Comparative Analysis of North and South Cyprus’ Teachers’ Perceptions of Teachers’ Unions

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Abstract
This study aims to examine the views of primary school teachers from North and South Cyprus on Teachers’ Unions. Qualitative research and a comparative case study method were used for the study. Thirty-seven primary school teachers from North and South Cyprus participated in this study. The data were obtained through interviews and analyzed by the content analysis method. The comparison of the findings of the research suggests that the functions of trade unions are related to the pressing issues of education, teachers, and the nation in both regions. Turkish Cypriots placed emphasis on education-related functions, while for Greek Cypriots teachers-related functions mattered more. Turkish Cypriot teachers assessed the functions of their unions to be more unsatisfactory than their Greek Cypriot counterparts.

Keywords
teacher unions, Cyprus, Turkish Cypriot teachers, Greek Cypriot teachers, primary education.

Introduction
Evolution of human civilization has witnessed long processes of people’s struggles throughout history. History tells us, starting from primitive times until the Industrial Revolution, that people struggled to meet their basic needs and for material gains and their rights during and after the Industrial Revolution. The Industrial Revolution led to increasing use of mechanical tools and equipment and diminished the importance of man power and labor. This forced people into struggling together, with an aim to obtain and protect their rights and material provisions, make internal changes to stand against poverty and equality. Therefore, unions should not be seen as just an entity of economic interest but also the agents and advocates of fundamental human rights (Bensusán, 2019; Savage, 2009).

Formation of unions is the result of endeavors of workers organizing to seek rights and protect themselves to regulate the relationships between employers and employees caused by the liberal economy, and to control the pressure placed on workers by the employers, who are economically stronger (Bascia & Osmond, 2012; Yüksel, 2000). In other words, unions are organized structures for providing solutions to problems created by industrialization (Yorgun, 2007), with the aim of protecting the rights and interests of their members (McCollow, 2017; Tokol, 2002), representing a part or whole of employees (Lieberman, 2000), and aiming to provide benefits and rights to their members based on common and equal conditions (Eraslan, 2012).

As they can be found in most professional groups, unionizing activities are widespread among teachers, who constitute a large section of public workers. The importance of teachers’ unions in Cyprus is greater than other unions because their foundations, laid in the 1920s, are nearly a century old and they are not only fully conscious of their legal rights but have a positive attitude toward addressing social issues and political solutions in Cyprus. In some other countries of the world, especially those where existing rights were denied, teachers’ unions were the first to get organized to fight for their rights (Sullivan, 2009). The first country where teachers’ unions were born is England, which was extensively affected by the Industrial Revolution and is also the birthplace of several other unions (Gül, 2007). Teachers’ unions were also formed in countries like France, Switzerland, and the United States (Taş, 1995). In addition, in Latin

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In short, teachers in many countries have chosen to organize to secure personal benefits, as well as contribute to education and instruction (Cowen & Strunk, 2015; Lott & Kenny, 2013; Matsudaira & Patterson, 2017; McCollow, 2017). Looking at teachers’ unions in different countries, it can be seen that there are not many differences in their basic aims and objectives. Most of them struggle for higher wages for teachers, better personal benefits, humane working hours suitable for living conditions, and for a better understanding of education (Çınar, 2008; Koç, 2000; Öcal, 1998; Taş, 1995).

Concept of Union and Unionizing

Examined through the historical process, the term union, as the equivalent of “syndic,” has been used to describe people assigned to providing unity and representation, within the framework of Roman and Greek legal understanding (Dinç, 1998). In the Türk Dil Kurumu (TDK), the concept of a union is defined as a body of employees, as well as employers, forming a unit with the aim of protecting their rights relating to labor and income, and also to ensure their socio-cultural development (TDK, 2018). Mahiroğullar (2011) states that the word union was coined in many European countries after the Industrial Revolution, meaning “union of labor,” such as “trade union” in English, and “gewerkschaft” in German. Different social researchers working on the topic of unions, on the other hand, define the concept of union in various ways. To give a few examples, Johns defined the concept of unions as “non-government organizations, outside the public service of a country” (as cited in Yorgun, 2007, p. 40); Bal (2007) defined them as “mass organization[s], coming together to provide similar rights to all workers regardless of their religion, ethnic identity, and political view” (p. 30); and Daud and Tumin (2013) defined them as “organization[s] defending compensation right[s] for workers, job safety, rights of workers, and running collective bargaining between employer and employees (p. 124).”

Researchers trace the roots of unionizing in the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution. During this period, workers got together to protect their rights as a group, rather than individually and, thus, started the process of unionizing (Tortop, 2005). Çınar (2008) states that unionizing first appeared in England because of the disintegration and divergence between the tools of ownership of production brought about by the Industrial Revolution and the labor of workers. Workers got together for self-assistance, and the unity that formed took the name of unions.

Researchers have been conducted in various parts of the world on the effects of teachers’ unions on both personal benefits of teachers and on the academic success of students. For example, Rose and Sonstelie (2010), in their research in regional Californian schools, investigated the correlation between the size of the region and the negotiating power of teachers’ unions. The conclusions of the study established that as school regions grew in size, the negotiating power of unions increased, and this had a positive effect on teacher quality and student success. Through their studies, Matsudaira and Patterson (2017) established that teachers’ unions are more effective in charter schools in the United States, and these unions have positive effects on the academic success of students.

Berkant and Gül (2017) examined the perspectives of teachers toward unions, in their study carried out in Kahramanmaras. This study established that, although unions have many contributions (i.e., sociocultural, legal, economic, etc.), their contributions toward educating students were limited. Moreover, it was also stated that they were extensively influenced by the political developments in the country, and this situation caused conflicts and disparities. In a study on the contributions of teachers’ unions toward education reforms in Namibia, Kudumo (2011) established that unions played various roles in different political contexts and that they did not have a wide vision for radical changes. Cowen and Strunk (2015) compiled the studies on the effects of teachers’ unions on school regions and students’ academic success, in the K-12 school system.

