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Teachers' Work-Life Balance in Emergency Remote Teaching During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Ilgın Ünal, Sabiha Dulay

Abstract: The balance between personal life and work life is essential to achieve desired outcomes. However, the COVID-19 global pandemic changed the way people live and work and affected schools like other organizations. Teachers were expected to work from home and adapt to the tools and technologies used in distance education. Working from home has blurred the borders between work and personal life and might affect the work-life balance adversely. Although there are studies based on the work-life balance of academicians, there is a gap lack of in the experiences of teachers on work-life balance during emergency remote teaching, especially those who worked at private schools. Therefore, the aim of this study is to identify teachers' experiences on work-life balance in emergency remote teaching. The current study was designed as phenomenological research. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 11 teachers who were selected through the purposive sampling. The obtained data were analyzed through content analysis. The findings of the study revealed that there were two themes as (i) challenges for work-life balance and (ii) ways of maintaining a work-life balance. It was found that the teachers, who had to work from home, did not maintain a balance between personal life and work because of such challenges as inadequacy of workspace, irregularity of working hours, lack of support and role conflicts. Consequently, they failed to achieve the desired outcomes of work and individual lives which adversely affected their well-being. Besides, working from home and distance education seem likely to continue even after the pandemic has ended. Hence, this study will provide practical and managerial implication for human resources, crisis management and work-life balance.

Keywords: work-life balance, Covid-19 pandemic, distance education, working from home, emergency remote teaching.

Highlights

What is already known about this topic:
- The literature identifies the measures taken in the pandemic such as emergency remote teaching and working from home.
- Recent studies indicate that working from home has had a significantly negative impact on individuals by blurring the borders between their work and personal life.

What this paper contributes:
- Teachers faced different challenges such as inadequacy of workspace, irregularity of working hours, lack of support and role conflicts which prevented them from maintaining a work-life balance.
- Organizational supports and teachers' commitment to their profession were identified as important stimulants of work-life balance during the COVID-19.

Implications for theory, practice and/or policy:
- The findings emphasize the need for further studies discussing excessive workload and lack of organizational support considering the obstacles such as workspace, role conflicts and infrastructure.
- There is a need for similar studies at different schools by including family members and other stakeholders since they can provide a broader perspective on the work-life balance and a supportive working culture for remote working conditions.

Introduction

Establishing a balance between work and personal life is essential for a balanced, happy and successful life. Regardless of their social status in society, every individual strives to balance his or her work and personal life. However, due to the conditions getting harder every day, it is getting more difficult for individuals to maintain this balance with only their own efforts (Lockwood, 2003), especially in the period of COVID-19, during which the boundaries between home and work have disappeared (Rawal, 2021). While establishing a healthy balance between their professional and personal life plays a critical role in the success of individuals, the process of working from home, which became more widespread with the pandemic, has made it even more challenging for individuals to achieve this balance (Angayarkanni, 2021; Irawanto et al., 2021; Syrek et al., 2022; Uslu, 2020).

COVID-19, which hit the world in early 2020, created a social and economic shock and has changed the way people live and work (Irawanto et al., 2021). To prevent its spread, many regulations were taken such as lockdowns and working from home (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020). In line with these, schools were closed and teaching practices were sustained at home. It was defined as emergency remote teaching which was about surviving in a time of crisis with offline and/or online resources (Bozkurt et al., 2020). This resulted in blurring the borders between work and personal life and leading to changes in working lives of educators. In their longitudinal study, Jandrić et al. (2021) emphasized the transformative impact COVID-19 has had on the working lives of educators since they continued teaching in shared workspaces, where being and teaching online is part of their daily routines at homes. On the contrary, staying at home adversely affected both teachers and students and caused stress, anxiety, depression and loneliness (Al Lily et al., 2020). Therefore, what is urgent might not be teaching at home, but the role of these shared workspaces within digital divide, domestic space and personal caring challenges to respond to the demands of emergency remote teaching (Jandrić et al., 2021).

