

# Relationship between Quality of Work Life and Work Alienation: Research on Teachers<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract** The purpose of the study is examined primary school teachers' quality of work life and work alienation perceptions. The sample of the study was composed of teachers (N=426) employed in Bolu province central and district state primary schools in 2010-2011 academic year. For data collection purposes, "Personal Information Form" was used to gather demographic information on the teachers, "Quality of Work Life Scale" developed by McDonald (2001) and adapted to Turkish by the researcher was used to determine perceptions related to quality of work life and "Work Alienation Scale" developed by Elma (2003) was utilized to determine alienation levels. Research results show that teachers displayed negative perceptions in salary and additional benefits and involvement and responsibility at work sub dimensions of Quality of Work Life scale while they had positive perceptions in the other sub dimensions. Arithmetic means regarding teachers' perceptions on work alienation show that teachers felt alienated from school followed by feelings of powerlessness, meaninglessness and isolation. In general, negative and significant relationships were detected between all Quality of Work Life sub dimensions and work alienation sub dimensions.

**Keyword** Quality of Work Life, Work Alienation, Teachers, Work Life

## 1. Introduction

The fact that the most important factor that makes an organization successful or unsuccessful is the human element cannot be denied in today's modern management approaches [1]. Work has crucial functions in human life such as making good use of time, directing life energy to beneficial purposes and preserving mental health as a result of satisfaction gained from these[2]. Human beings spend a majority of their time in work related environments and their productivity increases in proportion to their

satisfaction. Work is not only an indispensable responsibility for human beings to support themselves financially; it also has a quality that makes human beings social and independent [3].

The importance of work life for the individual is crucial for the improvement of work environments and to generate happier employees[4]. One of the recent concepts in work life that has been studied and developed is the concept of Quality of Work Life (QWL) [5]. This concept refers to the generation of work conditions that will ensure job satisfaction for employees[2]. Quality of work life is a concept that includes various subjects in the realm of philosophers, social scientists, employees and employers. It is a wide subject that contains work ethics, various aspects of work conditions, precautions that need to be taken in terms of work conditions, employee satisfaction and dissatisfaction, administrative concerns regarding production efficiency, social balance and integrity[5]. Quality work life, which is also expressed by concepts such as quality of working life, humanizing the job, and quality of the world of work, is defined by [6] as "the quality of the relationship between the employee and the work environment where the human dimension is added to the technical and economic dimensions" and by [7] as "the degree of satisfying important personal needs of the members of an organization through organizational experiences".

QWL was first approached and discussed as a concept in companies. However, it was later embraced in other areas such as education and the investigation of the quality of work life in these fields was undertaken[8]. The purpose of education is to ensure that individuals are provided with opportunities to adapt to society and the modern world and to equip individuals with the information and skills necessitated by the modern age. It is also necessary for individuals to be trained in a manner that will allow them to keep up with the changes that take place in the society and in the world and to contribute to these changes. These goals can only be achieved with the help of high quality teaching

staff in combination with a good education system. Although having high quality teachers is crucial and a must, it is not sufficient in itself unless it is supported by policies that employ teachers in a balanced, efficient and productive manner and improves their work life conditions [9].

According to research, teachers work under a great deal of stress while performing their duties. It is observed that teachers transfer the stress they experience at school to their external lives [10]. Lack of motivation, low performance and work alienation are observed in teachers who experience stress in their institutions. Work alienation can be defined as “finding the tasks at work meaningless, not receiving satisfaction from the relationships formed at work place, feelings of loneliness, incompetence and incapacity; losing hope for the future and perceiving the self as a simple cogwheel of the system” [11]. The size, management style and bureaucratic structure of the organization may provide suitable conditions for the formation of work alienation. Additionally, factors such as division of labor, working on a constant task, monotony, conflicts with the administrators, negative relationships with other employees, inability to participate in decision making, noise and harsh working conditions affect individuals and cause both alienation from the self and from work [12]. It is believed that one of the factors that can cause work alienation in employees is the perception of quality of work life. In this context, this study examined primary school teachers’ quality of work life and work alienation perceptions. Answers to the questions below were sought in order to realize this aim;

1. What are primary school teachers’ perceptions regarding quality of work life?
2. What are primary school teachers’ work alienation levels?
3. Are there significant differences between the levels of perceptions regarding quality of work life and their work alienation levels?

