

# Points of Incompatibility Between the Turkish Education System and Human Resources Management

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## Abstract

This study aims to explain the reasons for the difficulties in the implementation of Human Resources Management (HRM) in the Turkish education system by revealing the incompatibilities between them. A literature review and document analysis on official statistics, laws, and newspapers were conducted. First, we reviewed the implementation of HRM functions in Turkey. After that, we tried to reveal its basic features by examining the factors that led to the emergence of HRM in the historical process and the new forms it took over time. In addition, we examined the effects of neoliberal policies on the working conditions of teachers in public and private schools. We discussed the working conditions of teachers in public and private schools in Turkey separately. As a result of the review, we argue that acting in line with the efficiency/success target and the contradictions between Industrial Relations and HRM are among the main reasons for the incompatibility between the education system and HRM in Turkey.

**Keywords:** HRM, neoliberalism, public schools, private schools

## 1. Introduction

Human Resource Management (HRM) in education increases teachers' motivation and empowerment, thereby contributing to student success (Runhaar, 2016). However, in recent years, working conditions for teachers have become more challenging worldwide, with increased stress, burnout, and turnover. Since this situation necessitates the development of solutions to these problems from various perspectives, research on the difficulties experienced in HRM in education is increasing. However, although studies on implementing HRM in schools are frequently conducted in the academic field, it is not easy to apply these studies to schools (Tuytens, Vekeman, & Devos, 2021).

A similar situation is observed in Turkey. Since the 1990s, HRM courses have gained prominence in postgraduate programs in Educational Management in Turkey, and the degree to which HRM practices and functions are realized in schools has been the subject of research. However, important problems are encountered in HRM practices in schools and the education system (Tabanlı, 2004). It is hard to say there is a meticulous operation in terms of HRM functions in public schools concerning functions such as job analysis, job design, recruitment, placement, training and development, performance evaluation, career planning, wages, discipline, and separation. Teachers are assigned to schools only through a centralized exam, in-service training is not conducted adequately and effectively, and due to the absence of a robust supervision system, all teachers enjoy the same salary and fringe benefits without considering their performance and abilities. The Teacher Profession Law (TPL), which came into effect in 2022, introduced career stages for teachers in the public sector, but this is still considered inadequate (Çobanoğlu, Sertel, & Seven Sarkaya, 2018). A centralized HRM application in such a large system can only be achieved with a significant change in perspective and comprehensive planning. Nevertheless, it is considered very challenging and complex to apply academically recommended practices in schools (Kwan, 2009; Vekeman, Devos, & Valcke, 2016; Youngs, Pogodzinski, & Galey, 2014; Goings, Hotchkings, & Walkers, 2019). For example, Seezink and Poell (2010) revealed that HRM doesn't play a significant role in teachers' participation in professional development activities (whether mandated by the government or based on voluntariness). In short, it is observed that HRM studies in academia are not effectively translated into practice.

This study tries to answer the question of why it is difficult to implement HRM in the education system, depending on whether HRM is needed or not. In the first part, it tried to analyze to what extent HRM functions are fulfilled in Turkey. Afterward, the history of the field was examined in terms of the conditions of capitalism. After examining the situation in public and private schools in Turkey, an answer was sought to the question of why HRM and the education system are incompatible. We think that this study will be useful for academicians and teachers who are trying to find scientific solutions to the problems experienced in schools.

## 2. HRM in Education System in Turkey

There are three forms of employment for teachers in public schools: tenured, contract, and hourly paid. Tenured teachers have civil servant status and job security. They are appointed based on the results of the Public Personnel Selection Examination (PPSE) and after ten years they can take a written exam to become specialist teachers and after another ten years they can take a written exam to become head teachers. However, there is no change in their duties and job descriptions, only a small salary increase. Contract teachers are appointed after passing the PPSE. After three years of service, they can become tenured teachers. Hourly paid teachers are temporarily assigned to fill teaching gaps in schools. They are paid according to the number of hours taught and sometimes earn less than the minimum wage. Having a teaching diploma is not a requirement to become an hourly paid teacher.