The work-life balance has different dynamics for different occupations (Uslu, 2020). In terms of the teaching profession which demands higher levels of the professional labor and responsibility, the work-life balance should be handled multi-dimensionally to have qualified and healthy teachers. While as a result of the closure of the schools during the pandemic, it has become difficult for teachers, who teach outside the traditional classroom environment and spend most of their days at home in front of the computer, to manage their personal and professional lives and to balance these two areas (Sundari et al., 2020), the fact that the work and living areas have become the same place has also blurred the borders between the two areas (Naswall et al., 2008). Consequently, teachers have been trying to adapt to the distance education as the process contains within itself some features that teachers are not inherently familiar with, such as online meetings, using technology effectively, preparing online content and being expected to be constantly available. In addition, they experience burnout, anxiety, stress and family conflicts since they cannot set boundaries between their work and private lives (Rawal, 2021; Sundari et al., 2020; Uslu, 2020). For instance, Uslu (2020) reported that teachers have difficulty in maintaining work-life balance in the distance education process and have conflicts within the family and tend to focus more on their family roles rather than on their work-related roles. In their studies based on the work life balance of academicians, Demir and Budur (2022) emphasized that academic staff were demotivated when their work interfered with their personal life, which was a significant influencer of their academic performances. However, the studies on teachers' work-life balance are relatively scarce. The related studies mostly focus on job stress, job satisfaction, organizational performance (Agha, 2017; Hafeez, & Akbar, 2015; Johari et al., 2018; Padma & Reddy, 2014) and family conflicts (Cinamon & Rich, 2005). Akın et al. (2017) argue that the studies on work-job balance carried out in Turkey deal with the relationship between work-life balance and concepts such as performance, organizational citizenship, work engagement, burnout, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, intention to leave and alienation using the quantitative methods. Therefore, studies covering the views of the teachers in relation to their work life balance are needed.

Literature

Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance is described as achieving a balance between family or personal life and work (Jyothi & Jyothi 2012). In the concept the word "work" refers to the individuals' specialty and occupations while the word "life" refers to leisure activities and personal life of the individuals (Sharma & Nayak, 2018). Therefore, the work-life balance can be defined as the individuals' fulfilling their needs, expectations and responsibilities in these areas in a way that does not cause conflict and dissatisfaction (Greenhaus et al., 2003; Guest, 2002; Lockwood, 2003). Behaviors developed in one area (work life) might be transferred to other area (personal life) or vice versa (Kotera et al., 2020). In line with this, Greenhaus et al. (2003) defined work life balance as "the extent to which an individual is equally engaged in and equally satisfied with his or her work role and family role". Hence, the individuals will feel stressed when they lack the necessary resources to fulfill both work and family roles (Irawanto et al., 2021) and the imbalance between these areas will cause a decrease their productivity and performance (Konrad & Mangel, 2000).

The changes in business and social life during COVID-19 caused the work to be done without being tied to time and place. It provides individuals with many advantages such as flexible working hours, no transportation and traffic problems and the comfort of the working environment (Bell et al., 2012; Uysal & Yılmaz, 2020). On the other hand, working from home has increased the workload of the individuals and made the working period uncertain which in turn, leads to role conflicts for individuals (Dockery & Bawa, 2020; Foy & Rockett, 2019), difficulties in self-discipline and motivation (Doğrul & Tekeli, 2010). Individuals who are accustomed to having regular and fixed working hours, have difficulty in creating a border between work and private life due to the limitations brought by the pandemic and because of this, working from home has produced negative effects on the work-life balance (Irawanto et al., 2021). Hence, COVID 19 raised new concerns about work life balance since lockdowns forced individuals to stay or work from homes. The concept of work has thus undergone a major shift as the pandemic accelerated digitalization, flexibilization, autonomy and self-regulation (Rudolph et al., 2020). The pandemic lockdown has also blurred the boundaries between work and personal life and merged these two areas. Individuals were not able to divide their time between work and personal life and being disconnected from their working environment during lockdown triggers their work stress (Irawanto et al., 2021). Moreover, many people did not have a separate room for work and had to share the same workplace with the other family members, which eliminated the boundaries between the two areas and has affected the work-life balance adversely (Syrek et al., 2022). The decrease in work life balance increased work-home role integration and work-non-work conflicts (Demir & Budur 2022; Syrek et al., 2022).

However, establishing a balance between the work life and personal life of the individuals is essential for achieving the desired outcomes relevant to personal life since it has positive effects on individuals' job satisfaction, organizational commitment, life satisfaction and performance (Cohen & Liani, 2009; Guest, 2002; Pekdemir & Koçoğlu-Sazkaya, 2014). Therefore, the lack of the work-life balance leads to decrease in job satisfaction, organizational commitment (Bruck et al., 2002; Saeed & Farooqi, 2014), productivity and performance (Doğrul & Tekeli, 2010; Johari et al., 2018). Individuals who cannot cope with stress and burnout due to lack of work-life balance are more likely to experience work-family conflicts (Demerouti et al., 2013; Doğrul & Tekeli, 2010; Hilbrecht, 2008) and leave the profession (Qiu, 2010; Tosun & Keskin, 2017; Vithanage & Arachchige, 2017). Therefore, maintaining a balance between work and personal life is not easy due to isolation and lockdown policies in the pandemic. Besides, very few studies emphasize the effect of work life balance during COVID-19 (e.g., Demir & Budur, 2022; Irawanto et al., 2021; Syrek et al., 2022). It has thus become essential to investigate the experiences of individuals with regard to their work-life balance during this pandemic. The current paper investigates work life balance based on the experiences of teachers. Like other areas, the schools and the field of education encountered confusion and difficulties during lockdown. Schools were suddenly closed and