### 1.1. Significance of the Study

The degree of realizing the objectives in educational institutions affects a large majority of the society. It can be claimed that the concepts of quality of work life and work alienation, which affect organizational outputs directly or indirectly, are crucial in goal realization at schools, in student achievement and in the quality of education. In this sense, it is first of all necessary to identify the teachers’ quality of work life and work alienation levels in order to take the required precautions to increase quality of work life and decrease work alienation. This study is significant in its contribution to this goal. The study is also expected to present ideas as to how teachers are provided quality of work life.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1. Quality of Work Life

The concept of quality of work life has always been an area of interest for various for-profit and non-profit organizations based on changes in working life and management approaches. The most important reason behind this growing interest in the concept is that companies have started to realize that in addition to production and profit, “human factor and human expectations”, elements which are often overlooked, are the most crucial phenomena for increasing productivity and competition [13]. The literature review cites many definitions regarding quality of work life and some of them are presented below.

The concept of quality of work life was first defined by [14] at the end of the 1960’s to draw attention to the lack of quality of work life which was then the dominant theme at the workplace. According to [14], this concept, as a whole, points to the quality of the relationship between the employees and the work conditions and it aims to emphasize the human dimension which is so often forgotten amongst the economic and technical factors in the work design.

According to [15], quality of work life is a systemic approach that affects all aspects of the organization and forms a series of beliefs and values (such as job enrichment, democratic inspection, employee participation, and safe working conditions). [16] Define quality of work life as an approach that includes employees, the work itself and the organizations. The most distinct element of quality of work life is its relationship to the impact not only on the employers but also on organizational efficiency and organization decision making processes. In general, quality of work life is an employee’s visible physical and mental vitality and the level of job satisfaction and motivation. Quality of work life is the provision by employers of a working environment that supports employees’ efficiency, productivity, morale and motivation by identifying the preferred or non-preferred elements. Work environment should include positive elements for both the employees and the organization. The main factors that affect quality of work life are open communication channels, fair and applicable reward systems, sufficient job security and career opportunities, opportunities to participate in decision making, sufficient and suitable implementation of morale and motivation measures, providing employees with chances to utilize their skills and creativity, and providing employees opportunities to prove themselves and meet their social and societal needs, as well as meeting their basic needs at sufficient levels [17].

In the context of civil rights and social responsibilities, quality of work life was first implemented in businesses followed by the health sector. Along with increased interest towards studies on quality of work life, it was started to be used in educational organizations as well [18].

Teachers play important roles and have significant responsibilities in school processes. Teachers’ roles are highly important in goal realization and creation of effective

schools. Teacher commitment to school and teaching profession, job satisfaction, coping with stress and burn out and forming effective relationships with students, parents and colleagues, in short, high levels of quality of work life, can be regarded as the main factor of success. Priorities related to increasing quality of work life and humanizing the work are identified depending on the circumstances that are unique to each organization. Meeting teachers' psychological, social and academic needs and improving work conditions can be the first step in humanizing the work [19].

## 2.2. Concept of Work Alienation

[20]define work alienation as “the reflection of individual’s feelings created by disappointment experienced due to employment conditions at the work place”. They also state that this concept “expresses the dissatisfaction experienced by the individual as to the individual’s status in terms of authority and the others in the organization, opportunities for professional development and change, recognition and acceptance by the superiors and doing his/her work consistently with career expectations”. [21]defines work alienation as the result of an organization’s “inability to provide conditions and environments such as autonomy, responsibility, social interaction and self-realization that present the value of individuals as human beings”.

According to [22], there are modern dilemmas caused by the inability to create alternative solutions against the problems generated for the individuals by organizational and technological structures, by economic weaknesses, rapid life rhythms, responsibilities encumbered on the individual by the management and production styles and being isolated from management despite responsibilities. In light of these dilemmas, work alienation can be defined as the state of incapability, meaninglessness, inconsistency and insolubility created by the formation of unfavorable circumstances in place of ideal norms, internal dilemmas in place of external responses, passivity in place of activity and replacing the means with the ends.