In public schools, HRM functions are carried out by the General Directorate of Personnel within the Ministry of National Education (MoNE). The duties of the General Directorate of Personnel are as follows (MoNE, 2018):

- a) To carry out studies on the personnel policy and planning of the Ministry and to make recommendations for the development of the personnel system,
- b) To carry out the appointment, transfer, promotion, retirement, and similar personnel procedures of the Ministry personnel,
- c) Preparing, implementing, and evaluating training plans for Ministry personnel other than teachers,
- d) To carry out documentation, publication, and archive services related to training activities,
- e) To perform other duties assigned by the Minister.

The General Directorate of Personnel was established in 1992 and renamed as the General Directorate of Human Resources in 2011. However, in 2018, with the transition to the new government system, the name of the directorate was changed back to the Directorate General of Personnel, and no specific explanation was given for this name change. Moreover, during the period when it was called the Directorate General of Human Resources, its duties and responsibilities remained essentially the same as the most recent definition. The website of the Directorate includes a section called “Career Gateway”, but this section is empty and does not contain any career-related information. Argon and Sipahioğlu (2015) concluded that the directorate is far from fulfilling its HRM functions.

Although many studies have been conducted that include the problems encountered in practice and solution suggestions (Aksoy, 2017; Aytaç, 2014; Sertel & Seven Sarkaya, 2018; Emel, 2010; Türkmen, 2008) the causes of the problems have not been investigated much. To find the reasons for this, the transformation in education in Turkey and the role assigned to teachers should be taken into consideration as well as the fact that HRM is a field affected by social and economic developments.

## 3. Historical Development of HRM

Like every branch of social sciences, the basic assumptions and paradigm shifts in HRM are affected by social and economic developments. The acceleration of capitalist production with the Industrial Revolution, combined with competition between companies and countries and deregulation, led to very harsh working conditions. The devastation brought by the First World War and the coming to power of the working class after the October Revolution in Russia led to the need to end unregulated working life in capitalist countries (Benligiray, 2020). After the war, Personnel Management (PM) practices were initiated in enterprises to bind work life to certain rules (Kaufman, 2014).

As the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) gained prestige after the Second World War, workers in capitalist countries were in danger of adopting a socialist regime. One of the consequences of this was that PM became a professional department in businesses between 1950 and 1980 in the United States of America (USA). During this period, the PM was further institutionalized in the academic field and gained a function in managing relations between workers and employers (Benligiray, 2020). This period is also referred to as the Industrial Relations (IR) era. IR generally defines a period in which a consensus was reached on working conditions by

ensuring communication between a tripartite structure consisting of the state, employers, and trade unions (Alanlı, 2022; Benligiray, 2020; Kaufman, 2014). Kaufmann (2014) defines the period between 1945 and 1960 as the “golden age” of IR in the USA. The neoliberal view that developed in the following years is based on the assumption that employees do not need unions and that they will work in good conditions if they are individually successful. Therefore, employees should communicate directly with the workplace rather than the union in their interactions with the employer. Thus, while the IR field weakened, PM turned into HRM (Alanlı, 2022; Das, 2022; Guest, 1990). Keenoy (1999) defines HRM as “*HRMism*” and claims that it is about creating an ideo-culture in the organization and is propagated by important managers, politicians, and academics. Similarly, Guest (1990) argues that HRM in the United Kingdom (UK) was created by politicians and academics who wanted to bring the American Dream to the country.

While IR is pluralistic and emphasizes issues that are subject to bargaining due to conflicts of interest between the employee and the organization, HRM is singular. In other words, it claims that the interests of the organization and the employee are common and that the organization will profit if employee satisfaction is achieved. However, since the conflict of interest between employer and employee will continue in capitalism in any case, it does not seem possible for HR to fill the field of IR (Kılıç, 2014). For example, Godard (2004) argues that the high-performance discourse does not positively affect the relations between employers, employees, and unions, as employers may not believe that employees need to be satisfied for high performance, while employees may think that practices aimed at improving performance will be negative for their working conditions. Benligiray (2020) states that neoliberalism facilitates the dismissal of personnel, encourages practices such as performance-based remuneration, abandons the understanding of public service, and emphasizes individual values in the entrepreneurial culture understanding that is suitable for the human resources model. Işık (2009) also states that HRM has led to de-unionization and that low wages and employee poverty have emerged as important problems as a result of de-unionization. Coşkun (2009), in his study examining undergraduate textbooks in the field of management and organization, states that the field of labor economics, which previously had an identity representing working people, started to shift towards the field of business with the shift towards HRM, and therefore concepts such as union, working class, and labor are not included in the books. These data strengthen the claims that HRM is in a position that is opposed to the union organization of the working class.