History of Unionizing in Cyprus

In Turkey, which shares a common past with Cyprus, unionizing activities was a more recent development compared with other countries (as cited in Yasan, 2012). Workers’ unions developed first in Turkey, and public service unions were formed much later; however, the reaction toward public service unions have been stronger compared with workers’ unions (Mutlu, 2000; Tortop, 2005). Exploring this process in Cyprus, Dedecay (1981) stated that the initial gains of worker rights started after the Ottoman Empire took control of the administration of the island. After Cyprus was conquered by the Ottomans, the Sultan sent a decree to the island and all the slaves living there were granted freedom. The natives of Cyprus gained the right of choosing whatever jobs they wanted and earn a specific wage. Thus, they were elevated from being slaves to members of the working class, receiving wages for their work. A large process of organization was not seen in Cyprus until 1915. In 1915, it was observed that labor support and solidarity associations were formed in Limassol in small groups (Cyprus Turkish Workers Union Federation-Türk-Sen, 2018).

The first attempts at organization of workers in Cyprus started among construction workers in Limassol coming together in 1919 under the umbrella of “Construction Workers Association” (An, 2011). This association of workers, which became the first instance of unionizing in the island, was an association where Turkish and Greek Cypriots were members together. The regulations, speeches, and
announcements were made in both languages, and this contributed to workers from both communities becoming members. This association was followed by “Limassol Workers’ Center” founded in 1924, with members from both communities, which aimed at bringing all workers under a single organization (An, 2011). The first known strike in Cyprus was carried out by the members of this union in 1927, on the Troodos Mountain, with about 1,000 workers (Ulaş, 1999). This was followed by the “Skuriotissa Mine Strike” in 1936 (Varnava, 1997) and the “Limni Strike” in 1941. Thus, mine strikes were recorded in history as the first strikes in which Turkish and Greek Cypriots jointly participated.

The unionizing movements that began in Limassol are recognized as the beginning of organizing processes in the island. These arrangements and organizing activities continued until 1940 without showing much result. Although there was a union law passed in 1932 in the island (Dedeçay, 1981), transformation to the concept of a union started in 1941 (Kornienko et al., 1969). In 1941, the British Administration drafted the Unions and Labor Disputes Law and implemented it. After this law was passed, trade union activities increased in the island (Irkaç, 2004). Although they were rather weak during their initial years, these unions increased their activities with the workers reuniting in 1946 and with the formation of the “Cyprus Labor Federation” (PEO) (Kornienko et al., 1969). The PEO became a strong and effective union by uniting workers from both communities (Varnava, 1997). With this union, the people of the island offered a great resistance to the British Colonial Administration and carried out common activities. Workers who united under this union, especially those working at the mines (which were the main source of income of the period), went on strikes against the British Administration from time to time (Varnava, 1997).

Coming together with Greek Cypriots at first and establishing unions under the umbrella of PEO, Turkish Cypriots stood up to the increasing demands of the Greeks for joining Greece. Therefore, they left the PEO and attempted forming their own organizations (An, 2005). At the first division between Turkish and Greek Cypriots, the two communities parted ways and formed separate unions known as “Turkish Cypriot Unions” and “Cyprus Workers’ Confederation” (SEK), respectively (Ioannou & Sonan, 2014; Tuncel, 2012). The first union they formed after leaving the PEO is known as the first union in the history of Turkish Cypriots. The “Nicosia Turkish Carpenters Union” founded by Niyazi Dağlı on November 27, 1942, with 12 carpenters as members, is accepted as the first union of Turkish Cypriots (An, 2013). The second union is the trade union named “Sun,” founded in 1944. Turkish labor unions were formed in all other parts of the island from 1942 to 1945 and were organized together under the umbrella of “Cyprus Turkish Workers’ Union.” This name underwent various changes over time, and it eventually came to be known as Türk-Sen (Saygılı et al., 2013).

With the bi-communal unity broken on the island, and the move to living separately after the 1974 Operation becoming a reality, new legislative, executive, and judicial organs were formed. Those Turkish Cypriot workers who immigrated from the south to the north, united in Türk-Sen, and they later founded unions such as the Cypfruvex, TÜK, and Dev-İş, which are still active. The teachers’ unions founded before North Cyprus are Cyprus Turkish Teachers’ Union (Kybris Türk Öğretmenler Sendikası [KTÖS]) and Cyprus Turkish Secondary Education Teachers’ Union (KTOEÖS). These teachers’ unions are still functioning at present under the same names. Besides these teacher unions, other important unions such as the Cyprus Turkish Public Servants’ Union (KTAMS), Cyprus Turkish Electricity Authority Workers’ Union (EL-SEN), Municipality Laborers’ Union (BES), and Cyprus Turkish Telecommunication Office Workers’ Union (TEL-SEN) are still functioning (Saygılı et al., 2013). Unions have an important place in society under the contemporary democratic administration, and this importance is increasingly growing. There are 83 unions registered under the Unions Registrar in North Cyprus; however, only 53 of them are active. The distribution of these unions is as follows: 37 public service and labor unions, 7 educational unions, 3 health services unions, 2 civil aviation and press/media unions, 1 tourism union, and 1 employers’ union (Yenidüzen Newspaper, 2018).

**Formation of Teachers’ Unions in Cyprus**

The concept of organizing, which initially began with the workers, spread to other occupational groups and finally to public servants. Defending the public servants’ right to organize, Moe (2011) said they carried the same concerns which workers in the private sector did toward the end of 19th century and the first half of the 20th century; and they sought job security, better wages, and work conditions for the development of cooperation. Therefore, public servants also followed the same path toward unionizing.