face-to-face education was replaced by distance education. Children and adults were forced to stay at home for extended periods of time as the home became their school, their playground and their workplace (Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2021). In this regard, teachers were required to adapt to tools and technologies of distance education and the process of working from home. They struggled with developing new routines and strategies to adapt and manage these changes during pandemic. Although there are studies based on the work life balance of academicians (e.g., Demir & Budur, 2022; Durak & Çankaya, 2020; Ashencaen-Crabtree et al., 2021) and the challenges that they faced during the pandemic, there is a gap in the experiences of teachers on work life balance in remote education during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially those who worked at private schools. From this point of view, the study fills the literature gap by investigating the work-life balance of teachers since it has become a necessity for the well-being of individuals and institutions during the pandemic. The aim of this study is to understand experiences of teachers working from home during COVID-19 to establish work-life balance. It is thought that the results obtained would contribute to the practices and improvements to be made in the context of working from home and work-life balance. In this vein, this study aims to answer the following questions:

- What are the challenges which are being faced by teachers to establish work-life balance in emergency remote teaching?
- What are the strategies to be used by teachers within work-life balance in emergency remote teaching?

Methodology

Research Design

In this study, the phenomenology design was used since the aim of the study is to reveal the experiences about the work-life balance of the teachers who had to work from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which still continues to affect the world. The phenomenology design aims to reveal facts that we know, but do not have a detailed view about through the contributions of the individuals who have experienced them (Creswell, 2016; Patton, 2014).

Data Collecting Tools

The data of the study were collected through the semi-structured interviews. To develop the interview questions, the studies on the work-life balance during emergency remote teaching and the COVID-19 epidemic were examined and then the interview questions were developed about the term work-life balance, challenges and strategies for a healthy balance. These questions were then examined by a relevant field expert and a pilot interview was conducted with three teachers by using these items. As a result of these interviews, the final version of the interview questions was determined. The interview form consisted of six open-ended questions and some complementary sub-questions to clarify them. The interviews lasted approximately 45-60 minutes. Face-to-face interviews could not be conducted due to the COVID-19 restrictions. Instead, the interviews were made through phone calls, WhatsApp, Google Meet and Zoom platforms. The interviews were recorded after they were confirmed by the participants. An ethical confirmation form was gathered from Graduate Institute of university. Also, the participants were informed about the study and required to read and confirm the voluntary participation form. When we recognized the same themes coming out repeatedly at the end of the interviews, we decided to stop finding new ideas or participations. We realized that we had reached data saturation.

Study Group

The participants of the study consist of eleven teachers who were selected through purposive sampling. They were working at a private school as pre-school or primary school teachers. The participants were

selected among teachers who worked from home during the pandemic and who volunteered to take part in the study. Table 1 shows the demographical characteristics of the participants.

Table 1. Demographical characteristics of the participants

Demographical characteristics		f
Gender	Female	7
	Male	4
Marital status	Married	4
	Single	7
Age range	24-29	5
	30-37	6
Educational background	Undergraduate	8
	Graduate	3
Professional experience	2-7 years	6
	9-14 years	5
Teaching field	Classroom teaching	4
	Pre-school education	3
	English language	2
	Other	2
Having children	Yes	3
	No	8
Residence	With family	10
	Without family	1

Data Analysis

The data obtained were examined using content analysis. The content analysis consists of four stages: coding the data, finding the themes, organizing the codes and themes, defining and interpreting the findings (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). After the audio recordings of the interviews were written down, the coding process started. This process consists of determining what the participants have said, establishing relationships between codes, categories and themes. As a result of the analysis of the data, certain codes, categories and themes were identified. Based on the similarities and differences, the code, category and theme connections were established. Finally, the findings were interpreted within the context of the research.

Validity and Reliability

One of the methods used to ensure internal validity, which expresses the compatibility of the data with external reality, is the examination of the tools used to collect the data of the study by experts (Merriam, 2009). The interview questions used in this study and the codes, categories and themes obtained from the data were examined by field experts and the necessary changes were made in accordance with the feedback of the experts. One of the frequently used methods to increase the adaptability of the results obtained in a qualitative study to another situation (external validity) is to explain the process in detail. In the method section of the study, the data collection tool, information about the participants, research design, data collection, analysis and interpretation stages were all explained in detail. Detailed

descriptions of the processes in the study and the findings were made and quotes reflecting the views of the participants were frequently included.