It is apparent that work alienation can be caused by the things that the employees produce (the product), work relationships, the appearance that the organizational structure neglects humanism, administrative and inspectorial styles and technological constructs. In a general sense, work alienation can be affected by an individual’s affective and cognitive moods. In general, it can be said that work alienation results from individual, social and cultural factors. In line with these explanations, work alienation can be defined as “finding the current job meaningless, inability to receive satisfaction from work related relationships, feelings of loneliness, incompetence, weakness, losing hope for the future and perceiving the self as a simple cogwheel in the system”[11].

Alienation exists almost in all of the organizations of social life with different reasons, by emerging in different

types and creating different results and it affects the system in which it exists. In school staff, students or parents, alienation in educational organizations generates disinclination towards and distancing from tasks that are required. Research shows that the bureaucratic structure of schools, crowded classrooms, dense curriculum, heavy work load, lack of democratic processes in administrative structures, teaching information that will be useless in life and external determination of teaching processes create alienation in education [23].

Development of feelings of alienation in teachers who strive to keep social existence and provide better life conditions negatively affects their behaviors in the teaching-learning process. Alienation hinders teachers’ creativity, being role models for their students and the society, professional development, contribution to social development, efficacy in teaching-learning process, productivity in teaching services and cooperation with the school administration and other colleagues [24].

## 2.3. Relationship between Quality of Work Life and Work Alienation

[25]defines the concept of quality of work life as “employees’ degree of meeting important personal needs in the framework of organizational experiences”. In other words, the provision of quality work life is dependent on an effective and variable organizational structure and results in healthy, happy, productive employees. Therefore, existence of unproductive employees who experience work alienation and ineffective organizational structure will result in decreases in the quality of work life. [26]Morton (1977) proposes that six important conditions should be met in order to ensure or increase quality of work life. These factors are reasonable pay, work hours, suitability of the tasks, physical factors (temperature, light, pollution, noise, etc.), organizational factors (job safety, working conditions, management style, promotion system, union rights, etc.), and political, social and economic factors.

In fact, the concepts of quality of work life and alienation are used to explain similar psychological and sociological facts. Alienation is a concept that was created to identify and describe the negative influences of the industrial society on individuals and employees. The concept of quality of work life was used much later by behavioral scientists in an effort to eliminate the negative influences created by industrial societies on organizational structures and therefore on employees [25]. Both concepts propose solutions to problems resulting from work life and working conditions, and aim to uncover and eliminate these problems[27]. According to [28]there is a negative relationship between quality of work life and employee alienation. Administrators need to do more to increase quality of work life, and thereby decrease the level of alienation. Organizational resources should be used to this end to meet employees’ vital social and personal needs.

In terms of educational organizations, it is necessary for

school administrators to enhance teachers' quality at work life by providing humane work conditions (opportunities for professional development, career support, high motivation, democratic management environment, an open organizational climate etc.). Hence, alienation, which will create negative outcomes - in the case it is experienced- will be prevented.

### 3. Material and Method

#### 3.1. Research Model

The study utilized a relational screening mode, a general survey model, since the study aimed to identify primary school teachers' perceptions of their Quality of Work Life and work alienation levels and determine the relationships between these variables.

#### 3.2. Universe-Sample

The universe of the study was composed of teachers (N=1683) employed in Bolu province central and district state primary schools in the 2010-2011 academic year.

Theoretical sample sizes for different size universes can be tolerated at 95% level of accuracy during sample size identification. The necessary sample size for 5% margin of error was calculated to be 277 for a universe of 1000 and 356 for a universe of 5000 [29]. However, it was decided that 450 teachers should be included in the sample in order to protect against the risk of a low return rate from the scales. Following the determination of the sample size,

multi-stage sampling was undertaken. The random cluster sampling method was utilized to select the schools from lower, medium and upper economic levels in Bolu center and districts. A total of 46 primary schools (23 from the central province and 23 from the districts) were selected via random cluster sampling. The number of teachers employed in these schools was 1050 at the time of the study.

Although 450 teachers from these schools were selected via random sampling, 24 scales with missing information were not included in the analysis; thus, 426 scales were analyzed.

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristic of the teachers who participated in the study.