Numerically, teachers make up a large section of public servants. The first organization of Turkish Cypriot teachers was the “Teachers’ Union” founded in 1924. This organization, bringing together both primary and secondary teachers, split into two in 1968. On October 30, 1968, KTÖS, the union of primary school teachers, and KTOEÖS, the union of secondary school teachers were founded (KTOEÖS, 2018; KTÖS, 2020). The Turkish Cypriot teachers launched their first united struggle and went on a strike in 1969 at a time when being a unionist was disapproved of. After this strike, there was pressure on union executives, and there were some arrests. Despite this, KTÖS received support initially from its members, and eventually from the Turkish Cypriot community, and grew stronger (KTÖS, 2020). To continue its struggle more effectively, Cyprus Turkish Teachers’ Union floated a political party in 1976 (Communal Liberation Party [TKP]).
TKP became an important political movement and carried out its activities in successive general elections. Both KTÖS and TKP have launched various campaigns for democratic rights, political will, organization, solidarity of people, labor struggle, and especially for peace. “This Country is Ours,” which is an important platform in the political history of Cyprus, was founded by 47 non-governmental organizations including KTÖS. Working for the above mentioned values, this platform carried out its activities for a short period of time and was later dissolved. KTÖS then founded the “Cyprus Peace Platform” with fewer organizations (12 NGOs). This platform works together with Turkish and Greek Cypriots for a united Cyprus, based on a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation (KTÖS, 2020). Secondary school teachers, who broke away from the Teachers’ Union on October 30, 1968, and assembled under the banner of KTOEÖS, have organized the present day with their members only increasing. KTOEÖS, with 2500 members, is the teachers’ union with the highest number of members in North Cyprus. Besides defending personal benefits of teachers, KTOEÖS is involved in activities on political, social, and economic issues which are of concern to society at large (KTOEÖS, 2018). Although many different educational unions have been founded, such as the ILK-SEN, Education Volunteers Union, and Cyprus Turkish Educators’ Union, there are two unions which are officially affiliated under the Ministry of Labor and Social Security of North Cyprus (Ministry of Labor and Social Security, 2018).

While educational unions witnessed this development in North Cyprus, their South Cyprus counterparts were united under “Cyprus Teachers’ Union” between 1911 and 1931. However, the organization underwent a change between 1931 and 1936. First, “Greek Teachers Bishopric Union” (PEDR) was founded in 1936, followed by two unions, the “Pancyprian Greek Teachers’ Association” (POED), and “The Organization of Greek Cypriot Secondary Education Teachers” (OELMEK) in 1953. Besides these two active unions, there is another union called “The Organization of Technical Education Officers of Cyprus” (OLTEK), which represents technical, vocational teachers (OELMEK, 2019; POED, 2019). In a World Bank Report (2014a), it is stated that membership to these three powerful teachers’ unions in South Cyprus is commonplace. They are involved in collective bargaining on the issues of teachers’ working conditions, remuneration, and evaluation.

Greek Cypriot Secondary Education Teachers’ Union (OELMEK) was founded in 1953 to carry out educational and commercial activities, when Cyprus was still under the British administration. This union was a national-political organization in nature inspired by Cypriot Hellenist and nationalist sentiments because of the political situation of the time. Afterward, it began to struggle for the development of state schools, working conditions of teachers, and defending their legal rights. Today, OELMEK is known to be the union with the largest number of members. All members of the organization are active teachers working in secondary schools. The main goal of the union is to continuously develop public schools. Therefore, they have been involved in extensive activities in the field of education. In addition, the union also strives for improving work conditions of its member teachers and, thus, enhancing the honor and prestige of the teaching profession (OELMEK, 2019). In 2003, OELMEK suggested “changes in the teacher evaluation system” and proposed “teacher self-evaluation and evaluation of the evaluators” (The World Bank, 2014b, p. 23).

Another union in South Cyprus, the POED, was founded on April 9, 1953, with the goal of organizing primary school teachers. The POED’s center is in Nicosia, and its district offices are active in all cities in South Cyprus. The union is run by a number of collective organs. The highest administrative organ is the Bishop General Representatives’ Conference, composed of 100 General Representatives, elected every 3 years by secret vote and chosen from among the district general offices proportionately. The Union Executive Committee, composed of 25 members elected as General Representatives, is the executive body of the Pancyprian Conference, and is responsible for taking decisions and promoting the policies of the union. The basic vision of the union is the improvement of education and teachers; encouragement and protection of the professional interests of its members; providing professional, social, and economic benefits to its members; ensuring the welfare and general improvement in the living conditions of its members; and contributing to strengthening individual and political freedom and rights, besides upholding the principles of freedom, peace, and democracy (POED, 2019). In 1990, the POED was seriously involved in proposing ideas for the improvement of the education system. For example, it recommended the separation of the roles of evaluators and consultants for inspectors. POED also proposed a more transparent system of evaluation and professional development of the inspectors (The World Bank, 2014b).

In 2004, teacher unions and political parties made a serious effort in setting national standards in the education system. Teachers’ unions in South Cyprus currently offer opportunities for professional development of school teachers and organize conferences to keep teachers updated with the educational developments (The World Bank, 2014b).

**Aim of the Research**

This research seeks an answer to the question “What are the opinions of primary school teachers working in the north and south of Cyprus toward teachers’ unions?” The following questions were formed with the aim of responding to the main question of the research:

- What are the primary functions of teachers’ unions in the north and south of Cyprus?
• How are the relations between teachers’ unions and member teachers in the north and south of Cyprus?
• What are the approaches of unions toward solving problems?
• What are the metaphors teachers use for teachers’ unions in the north and south of Cyprus, and what are the meanings they attribute to the unions?