Different strategies can be used to ensure reliability or consistency of the qualitative studies. Triangulation, expert review and supervision are some of them (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Merriam, 2009). To increase the reliability of the study, the processes related to the selection of the participants, the development of the interview questions, data collection and data analysis, the development of codes, categories and themes were presented in detail and expert opinion was obtained on these issues. Code names were used in the study to mask place and person names. In addition, in the data analysis, themes were created in line with the consistency and integrity of the findings. Based on the compatibility of the sub-themes and categories of the constituent themes with each other and with the other themes, they were transferred directly without any comments or generalizations.
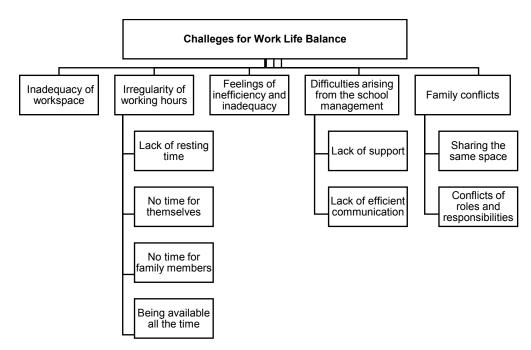
Findings

The findings obtained in the study are discussed under the following headings: (i) challenges for work-life balance and (ii) ways of maintaining a work-life balance.

Challenges for Work Life Balance

It was difficult to establish a work-life balance for teachers who had to work from home during the pandemic. In line with the findings, it is found that there are some factors that make it difficult for teachers to maintain work-life balance. These are given as follows: (i) the inadequacy of workspace, (ii) irregularity of working hours, (iii) feelings of inefficiency and inadequacy, (iv) difficulties arising from the school management and (v) family conflicts. These are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Challenges for work-life balance

Inadequacy of workspace

The inadequacy of suitable physical space to work from home is one of the aspects that negatively affect the work-life balance of teachers. In situations where the boundaries between work and private life

become blurred due to the lack of physical space, the participants tried to create a working environment where they could teach or they forced everyone in the house to comply with their own working order which gave rise to greater imbalance between work and personal life.

> I could not find a suitable working environment at home. I had to deliver courses and work from my bedroom because there is not enough space in my house. (Aleyna)

> I turned my own room into a working environment. I hung posters related to school activities on my walls for. I also turned my dining table into a working desk, thus merging the family's living space with my work environment. (Güneş)

Irregularity of working hours

The lack of resting time, not being able to allocate time for themselves and family member and being available all time were the problems teachers faced during emergency remote teaching because of the irregularity of working hours. The participants, who reported that the resting time was not enough during the process, emphasized that they had to spend their time for developing the teaching and learning materials, making the house suitable for courses, or meeting their own personal needs. Therefore, they never found an opportunity to rest and felt exhausted.

> Sometimes I did find time to rest, but such periods were very short, about ten minutes or so. It was difficult to even make time for my basic needs such as eating or drinking water. For example, there were times when I had to skip lunch just because I had classes. (Özgür)

> Working from home has caused me to have a lot of research and workload and to hinder my own private affairs, personal care and family responsibilities. It did not contribute anything to my personal or my family life, on the contrary, it took a lot out of me. (Ayşe)

Within the scope of the work-life balance, it is emphasized that individuals should allocate time not only for their work life, but also for their themselves and families. However, the participants stated that they had not been able to allocate necessary time for themselves due to the irregularity of working hours and had asked other family members for help to meet their basic needs due to the bans during the pandemic. The participants also reemphasized that they did not spend enough time with their family members because of the irregularity of working hours and the overflow of work-life into family life, in other words their non-work life. Those who stated that their workloads had increased due to the excessive work demands of online teaching methods, which greatly consumed their personal time. They could not cope with this situation and sometimes they had to resort to solutions they did not want and expressed the feeling of guilt with the following words:

> Due to such working hours and this working order, I frequently had to leave my son alone when I was working. And although I was not very happy about it, I gave him my iPad just to keep him busy for a while. It seemed like I had no other choice. (Ayten)

> I have never had a private life, which was a difficult for me. We are stuck at home during the pandemic. We were working from home all the time and frankly, there was no such thing as the concept of overtime. There was a constant working environment. Our home has become like our workspace. (Merve)

Working from home during the pandemic process led to the emergence of perceptions among the participants such as "being constantly accessible" due to the working hours that had become uncertain and flexible for teachers. The participants stated that they could limit their working hours when they were working at a school, but that they were always reachable while working from home. They also reported that parents or the school administration could call them any day or time of the week

> *It so happened that parents could reach me at any time they pleased. We were expected to be at their disposal day and night. When you are at school, you can say "I'm at school until 5 or I'm at school until 4 or I'm at school until 6, those are my working hours." Unfortunately, while working from home, parents were always trespassing upon our kindness and didn't care about how we felt. (Doğa)*

Feelings of inefficiency and inadequacy

Given that each child has his own style of learning and unique needs, while arranging teaching-learning activities are quite difficult even in the classroom environment, distance education without adequate infrastructure made it much more difficult for teachers to teach by using different methods and tools. Attempting to maintain 'teaching as usual' under exceptional, conditions was viewed as very stressful. One participant explained that the feelings of inefficiency he felt affected his work life balance with the following words:

> *During this period, we tried to contribute to the physical development of the students by organizing physical activities that students could do individually within confined spaces in their own homes. But the contents of physical education course were already restricted by the measures imposed by the pandemic. I thus felt inefficient as a teacher. This feeling affected both my relationships with my family members and my teaching performance. (Osman)*

> *There were times when I felt very stressed. On the one hand, you are trying to understand and please the parents and the students, on the other hand you are unable to achieve your what you want to do. I got completely lost in this confusion. (Güneş)*

Difficulties arising from the school management

It is apparent that the teachers who had to work from home during the pandemic had difficulties in maintaining a work-life balance in terms of their relationships with the school administration as well as their individual and work-related situations. Based on the views of the participants in this regard, the problems arising from the school management are grouped under the categories of (i) the lack of support from and (ii) the lack of effective communication with school management.

In the process of trying to maintain the work-life balance, individuals may be able to manage this process more efficiently and easily with the support they receive from their environment. The difficulties resulting from the pandemic, the increasing workload and psychological factors made it difficult for individuals to balance their work and personal life, while increasing their need for support from their environment. Although the participants thought that they could manage this process more easily with the support they received from the school administration, they were not able to receive any financial or moral support. In fact, the school administration gave importance to the completion of work rather than the well-being of teachers. Participants also highlighted organizational supports during COVID-19 as important stimulants of their work-life balance.

> *The school administration did not provide any kind of support. Neither material nor moral. Luckily, I had my own computer and I did not have to use my personal internet account for the courses. On the other hand, I also have friends who did not have adequate teaching resources. Along with the unreliability of internet services in Turkey, all teachers had to cope with the unfavorable conditions on their own. We all felt neglected. (Özgür)*

It is seen that the participants generally do not evaluate the process management and communication of the school administration as being effective, accurate, collaborative and harmonious. Not seeing the necessary care and respect in the administrators' approach, keeping the wishes, needs and interests of

the institution in the foreground by ignoring the private life increased the pressure on the teachers and caused the boundaries between work and personal life to become blurred.

> *School administrators did always communicate with us, but it was not exactly the kind of communication we expected. Apparently, they were not interested in our well-being, or they did not ask whether we needed any support or help in terms of mental states. Instead, they informed us about the parents' messages to us or they instructed us some activities that should be done in the courses. In short, it was not what we needed. (Doğa)*

Family conflicts

The views of the participants concerned with the family conflicts are discussed under the following two categories: (i) sharing the same space and (ii) conflicts of roles and responsibilities. Teachers who had to work from home during the pandemic period were constantly together with their families or people with whom they shared the same space. Staying at home together for extended periods of time causes the work and private life spaces to interfere with each other and increases the conflicts between family members.

> *Before the Covid-19 pandemic, we used to live a normal routine life. We all left the house in the morning. We went to our schools to work and our son went to his own school. However, during the process of working from home, the home and work got mixed up. The confusion negatively affected our home life both socially and psychologically. It was a period when everybody was at home. It was like a bomb ready to explode. We felt so depressed and so overwhelmed. (Aleyna)*
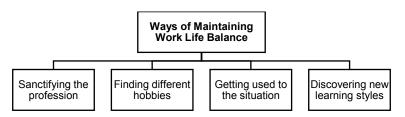
The roles and responsibilities of individuals outside of work also play an important role in their family life. The work-life balance supports the fulfillment of the responsibilities of the employees in their private life as well as in their professional life and the allocation of enough time for themselves, their family and their work, which foster their feeling of life satisfaction. It is seen that teachers, especially mothers, feel inadequacy and guilt due to the responsibilities brought on by their work and family roles. Work-life conflicts arise due to multiple role pressure and expectations of working women. Accordingly, female teachers stated that while balancing their work and personal life, having more than one role could not keep up with their maternity responsibilities while fulfilling their childcare and needs.

> *Although we were physically in our homes, we were also at work. In the early days of the pandemic, I was a mother at home, a teacher in the online classes, a wife who had to cook, clean the house, look after the children and a teacher who was required to prepare teaching and learning materials for the courses. (Ayşe)*

Ways of Maintaining a Work Life Balance

The teachers who participated in the study have implemented various techniques to maintain work-life balance during emergency remote teaching, when they had to work from home. These are grouped under following four headings: (i) sanctifying the profession, (ii) finding different hobbies, (iii) getting used to the situation and (iv) discovering new learning styles. Figure 2 presents these paths:

Figure 2. Ways of maintaining work life balance

Sanctifying the profession

Although there were difficulties and problems faced by the teachers while working from home during the pandemic period, there were also duties and responsibilities expected from them. In spite of imbalance in their non-work lives and relationships, the participants believe in themselves and were confident that they could do their jobs. The participants expressed their dedication to their profession and the belief that the teaching profession is sacred. This mentality gave them the power to go beyond and cope with difficulties.