### *3.1 Neoliberal Times and Recent Trends in HRM*

As precarious, non-unionized work increased with neoliberalism, relations between workers and employers began to be established directly within the workplace rather than through the union. Various authors state that in the era of globalization, organizational strategies are based on strengthening the competitive advantage of the organization and creating business teams, and therefore human resources have gained a more central position (Das, 2022; Gürbüz, 2013; Işık, 2009). Strategic HRM has emerged due to the necessity to address HR Planning together with the strategy of the organization. Although it is put forward as a brand new perspective, Gürbüz (2013) points out that the definitions of HRM and Strategic HRM are made the same, such as changing the name of PM books and making them HRM. Similarly, Uyargil et al. (2020) argue that the word “*strategic*” in the term strategic HRM was used in the sense of “*critical, important*” in academic studies conducted in Turkey until 2007 and that the definition of strategic HRM was the definition of Hard HRM, one of the most important HRM models.

Soft HRM is explained as the opposite of this. However, it can be said that soft HRM has received more criticism than hard HRM. Watson (2010) states that although soft HRM claims to create a strategy by approaching individual welfare, organizational effectiveness, and social welfare at an equal distance and considering all of them, the main concern is always to increase the earnings of the shareholders of the organization. It is claimed that HRM often aims to keep employees in the organization by ensuring organizational loyalty and that employees are used to advertise their own companies. Thompson (2011) states that the slogan or rhetoric of “a great place to work”, which gives prestige to companies in harsh competitive conditions, is produced to reduce labor costs, and as a result, the perception of HRM is weakened for employees. Another criticism of the soft HRM model is that, while it perceives the workplace as a free and democratic environment for employees, it has an oppressive and discriminatory structure hidden at the discursive level (Nurol, 2015). Although HRM claims the opposite in its discourses, studies are showing that it legitimizes discrimination (Özkan, 2018) and even violence (Harrington, Warren, & Rayner, 2013) in practice. These studies conclude that the pressure to achieve productivity and profit in the workplace overshadows the value that HRM claims to give to employees. According to Mueller & Carter (2005), discourse is an important part of HRM practices, but it is important to link discourse with strategy.

With the prominence of strategic HRM and the views that the organization should develop a sustainable strategy

based on the fact that the survival of the organization is related to the conditions of the environment and society, HRM practices aimed at raising awareness such as social responsibility projects and environmental awareness have started to be seen. One of the most common practices within this approach is Green Human Resources. In Green HRM, there is a tendency to raise awareness on environmental awareness, recycling, and energy saving and to recruit people with this awareness (Kanık, 2022). With technological advances, digital HRM has developed with the introduction of computer systems in the implementation of HRM functions. Artificial intelligence technology, which fulfills almost all functions, is indispensable for HRM practices today. With globalization, Diversity Management and Talent Management issues also come to the forefront.

All these processes show that HRM can rapidly adapt itself to changing production and competition conditions. The emergence times of these models have been very close to each other since the 2000s. When we look at the speed of keeping up with the era, HRM seems to be a field of knowledge that progresses with the expansions made by managers and non-university institutions to keep the organization alive and increase productivity in competitive conditions rather than a scientific discipline (Parks-Leduc et al., 2017; Sinkoff & Owen, 2004). Therefore, the characteristics of the neoliberal era should be taken into consideration when addressing HRM practices.

### 3.2 Can HRM Be Criticized?

Critical HRM reveals how HRM legitimizes inequalities in society. However, it does not seem possible to find a place in practice (Özkan, 2018; Gill, 2007). No matter how much the discourse that values people is at the forefront in HRM, ultimately the profit of the organization is important. Therefore, HRM should also have the ability to make quick decisions, especially in the age of globalization, where competition increases and organizations with the ability to change strategy at any time can survive. However, since critical HRM aims to question more and put forward practices aimed at eliminating inequalities, its presence in organizations is already considered a contradictory situation (Özkan, 2018).