This research may be of immense value in assessing the state of teachers’ unions in the same geographical region—the island—but under two different administrations. It is aimed to contribute to the literature by establishing the similarities and differences of teachers’ unions in both parts of the island, based on teachers’ opinions.

Method
Model of Research
This research was designed as a comparative case study. For the qualitative research approach, it is essential to have effective participation of the researcher in the process, a natural data collection environment, flexibility in the research model, a holistic assessment, an in-depth analysis of opinions, and an inductive perspective (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). Although comparative case study approaches have been used in qualitative studies for a long time, they are especially used to analyze similarities and differences across two or more cases in societies in intercultural studies, and to define and explain them. Comparative case studies are effective in garnering in-depth understanding of basic issues in countries across the world, in the explanation of new conceptions, in filling the gaps that could appear or occur in data, and in establishing previously unseen aspects and, thus, widening perspectives (Balç, 2013). The compared cases in this study are the two different regions of Cyprus, and the researched topic is the educational unions. Primarily, each case is studied separately, a holistic assessment is made, and later one studied case is compared with the other.

Sample of the Research
The sample of this research comprise 25 Turkish Cypriot primary school teachers working at North Cyprus state schools in the Spring Term of the 2017–2018 academic year, members of KTÖS and non-members, and 12 Greek Cypriot primary school teachers working at state schools in South Cyprus, members of the POED and non-members. The “purposive sampling” approach was used in the selection of samples, which is suitable for an in-depth examination of situations thought to yield rich data (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). The primary education level was chosen purposively because, in a recent report (KTÖS, 2020) that evaluated primary education in the Northern part of the Cyprus historically, primary school teachers have stated they found the teachers’ union more adequate and helpful than the Ministry of Education. The researchers of the current study evaluated these results as important and aimed to provide in-depth understanding of this issue. The researchers also sought to understand what the situation was like in the south of Cyprus in comparison.

Participants selected for the study were suitable for “convenience sampling,” as they worked in different parts of the island and were already known to the authors. Teachers who were not members of unions were also included in the research because it was aimed to realize an objective assessment.

Data Collection Tool and Collection of Data
In this study, semi-structured interview technique was used, in which interview questions were predetermined and data were collected through these questions (Karasar, 1998). The interview form, consisting of questions planned to be used by the authors in advance, was used by asking probing questions where needed, based on the flow of the interviews. Semi-structured interviews help the researcher explore certain issues the interviewees face, and discover specific areas related to the problems they are working with during the interview. The researcher can also examine these problem areas in depth with more detailed questions (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013).

The interview questions prepared by the authors were designated to “establish the primary functions of education unions, the state of unions performing these functions, their interactions with members, the state of members reaching out to their unions, and the level of interaction between them.” In addition, teachers were asked what they thought their unions looked like and why (metaphorical study). For the internal validity of the questions used in the research, opinions of three experts, two from the field of educational administration and a Turkish language expert, were sought. Thereafter, a pilot application of the questions was carried out with four primary school teachers, thus giving a final form to the interview questions.

The experts in the research team examined the data of the study at each phase to ensure the validity and reliability of the research. Detailed description was given in presenting the findings, and research data were conveyed as they were. The researchers commonly decided on the coding and theming of the data to ensure consistency.

Interviews with Turkish Cypriot teachers were conducted at previously specified places after working hours and Greek Cypriot teachers were also interviewed post their working hours in the Nicosia Buffer Zone. Each teacher was met individually and interviews lasted approximately 45 to 50 min.

Analysis of Data
Data were analyzed by the “content analysis” technique. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), content analysis
is realized in four phases which are, “separating content into codes, identifying themes by analyzing codes, unifying codes and themes by examining them, and interpreting findings by writing them.” First, the findings obtained during interviews were written down and prepared for analysis with the aim of coding them. Then, the written content was classified in a way to form meaningful wholes. The coding list was prepared and “consensus” was achieved by the researchers. The codes designated in the research were organized as headings (categories) and subheadings (themes). To present participant opinions in the study, each teacher was assigned a numeric identifier, and names were concealed to maintain anonymity. Turkish Cypriot teachers were presented as “TT-1,” and Greek Cypriot teachers were presented as “GT-1.” The opinions of participating teachers were presented as quotations, aiming to provide validity for the research.

Findings

Research findings were presented based on four research questions mentioned in the introduction of the research. The opinions of Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot teachers were presented, respectively. The subthemes emerging from the views of the participants were grouped under the main themes formed from the research questions.

Theme One: Primary Functions of Teachers’ Unions

Views of Turkish Cypriot Teachers

The views of teachers related to the first theme were divided into four subthemes: “education related functions,” “functions related to teachers,” “functions related to the country,” and “other.” For the first subtheme, participants emphasized that teacher unions performed functions such as “solving education and teaching related problems,” “carrying out activities related to education and teaching,” “dealing with the problems of schools,” “contributing to the enhancement of educational policies,” “guiding educational policies,” and “increasing the quality of education.”