Table 1 shows that 57,3% of the participating teachers were females and 42,7% were males. With regards to age, 42% of the teachers were in the 21-30 age range, 32,9% were in the 31-40 age range, 16,4% were in the 41-50 age range and 8,7% were in the 51 and older age range. In terms of marital status, 73,2% were married, while 26,8% were single. Regarding level of education, 78,9% of the teachers had undergraduate degrees, 12,9% had graduate degrees and 8,2% had two-year degrees. With regards to subject matter, 54% of the teachers were classroom teachers whereas 46% taught specific subject matter. Regarding the variable of seniority, 39% of the teachers had worked for 1-5 years, 26,8% had worked for 6-10 years, 16,9% for 11-15 years, 8,2% for 16-20 years, 7,5% for 21-26 years and 10,6% for 26 years or more. In terms of seniority at the present school, 75,6% of the teachers had worked for 1-5 years at the same school, 11,3% for 6-10 years and 13,1% for 11-15 years.

**Table 1.** Frequencies and percentage distribution of teachers' demographic characteristics

Demographic characteristics		f	%	Demographic characteristics		f	%
Gender	Female	244	57,3	Subject Matter	Classroom Teacher	230	54,0
	Male	182	42,7		Subject Matter Teacher	196	46,0
	Total	426	100		Total	426	100
Age	21-30	179	42,0	Seniority	1-5 years	128	30,0
	31-40	140	32,9		6-10 years	114	26,8
	41-50	70	16,4		11-15 years	72	16,9
	51 and older	37	8,7		16-20 years	35	8,2
	Total	426	100,0		21-26 years	32	7,5
Marital Status	Married	312	73,2	26 years or more	45	10,6	
	Single	114	26,8	Total	426	100	
	Total	426	100	1-5 years	322	75,6	
Level of Education	Undergraduate	336	78,9	Seniority at present school	6-10 years	48	11,3
	Graduate	55	12,9		11-15 years	56	13,1
	Two-year degree	35	8,2		Total	426	100
	Total	426	100,0				

### 3.3. Data Collection Tools

For data collection purposes, a “Personal Information Form” was used to gather demographic information about on the teachers, the “Quality of Work Life Scale” developed by [30] and adapted to Turkish by the researcher was used to determine perceptions related to quality of work life, and the “Work Alienation Scale” developed by [11] was utilized to determine alienation levels.

**Personal Information Form:** The form includes items to collect information regarding the teachers’ gender, age, marital status, seniority, seniority at the present school, subject matter and level of education.

**Quality of Work Life Scale:** In this study, the “Quality of Work Life Scale”, developed by [30] and adapted to Turkish by the researcher, was used to determine perceptions related to quality of work life. The scale is composed of seven dimensions: Support from manager/supervisor, Freedom from work related stress, Salary and additional benefits, Communication, decision making and job security, Involvement and responsibility at work, Relationships with work colleagues, and Job satisfaction, challenge, and use of skills. The Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient for the whole scale is .94. The Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficients for each dimension range between .77 and .90. In the current study, Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficients for sub dimensions were found to range between .75 and .89.

**Work Alienation Scale:** The “Primary School Teachers’ Work Alienation Scale”, developed by [11] and composed of 38 items, was utilized to determine teachers’ alienation levels. The Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale ranges between .62 and .86 for the sub dimensions. In the current study, Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficients of the Work Alienation Scale were found to range between .75 and .89 for the sub-dimensions.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

Percentages and frequencies were used in the analysis of the demographic characteristics, and descriptive analyses that determined arithmetic mean and standard deviations were utilized to identify teachers’ Quality of Work Life and work alienation perceptions. The Spearman Brown Rank Correlation Coefficient was used to determine the relationship between Quality of Work Life and work alienation since the data did not show a normal distribution.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Findings regarding the First Sub Problem

Table 2 presents arithmetic means and standard deviations of the scores teachers obtained from the whole

scale and for each sub dimension to identify teacher perceptions related to Quality of Work Life.

Table 2 shows that the highest quality of work life perception for teachers was related to relationships with work colleagues ( $\bar{x} = 3,80$ ), followed by communication, decision making and job security ( $\bar{x} = 3,74$ ) support from manager/supervisor ( $\bar{x} = 3,48$ ) Job satisfaction, challenge, use of skills ( $\bar{x} = 3,47$ ), freedom from work related stress ( $\bar{x} = 3,42$ ), involvement and responsibility at work ( $\bar{x} = 2,45$ ) and salary and additional benefits ( $\bar{x} = 2,36$ ) respectively.