> If you are a conscientious person, it's only normal that you try to do your best. Otherwise, you feel bad as a teacher. Of course, this affects your personal life and relationships as well as your well-being. But considering the importance of my profession and I will continue to do so. (Doğa

> I realized that I had to work harder to adapt to the process and to fulfill my responsibilities. I learned to work faster and became more active and practical. This process made me think more about being more practical. (Ayten)

Finding different hobbies

Although most of the participants had difficulty in planning their time efficiently during the pandemic period, they found different hobbies to maintain a work life balance.

> There were movies that I had not been able to watch before due to the lack of time. During this period, I had an opportunity to watch them. Likewise, I read the books I wanted to read. In this way, I tried to reduce the effects of work and life imbalance. Thanks to virtual museum tours, I discovered many museums that I had always wanted to visit, from my home. (Osman)

> I wanted to do things that I hadn't done before. I learnt to paint landscapes on the Internet and made oil paint and charcoal drawings. I assembled a multi-piece jigsaw puzzle. I even started learning Spanish, thanks to free apps. ["Hola a todos!"(Hello everbody)] (Deniz)

Getting used to the situation

One of the ways for the participants to establish a better work-life balance was familiarizing themselves with the process. In this way, they started looking at it from a different perspective and were able to appreciate its advantages, such as being able to deliver courses independent of space and time. This in turn motivated them to plan their time more efficiently.

> At the beginning, I had found the process of working from home and not having a decent office to work in, so frustrating and unreasonable. However, in time I got used to it and I realized that it was not unreasonable at all; and that my work could be run from home. Yes, I could teach everything I taught at school from home, just sitting in front of the computer! (Egemen)

Discovering new ways of learning

The participants stated that, by researching different web tools, new teaching methods, techniques and programs to meet the requirements of the distance education, they had discovered new learning styles apart from classical methods. They reported that these new methods contributed to their professional development.

> However, during this period I had to do practically everything on the internet. Now I can surf the internet and have access to a lot of teaching and learning material. I can use web2 tools.

Learning new techniques and using technology and using new programs have had positive impacts on me. By focusing on this process, I was able to spare more time for myself personally and improved myself in the field of the teaching and learning material development. (Deniz)

I realized that online education would be in our lives for a long time. I started attending online training courses, seminars and programs that would contribute to both my personal development and my professional development. I feel I have benefitted a lot from all these (Ayşe).

Discussions

The findings of this study, which aims to reveal the experiences of teachers working from home during the pandemic, are discussed with regard to two aspects: (i) challenges for work-life balance (ii) ways of maintaining a work-life balance. In the interviews with the teachers, it is observed that the teachers who started to work from home with emergency remote teaching had various difficulties in separating their work and non-work lives from each other and in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities to achieve a healthy balance between these two areas. The factors that make this process challenging for teachers were found to be as follows: (i) inadequacy of workspace, (ii) irregularity of working hours, (iii) feelings of inefficiency and inadequacy, (iv) difficulties arising from school management and (v) family conflicts.

For teachers there was inadequacy of physical space during emergency remote teaching since they had to teach from their homes. This situation has also led to the disappearance of the boundaries between work and private life, thus making it difficult for them to establish a work-life balance. For teachers, who had to spend most of their day in front of a screen with limited movement, it has become difficult to protect the balance between the two areas (Sundari et al., 2020). Working under such conditions, in which they could not decide when and where they would be working at home, led to the disappearance of the boundaries between work and private life (Naswall et al., 2008). Teachers were not prepared for distance education and working from home during the pandemic. Therefore, they did not have a separate room for work and share the same place with other people, which eliminated the boundaries (Syrek et al., 2022) and increased work–non-work conflicts during the pandemic (Demir & Budur 2022).

Another issue that made it difficult for teachers working from home during the pandemic to establish a work-life balance was the irregularity of working hours, which has heightened the imbalances in the working order and discipline and increased workload and work intensity. With the increase in the time allocated to work, teachers had difficulty in allocating time for themselves and their families. In addition, due to the lack of sufficient resting periods, they experienced more fatigue and stress as well as intra-familial conflicts. There are many studies supporting this finding. In these studies, it is reported that long and uncertain working hours cause problems in family relationships and work-life imbalance (Demerouti et al., 2013; Doğrul & Tekeli, 2010; Hilbrecht, 2008). Not giving equal importance to work and non-work life can reduce the time allocated to one area and cause conflicts between the roles and responsibilities, which in turn tends to increase the conflict between the two areas (Foy & Rockett, 2019; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Uslu (2020) stated that primary school teachers have difficulty in maintaining a work-life balance and that they experience intra-familial conflicts more frequently since they give more weight to their work-related roles than their family roles. On the other hand, in a study carried out by Irawanta et al. (2021) on job satisfaction, stress and working from home. In the study, it was concluded that individuals accustomed to certain and fixed working hours had difficulty in establishing a work-life balance during the pandemic period and this has affected their job satisfaction negatively. It is possible to argue that the uncertainty of working hours and the increasing workload is an important component of the work-life balance which make it difficult to allocate time to the two areas in a balanced way.