Two teachers said,

I think the most important function of a teachers’ union is to solve the problems related to education, and carry out activities on education and teaching by following innovations. (TT-1)

The most important function of teachers’ unions should be education. Everything about education; carrying out activities on education, contributing to the development of policies, increasing the quality of education are the most important duties of a union. (TT-9)

Under the second subtheme “functions related to teachers,” issues like “defending the personal benefits of teachers,” “developing the occupational competence of teachers,” and “conducting transfer processes of teachers” emerged. Some of the teachers’ opinions are as follows:

It is the duty of teachers’ unions to defend the personal benefits of teachers and prevent the usurpation of their rights by new laws besides solving education-related problems. (TT-7)

Besides solving education-related problems, our union should contribute to the professional development of its members, so they can provide better education. It should organize courses and conferences periodically with the aim of professional development of teacher members. (TT-18)

Our union has a broad range of duties. Although the primary duties are defending the vested interests of teachers, and contributing to the improvement of the educational system, developing a just transfer system at present and ensuring regular transfers are also duties of our union. (TT-22)

In the “functions related to country,” which is the third subtheme, issues such as “being sensitive towards problems of the country,” “providing proposals to solve problems of society,” and “doing research to enhance public service efficiency” arose from the interviews. The subtheme “being in contact with international education organizations” did not fit a suitable theme; therefore, it was slotted under the heading “other.” Teachers said,

KTÖS was founded during difficult times of our community and it has reached the present day with a great support from its members. Although it is a teachers’ union, I think it has among its duties to be sensitive to the problems of society and contribute to possible solutions, and raise awareness among its members on such solution proposals. (TT-4)

KTÖS is in cooperation with other teacher unions in Europe and sends its members to visit those countries at different times of the year. I think this is also a task of KTÖS, a useful practice, and that it should be expanded. (TT-20)

Views of Greek Cypriot Teachers

The opinions of teachers on this theme are examined under three subthemes. Based on the findings, it can be observed that the most important task of unions under the subtheme “education related functions” is “contributing to the enhancement of education policies,” “carrying out activities related to education and teaching,” and “enhancing the quality of education.” Under the second subtheme, “functions related to teachers,” the function of unions as “defending the personal benefits of teachers” was most emphasized by teachers. This was followed by “enhancing the occupational competence of teachers.” Under the third subtheme, “functions related to the country,” the function as “providing proposals to solve problems of society” emerged. Some opinions are,

The most important task a teachers’ union has to carry out, is to be innovative and to develop education policies. (GT-5)
Teachers' unions should carry out duties towards their members. Specifically, they should promote the personal benefits of their members. (GT-7)

Teachers' unions should primarily study problems related to society and contribute to the resolution of those problems. (GT-12)

Theme Two: Competence of Teacher Unions in Carrying Out Their Functions

Views of Turkish Cypriot Teachers

In accordance with the views of the participants, the competence of teachers' unions in carrying out their functions is classified under four different subthemes: Some teachers stated that education unions are “inadequate” while performing their functions, and they expressed their opinions with statements such as “politics is given more importance than education,” “professional development training toward members is inadequate,” “solving school problems is insufficient,” and “teachers do not trust unions.” Opinions of teachers who found unions inadequate are given below:

Our education unions are interested in political parties and the Cyprus problem more than education-related problems nowadays. I understand their interest in social problems, but I think they are overdoing it. (TT-13)

Our union is dealing with education-related problems as best as it can, and trying to solve problems of teachers. But I do not find its contribution to teacher development and to the professional development of its members. (TT-25)

I think people in the administration of the union discriminate among members and are not fair enough towards them. I find the union inadequate at this point. Therefore, I believe teachers are losing confidence in the union. (TT-6)

Under the subtheme “Adequate,” issues such as “unions promote the rights of employees” and “complaints are treated with sensitivity” emerged from the views of the participants. Teachers who thought so said,

Teachers are a lucky section of the community to have such a union as KTÖS. Whenever I go to the union with a problem, they try to find ways to solve it at once. I think the union is sensitive toward its teachers and their rights. (TT-2)

I believe our education union is performing all its duties and responsibilities successfully. I think it is a pioneer union in both protecting the rights of teachers, and solving problems of the community. (TT-18)

Looking at the conditions of the country, our teachers’ unions do not show their competencies completely. Unfortunately, each party that comes into power wants to make changes in workers’ rights and teachers’ benefits, and our union is not completely adequate in dealing with these problems. (TT-4)

I believe, particularly lately, that KTÖS has failed to carry out its function fully, and is having difficulties in dealing with teachers’ problems and reaching the desired results in educational activities. (TT-19)

In the final subtheme, teachers stated that the union carries out its functions “most of the time.” One teacher said,

As a member of KTÖS, I believe our union gives the most value to its members, compared to other unions, and that most of the time it can meet the expectations of teachers in carrying out its functions successfully. (TT-23)

Views of Greek Cypriot Teachers

The theme “the competence of teacher unions carrying out their functions” is explained under three subthemes, based on the opinions of Greek Cypriot teachers. Most of the teachers stated that education unions are “adequate” in carrying out their functions. They expressed that “employee rights are protected.” A group of participants said it was adequate without giving a reason. Some of the teachers found the unions “inadequate.” Those teachers, who think unions are inadequate, expressed that “professional development training for members was insufficient” and that unions are “inadequate in solving school problems.” In the last subtheme, teachers stated that unions are “not sufficient” in carrying out their functions, adding that unions need to improve based on the conditions of the country. Teachers said,

Inadequate. It should inform us parallel to the developing conditions, and should prepare educational programs. (GT-6)

Protects our rights and tries to find solutions. (GT-1)

Ignores problems at schools and does not solve them. (GT-8)

Theme Three: Relations of Teachers With the Teacher Unions

Views of Turkish Cypriot Teachers

Teachers who said “I apply to the union” make up the majority. Some teachers stated that their problems were solved. The other two positive opinions were “although their
problems were not solved, the union administrators made an effort to solve them,” and “their problems were solved to a great extent.” Teachers, who held a negative opinion said that although they applied to the union, their problems were not always solved. The union only evinced interest and solved their problems if they thought they were important and that the union did not always treat the problems fairly. Teachers said,

Yes, the first place I approach when I have problems in my job is my union. I believe my union shows interest in my problem and attempts to solve it no matter what time of day it is. I may have unsolved problems in the past, but still, it is assuring to know there are people trying to solve my problems. (TT-3)