The basic assumption of HRM is that the success of a business stems from the value given to people. If the commitment of the individual to her/his job and the organization can be established as the most important factor, both the individual will be happy and the organization will be able to increase its profits. However, when we look at some basic economic indicators, it can be seen that companies can still make profits despite the impoverishment of people. Figure 1 below shows the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TSI) and the share of Labor Force and Enterprises in GDP.

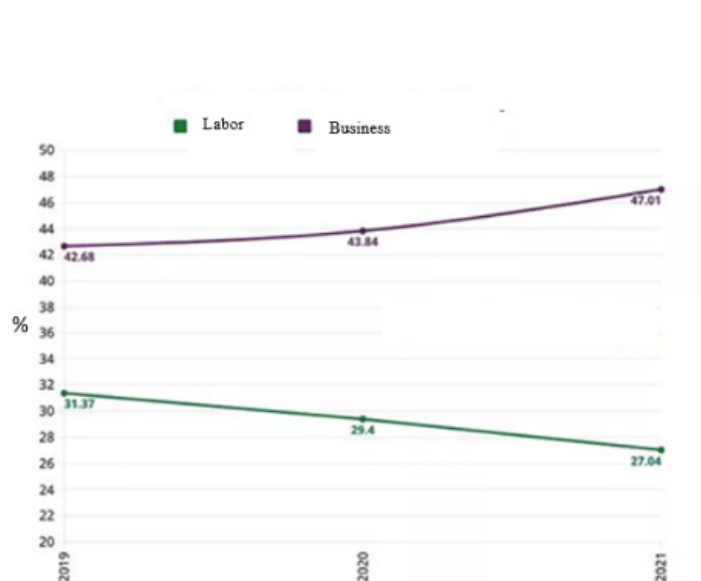


Figure 1. Share of labor and business in GDP (Source: Adopted from TSI (2022))

According to Figure 1, the share of labor from GDP was 31.37% in 2019, which decreased to 29.4% in 2020 and further declined to 27.04% in 2021. On the other hand, the net profit of businesses was 42.68% in 2019, increased to 43.84% in 2020, and further rose to 47.01% in 2021. The graph shows an almost symmetrical

pattern, indicating that the decrease in workers' income is parallel to the increase in the profit of businesses.

Although poverty is a concept with many different dimensions, today working poverty comes to the forefront. In recent years, there has been an increase in research on working poverty, which is experienced by those who are poor despite having a job and who are becoming poorer and poorer (Konyalı & Kontay Busun, 2022). It is an important question mark whether people continue to work in the workplace despite the decline in their incomes due to a passion for work or out of necessity. In the capitalist economy, especially in times of global crisis, there is a tendency to reduce wages and benefits. This makes the job of HR employees, who are responsible for ensuring communication between employees and employers, more difficult (Evcimen, Çakıcı, & Aysen, 2022). Similarly, Jayawardena (2021) points to the challenges HR managers in Southern countries face in bringing the Anglo-American neoliberal HRM discourse into the organization while at the same time belonging to the local context. Bringing an ideology into the workplace but also creating a workplace-specific culture and trying to keep people in the organization due to its singularist perspective can be said to give HRM a complex and difficult character.

When the historical process of HRM is examined, it can be said that the main goal is efficiency/success and the transition from a pluralistic understanding to a singular understanding of working life in line with the spirit of the neoliberal era. We will now analyze the Turkish education system from these two perspectives.

#### 4. HRM in the Turkish Education System

In this section, we will try to identify the key principles and characteristics of HRM and the points where it does not align with the education system by examining public and private schools separately.

##### 4.1 Situation in Public Schools

One of the fundamental arguments of HRM is to view individuals not as a cost element but as a resource. Therefore, employees are valued. While this argument may be debated under capitalist conditions, it is a fact that organizations striving for efficiency and success value their employees. When thinking about HRM in the education system, this should be the starting point. In Turkey, does the education system want to be successful? What defines success for an education system? The answers to these questions should be sought in the character of the education system.

