319.993 students went out of formal education (MoNE, 2017). In this context, open high school has been an important part of the whole education system and it has a capacity to work as a backup system for dropped out young generations to continue to higher education or their transition to the workforce. Although open schools can be considered as a chance for the future of Turkey and the disadvantaged young generations, they have some accumulated problems through the years. In this study, we focused on the problems of open vocational schools which can be regarded as a second chance for dropped out students. According to the findings of this study, in order to increase the capacity of open vocational schools in dealing with the elimination high school dropouts mainly three organizational problems come forward as administrative, academic and legal.

Similarly, Parsons (1967) proposes that there are technical, administrative and institutional control levels in order to solve the organizational problems in schools. The technical level

consists of the teaching-learning process. The primary purpose of schools is to provide education for individuals. For this reason, school administrators, teachers and all stakeholders involved are responsible for resolving problems related to the educational process. Administrative level concerns the management of the school. Principals are the top managers of the school. School principals allocate resources and coordinate the workload. They motivate teachers and increase the loyalty, commitment, and trust of the teachers. Institutional level connects the school with its environment. The school needs the support and the legitimacy of this community. It is necessary for school administrators and teachers to fulfill their duties in the school and to get rid of unnecessary repression of individuals and groups outside the school (Korkmaz, 2007, Open Schools/Healthy Schools).

When compared with the Parsons' administrative control level, participants complain about the lack of human resources, security problems originated from the school environment and inefficiency of the current administrative structure, figuring out the administrative problems in open vocational schools. All the personnel in open vocational schools are selected from the current formal vocational schools. Considering the late worktime and the extra workload on teachers and managers, some of the personnel in open vocational schools actually doesn't want to work in these schools, despite the extra income. Such a work timing also makes these schools open to security problems. With the addition of the lack of security personnel, these schools become more vulnerable to security and discipline problems. According to the findings of this study, lack of regularities related to discipline of students are addressed as a part legal problems because there is not any kind of discipline regularities in open vocational schools as in their counterparts in the formal secondary education. However, such an inadequacy may result in inefficiency in the administration of student affairs in open vocational schools, considering the student-teacher and peer relationships.

Considering the technical control level, academic personnel, teaching material, student, the timing of classes and IT system factors are related to academic problems emphasized by the participants. Students in open vocational schools are very diverse by means of age, marital status, work status and socioeconomic levels. The timing of classes is in the evening and weekends. There is no separate teaching material for the students, which sometimes causes the lack of these materials because they are used in formal vocational school in daytime classes. Most of the students of open vocational schools are also working in the daytime and come to

the evening and weekend classes. Student archives are not well documented because of the IT system problems. All these factors together may result in a low academic quality in teaching and learning process, considering the effect of school and student level factors on student achievement (Edmonds & Frederiksen 1977; Coleman et al., 1966). As a part of the legal problems, the degree equivalency problems occurred during the transition of the student from formal high school to open vocational school, which can be regarded as another factor contributing this low academic quality, since the lack of regularities on academic equivalency and recognition of past courses and grades.

As a part of Parsonian institutional control level, there are no findings in this study. However, quality of education in and the public opinion on open vocational schools are a matter of question, considering their huge number of enrollments. According to the EUROSTAT, the early leaver rate (% of the population aged 18-24) from education and training in Turkey is almost 35% in 2016 (Early leavers from education and training). Similarly, according to MoNE 2017 Performance Program, the rate of early leavers and out of school students are 34,81% and 5,47% respectively (PoSD, 2017). Even if the number of enrollments of open high schools (26,6%) is considered only, open schools are becoming an essential part of the formal education system, especially in dealing with the early leavers and out of school youth. Hence, most probably, starting from today and in the near future, the academic quality, organizational effectivity in the open vocational schools and their contribution to students' academic and work-related goals will be popular in the discussion of educational problems in the public conscience, raising questions about the legitimacy of open vocational schools.

### **Suggestions**

Below results and recommendations can be constituted for the problems of open vocational schools in Şanlıurfa:

- The main reason for the administrative problems is the lack of a special administrative structure for open vocational schools. Currently, managers, administrative and teaching personnel, buildings and the educational material in the formal vocational school also constitute the managers, administrative and teaching personnel, buildings and the educational material in the open vocational schools. Hence, there is the same structure for different functions, and the system uses the same resources. A specialized

administrative structure focusing on the education in the open vocational schools in Şanlıurfa, would make easier the management of the school as an organization and the management of curriculum.

- Academic problems indicate the need for a holistic management of teaching-learning process before, during and after the transition of students from formal high school to the open vocational high school. Besides, open vocational schools require more skillful and capable administrative and teaching personnel because of the diverse student context. So, there should be some criteria defined with a regulatory framework for the selection of teaching and administrative personnel. Also, recruiting the psychological counseling and guidance teacher for the students is needed.
- There is an obvious gap related to discipline regularities in open vocational schools. Moreover, there are some problems related to transfer of grades, recognition of past courses and division selection based on the lack of regularity frameworks. The main reason causes such lack of regularities needed in open schools as a whole is again the lack of regularities in the law. When thinking of the operating system of open schools, they are either distance or open education institutions, however, at the same time, they are regarded as the part of the formal secondary education. Such a duality in the operation of open vocational schools creates gaps in the regularity framework. Hence, there is a need of redefinition and to constitute a new identity for open vocational schools.

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