I share my professional problems with my union. Sometimes they are solved immediately, while no ways are found to solve them at other times. I prefer to leave my unsolved problems to time. (TT-5)

I share with my union those problems which I have difficulty in solving within my school, or with my administrators. Although the union shows an attempt to solve them, and sometimes they do solve them, at other times our applications are not dealt with fairly, and they present solutions in favor of members close to them or befitting their interests. (TT-21)

One teacher said that he did not apply to the union for the problems because he did not think the union was transparent enough. He said:

My relationship with the teachers’ union is reasonably fair. The reason for this is that whenever I approach the union for my problems, the union assesses it if it suits their interests. Lately, I do not think the union is sufficiently fair and transparent. Therefore, I do not take my problems to the union anymore. I try to solve my problems by taking it directly to the authorities at the ministry. (TT-6)

Some teachers, who answered this question, stated that they were not members of any teacher unions.

Views of Greek Cypriot Teachers

Concerning the relationship of Greek Cypriot teachers with their unions, the majority of the participants said that it approached the union when it had problems. The opinions in this subtheme were positive and included such responses as “my problems are solved,” “effort is shown to solve it,” and “it is substantially solved.” Some teachers said that they did not apply to the union and, as justification, said, “I try to solve problems myself.” Teachers’ opinions on this category are

I am on good terms with the union. I haven’t had any problems so far. (GT-3)

I solve my problems myself. I do not ask anyone for help, but my relationship with the union is not bad. (GT-9)

Theme Four: Metaphors Related to the Teacher Unions

Views of Turkish Cypriot Teachers

The majority of teachers likened the union to an abstract body using metaphors such as “opposition,” “struggle,” “seek justice,” “protection,” and “strength,” while some of the teachers compared it to a nonliving entity using metaphors such as “community,” “framework,” “chain,” “political party,” “teamwork,” “glass,” and “school.” Some teachers likened the unions to living beings using metaphors such as “a tree root,” “father,” “advocate,” and “mechanic.”

Views of Greek Cypriot Teachers

Some teachers likened the teachers’ union to an abstract being using the metaphor of “power,” while the majority of the teachers likened the teachers’ union to nonliving beings using the metaphors such as “chain,” “team work,” “umbrella,” and “shield.” Some teachers likened the union to a living being using the metaphor of a “partner.”

Discussion

This study has revealed that teachers’ unions in both parts of Cyprus perform functions related to the agendas and politics of the country as well as education and teachers. The reason for reaching this conclusion could be that the Cyprus conflict is on the agenda of the country every day, and the Cyprus negotiations have been going on for years. It can also be the case that in both communities, teachers’ unions have large memberships, respectively, and they are quite effective and active on social issues. Similar to the teachers’ unions in Cyprus, Cerev (2014) states, teachers’ unions in Turkey have the numerical majority among public sector unions, and therefore have a say in the administration of the country. As it has been emphasized in the study by Fidan and Öztürk (2015), this study also observed that unions being interested and involved in the policy of the country is a very important source of attraction for some teachers, but, for many other teachers, it is the reason for not choosing to be members of the union, or even leaving the union. Akcan et al. (2017) found that political involvements top the list of reasons behind teachers not joining unions. Moreover, the findings of this study overlap with the findings of Akcan, Polat, and Ölçüm’s research. These reasons include the unions being seen as a theater of political reconstruction and discrimination and polarization among teachers, based on dominant political leanings. Various studies have established (Aksoy & Günbayan, 2016; Berkant & Gül, 2017; Can, 2012; Karaman & Erdoğan, 2016; Köybaşi et al., 2016) that teachers have
been adversely affected by the association between unions and politics in Turkey. In overseas studies as well (Affourtit, 2019; Givan, 2014; Toloudis, 2015), it was established that teachers’ unions were affected by the politics and politicians of the period and that they sometimes gained from such relationships, but most of the time they were negatively affected.

Looking at the functions of educational unions, it stood out that teachers participating in this study did not articulate opinions on an important topic. While it is expected of teachers’ unions to be flag bearers in realizing educational and school reforms, as Şimşek and Seashore (2008) stated, participants of this research did not mention this function of unions in either part of the island. Buyruk (2015) also stated that teachers’ unions should guide the process of change in education and undertake different responsibilities in reforms. As education occupies a centralized structure in both parts of Cyprus, it can be expected that reforms are developed by the state and implemented by the authorities. From another perspective, education not being a state policy, but being shaped according to the policies of governments, complicates the implementation of educational reforms. Therefore, unions could get demoralized and lose hope when it came to becoming pioneers of change. For example, in their study about the feasibility of the school development model in North Cyprus, Dağlı and Silman (2009) established that teachers’ union expressed a negative opinion on the process claiming that the Ministry of National Education was not sufficiently competent to implement the required reform.

The necessity for international contacts, projects, and communication and cooperation with education unions in Europe was stated by one participant only (from North Cyprus). This suggests that teachers’ unions in Cyprus do not have the capability to assess their own activities, and compare and evaluate their own unions with those in other countries. For example, a research conducted in Israel (Tamir, 2017) pointed out that the rivalry among teachers’ unions in a country generates a transforming effect on the education policies and reforms. In a study, Tok (1996) stated that it is very important for teachers’ unions to cooperate with other unions. As Berkant and Gül (2017) stated in the study they carried out in Turkey, teachers’ expectations from their unions are high in various aspects, such as social, cultural, economic, and legal. A study conducted in the United States, by Pogodzinski (2012), discussed how much teachers’ unions contributed to the socializing of teachers. Thus, it can be seen that teachers’ unions carry out activities in various fields, in many other countries, just like they do in Cyprus and in Turkey.