**Table 2.** Arithmetic means and standard deviation values for teacher perceptions related to Quality of Work Life

Dimensions	N	$\bar{x}$	Ss
Support from manager/supervisor	426	3,48	0,61
Freedom from work related stress	426	3,42	0,57
Salary and additional benefits	426	2,36	0,84
Communication, decision making and job security	426	3,74	0,72
Involvement and responsibility at work	426	2,45	0,65
Relationships with work colleagues	426	3,80	0,64
Job satisfaction, challenge, use of skills and autonomy	426	3,47	0,56
QWL general total	426	3,25	0,34

### 4.2. Findings regarding the Second Sub Problem

Table 3 presents teacher perceptions regarding work alienation.

Examination of the arithmetic means of teacher perceptions related to work alienation presented in Table 3 shows that alienation from school was the dimension that was perceived with the highest level ( $\bar{x} = 2,75$ ), followed by powerlessness ( $\bar{x} = 1,96$ ) meaninglessness ( $\bar{x} = 1,67$ ) and isolation ( $\bar{x} = 1,65$ ), respectively.

**Table 3.** Arithmetic means and standard deviation values for teacher perceptions related to work alienation levels

Dimensions	N	$\bar{x}$	Ss
“Powerlessness”	42 6	1,96	,65
“Meaninglessness”	42 6	1,67	,60
“Isolation”	42 6	1,65	,61
“Alienation from school”	42 6	2,75	,80

### 4.3. Findings regarding the Third Sub Problem

Correlation analysis was used to determine the relationship between teacher perceptions of Quality of Work Life and their work alienation levels.

**Table 4.** Correlation analysis to determine the relationship between teacher perceptions of Quality of Work Life and their work alienation levels

Variables		Work alienation				
		Powerlessness	Meaninglessness	Isolation	Alienation from school	
QWL	Support from manager/supervisor	r	-,407	-,310	-,397	-,189
		P	,000	,000	,000	,000
		N	426	426	426	426
	Freedom from work related stress	r	-,436	-,415	-,378	-,155
		P	,000	,000	,000	,001
		N	426	426	426	426
	Salary and additional benefits	r	-,103	-,038	-,001	,021
		P	,034	,438	,980	,671
		N	426	426	426	426
	Communication, decision making and job security	r	-,001	,060	-,009	,024
		P	,979	,219	,856	,620
		N	426	426	426	426
	Involvement and responsibility at work	r	-,126	-,097	-,090	-,102
		P	,009	,045	,064	,036
		N	426	426	426	426
	Relationships with work colleagues	r	-,266	-,241	-,396	-,197
		P	,000	,000	,000	,000
		N	426	426	426	426
Job satisfaction, challenge, use of skills and autonomy	r	-,318	-,400	-,307	-,192	
	P	,000	,000	,000	,000	
	N	426	426	426	426	
QWL general total	r	-,500	-,456	-,479	-,192	
	P	,000	,000	,000	,000	
	N	426	426	426	426	

p<.05

Examination of Table 4 presents a medium level, negative and significant relationship between perceived Quality of Work Life sub dimensions of support from manager/supervisor, freedom from work related stress and job satisfaction, challenge, use of skills and work alienation sub dimensions of powerlessness, meaninglessness and isolation. It shows a low level, negative and significant relationship with the alienation from school sub dimension.

While a low level, negative and significant relationship was observed between the QWL sub dimension of salary and additional benefits and powerlessness sub dimension of work alienation, no significant relationships were observed for the meaninglessness, isolation and alienation from school sub dimensions. No significant relationships were observed for the communication sub dimension and powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation and alienation from school sub dimensions.

Low level, negative and significant relationships were observed between the QWL involvement and responsibility at work sub dimension and the work alienation powerlessness and meaninglessness sub dimensions, whereas no relationships were detected for the isolation and alienation from school sub dimensions. Medium level, negative and significant relationships were found between relationships with work colleagues and the isolation sub dimension of work alienation, while low level, negative and significant relationships were observed for the powerlessness, meaninglessness and alienation from school

sub dimensions.