In Turkey, the education system has undergone significant transformation since the 1990s. Neoliberal economic policies have eroded the public character of the education system, opening the way for marketization in education. This has not only led to an increase in the number of private schools but has also increased the education expenses incurred by families in public schools. Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of education expenses between the government and households.

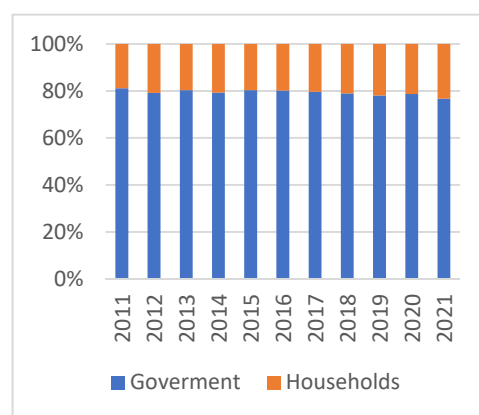


Figure 2. Distribution of expenditures (Source: Adopted from TSI (2022))

Figure 2 shows that between 2011 and 2021, the share of households in education expenditures is increasing while the share of the state is decreasing. When the public character of education is eliminated, inequalities increase and the opportunity for poor children to receive quality education is eliminated. Everyone in society benefits from education opportunities according to their income level (Kuzulu, 2022). This situation is not different from the general situation in the world (Alexander & Massaro, 2020; Mac, 2022). Therefore, since

under neoliberalism, the state's responsibility to provide education services to all citizens is reduced, it can be said that the state is not responsible for the success of public education. Of course, a state wants its education system to be successful compared to other countries in the world, but all segments of society don't need to take part in this race. It may be considered sufficient that the schools attended by the children of socio-economically advantaged groups are successful. As a result of the inequalities that have emerged within the city as a result of globalization, those who interact or compete with other countries are already the advantageous segments of society (Çelik, 2012; Castells, 2020). Based on this, it can be said that neoliberal globalization separates even schools in the same city from each other. There can be both very successful and very unsuccessful schools in a country at the same time. Therefore, it can be argued that the first criterion for HRM implementation, the goal of organizational success, is not present in public schools in general.

When we look at the MoNE budget, it can be seen that the most fundamental expenditure item is personnel expenses. Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of expenditures in the MoNE budget.

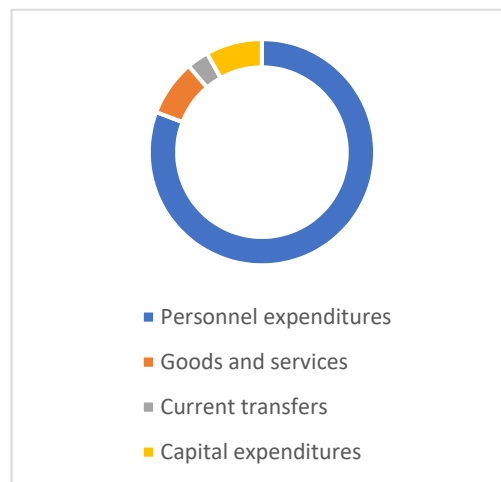


Figure 3. Distribution of expenditures in the budget (Source: Adopted from TSI (2022))

When we examine Figure 3, it is evident that investments constitute only a very small portion of the budget. This indicates that the ministry's budget is allocated primarily for teacher salaries. The primary goal of the HRM is to increase the efficiency of private companies, and efficiency improvement is measured by the growth of capital. In public schools, however, productivity means the effective use of public resources and not wasting them. Since the government does not invest in education, we cannot talk about the pursuit of productivity. Paying teachers' salaries is not an investment but a legal obligation. On the other hand, the fact that almost the entire budget consists of salaries leads to the perception of teachers as a cost rather than a resource. Ziya Selçuk, one of the former ministers, used the phrase "*burden on the budget*" regarding teacher salaries (Cumhuriyet, 2020).

In summary, the lack of expectations for efficiency and success in public education in Turkey and the perception of teachers as cost elements can be seen as an indicator of the incompatibility of the education system and HRM.

#### 4.2 The Situation in Private Schools

Figure 4 shows the distribution of schools, students, and teachers in the public and private sectors.