By interpreting the opinions of the participants of this study, it can be observed that opinions on teachers’ unions in North Cyprus not being adequate outnumber claims of they being adequate. In the south of Cyprus, on the other hand, participants’ opinions on whether the unions are adequate are almost equally divided (slightly more in favor of the unions being adequate). In a research by Fidan and Öztürk (2015) in Turkey, functions of teachers’ unions were found to be inadequate. Studying the opinions of teachers in this study, who stated that teachers’ unions are inadequate, two aspects emerged: (a) opportunities for professional development of teachers not being provided, and (b) problems at schools not being resolved. Bangs and MacBeath (2012) stated that teachers’ unions should directly affect the enhancement of the professional development of teachers; they even said that unions could fill the gap left by governments in this field. In a study conducted in Norway, Mausethagen and Granlund (2012) pointed out that in enabling the professional development of teachers, teachers’ unions are as policy determining as the state. Fidan and Öztürk (2015) talked about the necessity of teachers’ unions in Turkey carrying out activities to enhance the respectability and dignity of the teaching profession. Terzioglu-Barış (2018) underlined that this is possible through the efforts of unions working to increase personal benefits of teachers.

Some serious problems are observed in state-run public education in the north of Cyprus because of some factors. In accordance with the regulation of salaries after 2010, teachers’ salaries were reduced by half and a big gap was created between experienced teachers and newly appointed ones, although they were doing the same amount of work. A study by Winters (2011) in the United States also established that teachers’ unions were unsuccessful in balancing the salaries of novice teachers with those of experienced ones. A similar situation was observed in the north of Cyprus; although teachers’ unions have been working to eliminate the differences in teachers’ salaries, they have not achieved the desired solution. This conclusion shows that the efforts of teachers’ unions can be affected by the economic conditions of the country they work in. Another critical problem in North Cyprus is that not enough importance is given to the supervision of teachers. Throughout their long professional lives (i.e., supervised only once in 30 years), teachers are hardly supervised and their promotions are based on seniority and political appointments rather than their performances. It is observed that the essential environment is not created for teachers who want to enable their own professional competencies. Other important problems of the education system relate to the huge disparities that exist between the state schools and private schools. Private schools are preferred because of the lack of equipment and facilities in state schools where mostly children of immigrant families of lower socioeconomic level study. Local people in Cyprus do not want their children to be educated together with children of immigrant families. Looking at the findings of this research, it is observed that teachers in North Cyprus expect scientific, rational, and objective solutions to problems from their unions. Also, as stated in a study by Iren (2009), teachers demand a more concentrated and planned approach or workings from their unions to eliminate deep-rooted problems. Similar problems are seen in the south of Cyprus, such as schools having to cope with a changing student profile
because of high levels of immigration and teachers’ salaries declining after the economic crisis. In short, the expectations of teachers from their unions in both parts of the island are high on the issues of multicultural education and disadvantaged groups (students of lower socioeconomic levels, immigrant children, insufficiencies in special education, etc.). Hoxby (1996) pointed out that the ratio of children leaving schools in areas with teachers’ unions was high. Lovenheim (2009), on the other hand, found that unionizing did not have any positive effects on the ratio of students leaving school. In their study, Eberts and Stone (1987) established that efforts of teachers’ unions were not effective in ensuring productivity in education for the students whose academic performance was below average. In a research, Milkman (1997) established that teachers’ unions could positively affect the success level of minority students in schools where they are in majority, but in schools where minority students did not make up the majority of the student body, teachers’ unions were not sufficiently effective. Therefore, the findings of the above mentioned researches show that, as in Cyprus, teachers’ unions in other parts of the world need to carry out more functional activities for disadvantaged students.

The general opinion of participants of this study was that they obtained solutions when they approached their unions with their problems. This conclusion was reached by teachers in both parts of the island. The reason for this could be that the population of the island is small, or the fact that the number of teachers as members of teachers’ unions is much smaller compared with other countries. Unions can have the opportunity of devoting more time to their members and successfully dealing with their problems one-on-one. It should also be kept in mind that teachers’ unions have a historical past, providing them with experience in problem solving and, thus, enabling them to solve problems effectively in a short time. Members who are effective in teachers’ unions (those who get the most votes) are chosen, and these influential teachers are granted official leave by the Ministry of Education so that they can carry out their union duties. They are at the union office during school hours, which allows them easy access to teachers and proximity to the problem, so it can be solved on-site. Therefore, it can be said that professional unionism is being carried out. In their research conducted in Turkey, Berkant and Gül (2017) pointed out that teachers must become members of unions, because unions make teachers feel safe and their voices heard and defend their rights. Can (2012) also emphasized the importance of placing trust in unions because he felt that teachers in Turkey did not believe their occupational problems could be solved through unions. In addition, a research by Kara (2016) showed that there was inequality between male and female members in unions in Turkey, and this inequality can only be eliminated by unions treating all members equally, women having a say in the administration, and being favored. On the other hand, Taşdan (2012) states that teachers’ unions in Turkey struggle with their internal problems (economic difficulties, not finding sufficient number of members, not being able to represent themselves sufficiently, not carrying out activities fearing political pressure from governments, not being taken into consideration by political leaders), and therefore they cannot help member teachers enough, and they cannot deal with teachers’ problems in the real sense. In a research by Tok (1996), it was established that legal arrangements need to be made to eliminate the problems teachers’ unions are facing. On the other hand, researches carried out in the United States (Coulson, 2010; Hoxby, 1996) revealed that teachers’ unions were criticized for increasing public costs, while they did not contribute to quality in education and student success.