While medium level, negative and significant relationships were observed between quality of work life and the powerlessness, meaninglessness and isolation sub dimensions of work alienation, low level, negative and significant relationships were observed between quality of work life and the alienation from school sub dimension. In general, negative relationships were detected between all sub dimensions of Quality of Work Life and sub dimensions of work alienation.

## 5. Discussions

Teachers' highest Quality of Work Life perception was found to be related to relationships with work colleagues, followed by communication, decision making and job security, support from manager/supervisor, job satisfaction, challenge, use of skills, freedom from work related stress, involvement and responsibility at work and salary and additional benefits, respectively.

In general, it was found that teachers had negative perceptions regarding the salary and additional benefits, and involvement and responsibility at work sub dimensions of the Quality of Work Life scale, while they had positive perceptions in the remaining sub dimensions.

The literature review reveals other studies that point to teacher dissatisfaction with salaries. For instance, teachers included in the studies of [31], [32],[8], [33],[34], [35], [36],

[37]and [38]stated that salaries were not fair, and the teachers in [39]study asked for a payment system that would improve their social status.

The sub dimension of involvement and responsibility at work includes participation of the employee in decision making and having opportunities in work related areas. This finding in the study can be interpreted that teachers have negative perceptions regarding participation in decision making processes and having more efficient roles in work related issues. Studies by [40], [8], [41], [42], [43]and[37], in which teachers have negative perceptions about participation in decision making at schools, support this finding and studies by [44], [45]and[46]confirm that teachers want to participate in decision making processes at higher levels.

Investigating primary school teachers' perceptions regarding work alienation shows that alienation from school was the sub dimension in which work alienation was perceived at the highest levels, followed by powerlessness, meaninglessness and isolation. This finding related to high teacher perceptions emphasizing alienation from school are parallel to the findings of [47], [48], [11], [23],[49] [50]and[51].

Alienation from school was found to be the sub dimension in which teachers felt the highest level of alienation. The alienation from school sub dimension includes not wishing to take high responsibility in school related matters, lack of comfortable feelings at school and having negative emotions towards the teaching profession. It can be claimed that alienation experienced at this dimension may be linked to school management, problems among teachers, and that teachers are kept out of decision making processes. Negative teacher perceptions related to the QWL sub dimension of involvement and responsibility at work may support this case as well.

While a negative, medium level and significant relationship was observed between quality of work life andthe powerlessness, meaninglessness and isolation sub dimensions of work alienation, a low level, negative and significant relationship was detected between quality of work life and alienation from school. Findings by[28]and[52], which point to negative relationships between quality of work life and employee alienation, are parallel to the findings of the current study. In line with this, it can be claimed that increases in positive perceptions towards quality of work life will decrease work alienation in teachers. Increasing the quality of work life provides tangible and intangible benefits both to employees and to the organization. Some of these benefits include job satisfaction and motivation, formation of organizational identity and increases in work force performance. At the same time, increases in quality of work life will decrease personal alienation of the employees and of society in general, and will ensure that individuals enrich their lives via beneficial experiences[28]. These aforementioned benefits will make positive contributions first to the individual and then to the organization, and in the end will

benefit the society.

## 6. Results and Suggestions

The research results show that teachers displayed negative perceptions in the salary and additional benefits and involvement and responsibility at work sub dimensions of the Quality of Work Life scale, while they had positive perceptions in the other sub dimensions.

Arithmetic means regarding teachers' perceptions on work alienation show that teachers felt alienated from school, followed by feelings of powerlessness, meaninglessness and isolation.

In general, negative and significant relationships were detected between all of the Quality of Work Life sub dimensions and the work alienation sub dimensions. Based on the research findings, suggestions for implementation are presented below:

1. Administrators should adopt a management approach in which employees participate in decision making processes more, in order to change the negative perceptions related to involvement and responsibility at work to positive perceptions;
2. A performance-based salary system may be activated in order to increase teachers' satisfaction regarding their salaries;
3. Measures can be taken by school administration to increase teachers' organizational ownership and commitment levels, in order to decrease alienation from school.
4. Based on research results, efforts should be made to have teachers get rid of negative perceptions on quality of work life in order to reduce alienation in teachers.

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