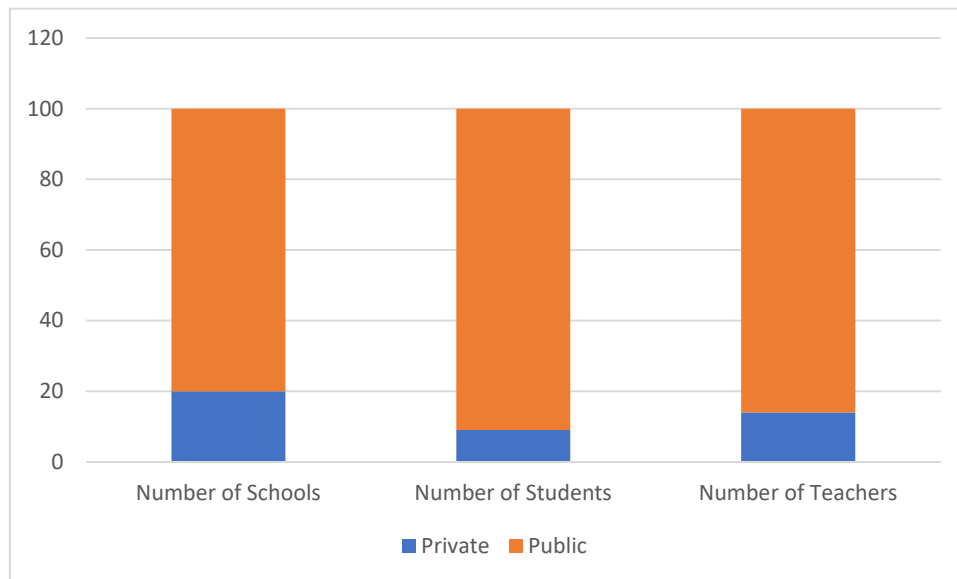


Figure 4. Distribution of schools, students, and teacher numbers (Source: Adopted from MoNe (2023))

When Figure 4 is examined, it is observed that private schools account for about 20% of all schools. In Turkey, the privatization of education gained momentum in the 1990s, but it has rapidly increased since 2014. Regulations such as the conversion of existing courses into private schools, tax exemptions for individuals and companies opening private schools, and incentive payments to parents who want to send their children to private schools have contributed to the growth in the number of private schools. These opportunities provided to private schools, combined with the decrease in the quality of education in public schools, have caused an increase in the demand for private schools (Altun Aslan, 2019). Based on these, it can be said that the private school sector has been expanded with state support.

The fact that private school teachers are subject to more than one law also complicates their working conditions. Teachers work under both the Fundamental Law on National Education and the Labor Law, which regulates working conditions in the private sector. They operate within the MoNE. However, MoNE does not deal with issues related to salaries and other personal rights, citing the Labor Law. Teachers are expected to be responsible and duty but are not given their rights. Until 2014, the article of Law No. 5580 was in force, which ensured that teachers working in private schools were paid at least as much as teachers working in public schools. When the article stating that “*Those who provide administrative and educational services in private schools cannot be paid less than the salary paid in equivalent public schools according to their rank and the amount of additional payment within the scope of social assistance.*” was repealed in 2014, there was a big difference between the salaries of teachers working in private schools and those working in public schools. Many private school teachers earn minimum wage (Birlık Sendikası, 2023). At the time of writing, the Private Sector Teachers' Union is preparing to stage a major protest demanding a legal regulation to pay teachers as much as public school teachers. Low wages, job insecurity, and lack of legal protection emerged as the biggest problems of teachers in recent studies (Cerev & Coşkun, 2020; Çimen & Karadağ, 2020). Godard (2004) argues that the risk of negative consequences of the high-performance paradigm for employees can be prevented by legal regulations. Indeed, if workers' rights are not legally secured, competition in the neoliberal era may have negative consequences for workers. These consequences can be seen both in the media and in social media posts in Turkey, causing problems such as employee poverty and high labor turnover among private school teachers.