Data were obtained for this research by asking teachers to use metaphors for the researchers to understand and analyze their opinions regarding unions. It was observed that metaphors used by teachers in both parts of Cyprus reflected their positive opinions about the unions, and this is valid for both parts of the island. Primarily, metaphors such as “framework” and “chain” emphasized the unity of teachers. It was suggested that unions are places where rights are defended and they are centers of struggle and opposition by using metaphors like “shield” and “umbrella.” It was mentioned that unions protect teachers and the “father” metaphor was used for this. Finally, it was emphasized that unions have a past, a history by using the “deep-rooted tree” metaphor. In a research carried out in the United States, Şimşek and Seashore (2008) also noted the significance of the use of metaphors related to unions, similar to the ones in this study. In their research, the word “hammer” was used to describe the power and opposition of the union, which is different from the ones in this study. “Bear” was used to define the protective function of the union, and for the function of unity the term “round table” was used. It is observed that metaphors used in the United States differ from the ones used in Cyprus, but the meanings attributed to unions are similar. In a study assessing teachers’ unions in Turkey, Eraslan (2012) presented expressions similar to the descriptions of unions appearing in the metaphors of this study. He also established that teachers’ unions in Turkey have a past going back to the Ottoman period and that there is a powerful organizational network among members. On the other hand, Buyruk (2015) in his study points out that meanings attributed to teachers’ unions in Turkey have changed. It was established that reconciliative and “moderate” unionism is acceptable while resistant unionism is marginalized. According to opinions of union administrators and teachers participating in the research by Karaman and Erdoğan (2016), one of the most important problems faced by the unions in Turkey is that they do not have the right to strike. It was emphasized that this problem adversely affects the unions’ power of opposition and struggle.

In conclusion, although the views expressed about the unions are generally positive and it is believed that unions solve problems easily and swiftly, an important finding
revealed that teachers find the functions of unions in Cyprus inadequate. It is quite reasonable for teachers to expect their unions, which have a long history, to perform too many, and a variety of, functions. The necessity was felt for unions which focus on the infrastructure of schools, the development of students, and the professional competence of teachers, working with a just, reliable, and scientific discipline, rather than focusing only on personal benefits and devoting time to the politics of the country. In the study by Berkant and Gül (2017), it was shown that the contribution of unions to education-training was limited. Cowen and Strunk (2015) found that teachers’ unions did not adequately affect student success; on the contrary, they had a negative effect on it. In this respect, as shown in the research by Vachon and Ma (2015), it is clear that teachers’ unions need to plan and implement activities toward improving students academically. Milkman (1997), on the other hand, emphasized that in countries with teachers’ unions maintaining a certain standard had to be established in schools. He also pointed out that unions had to be active to ensure that schools’ resources can be accessed by all students based on equal opportunity and according to the assessment and update of educational programs.

The studies related to teachers’ unions conducted in different countries in the last 5 years (Bourn, 2016; Finger & Gindin, 2015; Stevenson, 2015) emphasize that it is not enough for teachers to deal only with national education problems. It was observed that many noneducational issues such as migration, terrorism, global warming, racism, and economic problems affect the world and also education systems negatively. From this point of view, it is not advisable for teachers to be trapped in the vicious circle of their national education systems or just to fight for their personal rights. It is said that teachers’ unions should see the big picture and think socially and be a transformative force for societies. It is known that teachers’ unions have political power in many countries. Based on the findings of this research, it can be said that teachers’ unions in both parts of Cyprus have made efforts to transform their communities, like teachers’ unions across the world.

Saygılı et al. (2013) stated that apart from teachers’ unions, there are many unions in different sectors of the economy (such as those related to workers, civil servants, professionals) in Northern Cyprus. What these unions and teachers’ unions have in common is that they are actively involved in social and political issues and even have a common platform. For example, in 2004, during the Annan Plan Referendum process, many unions in different sectors in Northern Cyprus came together and carried out joint activities to unite Southern and Northern Cyprus and establish a federal republic. Saygılı et al. (2013) pointed out that unions in all sectors can actively work on political events, but they should be objective, take the public in confidence, and not be the advocates of any political party. Ioannou and Sonan (2017) have revealed that there are unions in different sectors in Southern Cyprus that are closely dealing with the country’s social, political, and economic problems, as in Northern Cyprus. Ioannou and Sonan’s research (2017) revealed that unions in the south have better international representation and contacts with different countries, unlike those in the north.

Conclusion

It can be said that research findings show similarities between Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots in that in both parts of the island, functions of unions are related to education, teachers, and the country. Turkish Cypriots placed more emphasis on educational functions, while Greek Cypriots gave priority to teachers’ personal well-being. The majority of Turkish Cypriot teachers as well as their Greek Cypriot counterparts assessed the functions of unions as inadequate. The majority of teachers in both parts of the island said that they approached the unions to find solutions to their problems and the unions solved these for them. Finally, metaphors used by both Turkish and Greek Cypriots showed similarities (power, chain etc.), and expressions such as “togetherness,” “protective,” and “having a deep history” were voiced by both communities.

Implications

This research showed that primary school teachers working in both regions of Cyprus were disturbed by the political activities of their unions. Therefore it may be suggested that it is very important to clearly explain the establishment’s objectives and the vision-mission of the unions. Similarly, it can be deduced that teachers’ unions in Cyprus should take a more active role in education reforms. The views of the teachers also implied that there is an expectation from teachers’ unions to cooperate with other unions in Cyprus to solve educational problems. Teachers’ unions, especially in Northern Cyprus, are expected to increase their cooperation activities with trade unions in different countries. On the other hand, according to the results of the research, it has been revealed that cooperation activities are currently carried out in Southern Cyprus. Teachers’ unions need to be more active and increase their functions in providing scientific and effective solutions to ingrained problems (such as the education of children of immigrant families, dropout rates, and teachers’ resistance to self-improvement).

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