The work-life balance, which refers to the harmony between the work life and private life of the employees, has aspects that require physical, psychological and mental effort (Choi & Kim 2017; Lockwood, 2003). It has been observed that the social isolation created by the pandemic conditions and the obligation to stay at home have had an unforgettable impact on the mental state of teachers who had to work from home and emphasized the feeling of inadequacy and inefficiency. Previous studies reported that individuals with work-life imbalance problems experience depression, burnout, increased anxiety and stress, difficulty in being motivated at work, an inability to maintain self-discipline and a decrease in their performance (Çobanoğlu et al., 2019; Guest, 2002). Studies conducted in educational institutions revealed that the performance and success of individuals who could not maintain the desired work-life balance during the pandemic and their research and teaching efficiencies declined, as well (e.g., Barooj & Gani, 2019; Nwangwa, 2021).

Work-life balance, which is a multidimensional phenomenon, can be affected not only by individual efforts and factors, but also by organizational processes. In the interviews with the teachers, it is seen that the attitudes and behaviors of the school administrators have an important role in establishing a work-life balance. The teachers who could not get the necessary support and cooperation needed from the school administration frequently complained that they had difficulty in coping with the negative conditions created by the fact that school goals and parent expectations were given more importance than their own well-being. Developing communication strategies and exchanging ideas between the school administrators and teachers is necessary to ensure a work-life balance (Cowan & Hoffman, 2007). These findings are consistent with previous studies that found social support from supervisors and co-workers to significantly influence work-life balance of workers as important stimulants (Uddin, 2021). However, the failure of the school administration to communicate with teachers properly and their suppressive and compelling attitudes to force teachers to show better performance and effort has created a working climate devoid of empathy and effective communication.

One of the issues frequently mentioned by the participants is family conflicts. They experienced intra-familial conflicts more in the process of working from home since they could not always share the same space and fulfill the roles and responsibilities of work and family life. There appears to be an increase in work- and family-based conflicts during the pandemic (Rodríguez-Rivero et al., 2020; Uslu, 2020; Ying et al., 2020). It has been observed that particularly female teachers had more difficulty in maintaining a work life balance during the pandemic. The conflict between motherhood roles and responsibilities and teaching roles and responsibilities made it much more difficult for women to balance their work and family life. They tried to find and answer for the question whether they were mothers or teachers. In most of the studies, it is reported that women have more difficulty in maintaining the balance between work and private life and that they experience more work and private life conflicts due to their domestic responsibilities (Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2021; Rawal, 2021; Uddin, 2021). In addition, recent studies show that women's mental health was more adversely affected due to the lockdown compared to men's mental health (Pieh et al., 2020).

The second theme analyzed in this study, which aims to reveal the experiences of the teachers about the work-life balance, is the ways to maintain a work life balance. While working from home during the pandemic period, teachers took actions to ensure work life balance. Of them the most frequently reported actions are as follows: (i) sanctifying the profession, (ii) finding different hobbies, (iii) getting used to the situation and (iv) discovering new learning styles. It is seen that teachers try to show a self-sacrificing approach to ensure the continuity of their work by keeping their morale and motivation high during the pandemic period. Their belief, love and dedication to the teaching profession have been a tool giving them the necessary strength and desire. Yılmaz and Altınkurt (2015) conducted a study on teachers. In this study, teachers' opinions on the personal development, professional sensitivity, emotional labor and contributions to the institutions were taken. As a result of the study, it is found that there is a relationship between teachers' perceptions about the professionalism and the work life balance. On the other hand, the meanings that teachers attribute to the teaching profession and their deep devotion arising from their perspective of the profession paves the way for the work-life balance

to deteriorate in favor of work. However, this deterioration becomes meaningful and valuable for teachers (Uslu, 2020). Despite all these negative experiences in this difficult process, it is noteworthy that teachers try to be in harmony with their profession and have a positive emotional commitment to their profession. Therefore, sanctifying the profession appears to be an important component of work-family conflict, both as a cause and as a way of avoiding it.