Considering salaries and basic working conditions, trade unions may be the only way for workers to get their rights. However, unionization rates in the private sector are low. Private schools are included in the labor branch numbered 10. According to the law, to be an authorized union and to be able to make collective bargaining agreements, there must be at least 1% membership in the line of business (Ministry of Labor and Social Security, 2012). Considering that there are 4 million 167 thousand 249 employees in line 10 (Ministry of Labor and Social Security, 2023), the union needs to reach at least 41672 members. The current number of unionized teachers is far below this number. Remembering that one of the reasons for the separation of HRM from PM is to end the IR period, the fact that the IR process has never started in private schools may explain why there is no need for HRM. Cengiz (2010) examined teachers' perspectives on HRM according to union membership and found that

teachers who were not union members had a more positive view of HRM. This result can be considered an indicator of the tense relationship between unions and HRM.

In the studies on HRM practices in private schools, it was concluded that administrators think that the presence of an HR department in the school does not make a special difference in terms of HRM practices, but teachers think that the presence of an HR department in the school will make a significant difference in terms of the realization of functions (Cent, 2007; Emel, 2010). It is thought that this difference in perspective between administrators and teachers stems from the fact that administrators think that they already implemented the HRM approach. Teachers, on the other hand, do not consider the HRM practices carried out by the management to be sufficient and therefore they want an HRM department (Emel, 2010; Runhaar & Sanders, 2013). It can be said that teachers' desire to have an HR department stems from the fact that they want to feel safe in an environment where they are not unionized and without legal protection.

Teachers in very successful and well-established private schools work under good conditions. HRM practices in these schools are already successful. However, considering that the sector is growing rapidly and unregulated, it can be said that these institutions cannot be decisive for the sector in general.

## 5. Discussion

The issue of the connection between the education system and HRM is too deep to be covered in one single article. Although we cannot cover all aspects of it in this article, we have examined whether some of the basic elements of HRM are present in the education system. For this, we first examined what HRM is.

It can be said that all practices from PM to today's HRM show continuity as a whole, although they have some differences from each other. The situation that creates this holism can be explained by the fact that the capitalist mode of production continues and workplace organizations are profit-oriented and constantly competing institutions. Profit was the main goal for an organization in the PM period, and this goal has not changed today. The value given to people and the investment discourses becomes questionable when factors such as income inequality, employee poverty, and unemployment are taken into consideration. However, there will inevitably be a limit to the critical view of HRM. Otherwise, there is nothing to criticize about the assumptions that people are the most valuable factor for a business and should not be seen as a production cost. However, HRM is a field shaped by the economic structure and more oriented towards practice. In this case, it is very difficult to prevent the negativities experienced by individuals in business life by taking a critical approach to HRM practices.

In education, it is seen that the difficulty of HRM practices is that the studies conducted in the academic field are not sufficiently reflected in schools. In Turkey, there are no HRM departments in public schools, and even within the Ministry of National Education, classical PM continues. However, at the school level, functions such as training and development, performance evaluation, and discipline are carried out by the school management. But these functions are also management functions. The fact that in every organization where there is a management, in a sense mandatory functions are carried out does not mean that there is HRM there. HRM represents a different understanding than the classical management approach and performance management. At least this is the claim of HRM.

Since the working conditions of teachers in public and private schools and the legal conditions they are bound by are very different from each other, HRM practices are also very different from each other. This is because the neoliberal order affects both groups differently. The fact that public schools have no expectation of success and that there is no expectation of efficiency due to the very small portion of the budget allocated to investments pushes teachers into the position of civil servants who are only paid their salaries and not as valuable resources. In private schools, again under the influence of neoliberalism, the existence of a large number of unemployed and the revocation of laws guaranteeing salary security has pushed teachers into the position of being just another private sector employee subject to the Labor Law. Considering that HRM was created to weaken unions, HRM would not be needed in cases where unions are not strong.

In this article, we have tried to reveal the reasons for the difficulties of implementing HRM in education by examining the main points arising from the purpose and character of HRM and the points where it is incompatible with the education system. At this point, we propose to think about what tools other than HRM are used to keep employees in the workplace increase productivity, and gain an advantage in competition. Another suggestion is to consider the transformation of the education system when analyzing HRM practices in education.



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### Authors contributions

Çakır and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Tabancalı were responsible for the study design. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Tabancalı made revisions to the design. Çakır was responsible for data collection and drafting the manuscript. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Tabancalı reviewed the draft. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Obtained.

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**Data sharing statement**

No additional data are available.

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