In establishing a work life balance, teachers have acquired different hobbies that give them pleasure and relax and have been instrumental in their adaptation to the limitation of working from home. In addition, they think that it is instructive and enjoyable to teach through the distance education and prepare course content and materials, which is a completely new process for them. In this process, teachers have discovered new learning styles by specializing in using technology and preparing online course content and materials. The use of technology by teachers in the distance education process has been examined in many studies. In these studies, it is found that teachers have difficulties in using distance education tools, but they could prepare only simple presentations and visual materials. In addition, they do not use Web 2.0 tools and need training in terms of using technology effectively and integrating it into their lessons (Başaran et al., 2021; Korucu & Karalar, 2017; Yıldırım, 2020). Almost everyone in distance education considered distance education as a challenge during the complete lockdown of the pandemic. It was seen that teachers were involved into distance education with almost no training and support about distance education. Hence, they faced difficulties in preparing content, using tools and managing the process (Bhaumi & Priyadarshini, 2021; Sari & Nayir, 2020). This may serve as a basis for educational policies to take the necessary precautions to improve the delivery and quality of distance education.

Conclusion, Implications and Suggestions

The current study aimed to identify teachers' experiences on work-life balance during the pandemic. Teachers encountered various challenges such as inadequacy of workspace, irregularity of working hours, lack of support and role conflicts, which hindered them from maintaining an efficient balance between their work and personal lives. Consequently, they failed to achieve the desired outcomes in their work and personal lives. To manage these changes in their lives such as distance education and working from home, they found different strategies. Hence, there are some theoretical and practical implications in this study. Theoretically, the current study fills the gap in the literature by investigating the challenges and strategies used by teachers for maintaining the desired work-life balance in distance education during COVID-19 pandemic, since there are not many studies on how teachers managed the abrupt changes brought by the pandemic to protect work-life balance for a happy and healthy life. In addition, this study comes up with a suggestion for the necessity of the organizational support and effective communication between teachers and school administrations since the teachers see the organizational support as an important incentive for work-life balance. When teachers receive support from their organizations and feel the care and empathy, they find the power and motivation to continue. Since the organizational support is an important factor for teachers in this study, it could be necessary to provide training for institutions to increase the awareness on the necessity of supportive working environment. Otherwise, they sanctified teaching profession and got the strength and desire to manage challenges in this pandemic. It has also been indicated that working from home, which has blurred the borders between work and personal lives of teachers, might negatively impact work-life balance. In this vein, this study might help school administration, policy makers to consider and to become aware of and take into consideration teachers' needs and problems in distance education and working from home. In addition, it is also necessary to pay attention to problems related to the workload and working hours which adversely affect work-life balance considering the obstacles such as working space, role conflicts, infrastructure and tools for distance education. Apparently, we have all had different experiences during the pandemic and faced psychological problems such as anxiety, depression and stress due to sudden changes and challenges. Consequently, it can be concluded that there is a need for due care and understanding on part of the organizations. It can also offer the schools an opportunity to finally move

forward with preparations to enhance classroom infrastructure and making changes in perception of online learning. Problems experienced in the work-life balance affect not only individuals, but also their families, organizations and their immediate environment. Therefore, the existence of work-life balance is essential both for individuals and organizations. In this context, raising awareness of the society about the work-life balance in general, developing strategies to cope with potential work-life conflicts and commitments for a better work-life balance during the pandemic are important points to be emphasized.

Limitations and Direction for Future Studies

There are some limitations in the study. First it was carried out with a small sample. Carrying out similar studies at different school types and levels, including family members and other stakeholders in the study process can provide a broader perspective on the work life balance. It is important to investigate the areas where teachers have problems in establishing and protecting the work-life balance, the roles played by school management and other stakeholders, to create a supportive working culture and fostering remote working conditions appropriate for the work-life balance and to make the necessary arrangements and improvements. This study was carried out among teachers currently working at private schools. Future studies could be conducted at different private and public schools to compare the experiences of teachers within different context. In this study, the data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Therefore, studies could be conducted with a wider group of participants to evaluate the impact of work life balance by using quantitative research designs. Since the organizational support is an important factor for teachers in this study, it might be necessary to provide training for institutions to raise awareness of the necessity of a supportive working environment. As a final remark on this issue, it is worth highlighting that, while the Covid-19 crisis has brought about challenges and anxiety that teachers have never experienced before, it might be an offer the schools an incredible opportunity to move forward with preparations to enhance classroom infrastructure and making changes in the perception of online learning.

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About the Author(s)

- Ilgın Ünal; ilginunal@gmail.com; Bahçeşehir University, Turkey; https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0352-4040
- Sabiha Dulay; sabiha.dulay@es.bau.edu.tr, Faculty of Educational Sciences, Bahçeşehir University, Turkey; https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9994-0363

Author's Contributions (CRediT)

Ilgın Ünal: Literature, Methodology, Findings & Discussion Writing; Sabiha Dulay: Introduction, Discussion, Conclusion, Implications and Suggestions & Limitations and Direction for Future Studies Writing, Reviewing & Editing.

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Conflict of Interest

 The authors do not declare any conflict of interest.

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The datasets used and/or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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