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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Administrators' perception concerning the auxiliary (janitorial) staff: The hidden heroes of education

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Abstract

The present study examined administrators' views on the working status, contributions to the education process, performance status, and employment processes of the school auxiliary staff. The research was conducted in a holistic multiple-case study design, one of the qualitative research methods. The study group consisted of 22 school administrators who work in various K12 school settings in the central districts of a city in Turkey and voluntarily participated in the study. A maximum diversity sampling strategy, one of the purposeful sampling techniques, was employed in sample selection. The study's data were obtained using a semistructured interview conducted by the researchers. An inductive content analysis technique was utilized to analyze the data, and the results were interpreted accordingly. The study's findings revealed that administrators felt that their role is a very insignificant position in the recruitment of auxiliaries, the auxiliary staff has direct and indirect contributions to the education process, and they cause some unfavorable circumstances in some cases. In addition, it was found that school administrators think that the auxiliary staff could be efficient when employed through temporary recruitment procedures and if they have an active role in their recruitment.

KEYWORDS
administrators, auxiliary staff, employment, public schools

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Practitioners points

- Administrators have a trivial role in recruiting auxiliary staff, except those funded through local budgets.
- Administrators see permanent auxiliary staff as less productive and potentially disruptive.
- Administrators believe the auxiliary staff have positive and negative effects on the education process.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Educational institutions provide the essential environment for students' personal, social, and academic development. Thus, providing necessary resources for students to obtain quality education and to make schools compatible with technological developments is indispensable for educational institutions, which are not just a community of students and teachers but a collective institution of society, including parents, administrators, auxiliary staff, and government. Therefore, there must be positive cooperation and interaction among the stakeholders of educational institutions. As Bastian et al. (2019) state, school districts should adequately staff schools with support personnel besides certificated personnel such as teachers and administrators. If the personnel providing educational services are not offered proper spaces and tools, or if the required material resources are not provided for the support personnel, the school may be unable to function effectively (Stufflebeam, 2003; Webb & Norton, 1999).

Since every staff can affect the school's performance, overlooking the influence of any person in the school community disregards the opportunity to improve performance (Pounder et al., 1995). However, the review of available literature revealed that almost no recent study focuses on the auxiliary staff, which is also at the core of educational institutions. It is observed that the role of support personnel in schools is a neglected topic of recent research worldwide, and the literature about auxiliary staff in education has been less than informative (Conley et al., 2010). Magolda and Delman (2016) claim that scholars, including educational anthropologists, seldom deem custodians [auxiliary staff] research-worthy. Similarly, Hoyle (1986) remarked that the influence of auxiliary staff is often discussed in staff rooms; however, the evidence is short.

Similarly, Smilie (2022) stated that scholars have largely neglected the role of school janitors [auxiliary staff] in the educational process. As Conley et al. (2010) claimed, even though the film industry considered the janitors' visibility in schools, the educational administration literature oversights the complexities entailed in their work and employment. Likewise, it is observed that although school administrators are responsible for the auxiliary staff's job performance and health, little literature exists specific to administrators' perspectives in recent studies. Perceptions of administrators on the janitorial staff in education settings are important because there is limited research on this particular population, which reinforces academia's indifferent attitude toward them. Concerning their position, investigating administrators' perspectives can provide further information on understanding the roles of auxiliary staff in schools.

This study delves into the multifaceted perspectives of administrators within the educational landscape, focusing on their insights to illuminate the intricate dynamics and challenges associated with auxiliary staff. Thus, the purpose of the present study is to determine the views of school administrators on the employment of auxiliary staff, their working status, their competencies, and their effects on the educational process. Specifically, the present study sought answers to the following questions:

RQ1. How do school administrators consider their roles in employing auxiliary staff?

RQ2. How do administrators perceive the impact of the functional status of auxiliary staff on job performance?

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RQ3. How do administrators consider the current and expected qualifications of auxiliary staff?

RQ4. How do administrators perceive the influence of auxiliary staff on education?

The study is organized as follows: the following section presents the definition of auxiliary staff in line with the available literature, the recruitment of auxiliary staff in Turkiye and the related studies involving auxiliary staff in schools. Then, the methodology of the study is given, including the design of the study, the study group, the data gathering instrument, data analysis, the researcher's role, and the trustworthiness aspects of the study. While section four presents the study's findings, the results are discussed in section five. The last section reports the study's conclusions in addition to methodological and theoretical implications, limitations, and suggestions for future studies.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

The auxiliary staff are the invisible or neglected employees in educational institutions known as noncertificated (Conley et al., 2010) or nonteaching personnel. They are also interchangeably referred to as support personnel, school custodians, janitors, cleaners, or paraprofessionals in various sources. The auxiliary staff is one of the critical pillars of the school stakeholders (Solone et al., 2019), who operate in cleaning, security, transportation, and maintenance in schools and contribute to the smooth operation of educational institutions. The auxiliary staff which adds to and improves upon the overall performance of an institution (Lucas & Buzzanell, 2004) are the ones generally outsourced by the schools (Bates et al., 2021; Cuban, 2012; Phipps & Merisotis, 2005; Wekullo, 2017).

Available studies show that improving service quality is vital for student health and safety (Adelman et al., 1997), and inadequate auxiliary staff employment poses potential risks for schools regarding providing quality service. Similarly, studies (Magiera et al., 2006) also evidenced that auxiliary staff has some problems concerning inadequate wages, difficult working conditions, limited opportunities for career development, scarcity of personnel or understaffing, and loss of rights. In addition, the intense work pace and challenging working conditions can affect the health of employees and reduce job satisfaction (Brewer & Clippard, 2002; Creagh et al., 2023). Similarly, understaffing in some schools increases the auxiliary staff's workload and causes disruptions in the maintenance of schoolwork or leads to complications in school cleanliness and safety (Magolda, 2023). The limited opportunities for professional development and rights losses of auxiliary staff can also negatively affect employees' job satisfaction and reduce their motivation (Smilie, 2022). Thus, to solve the problems, employers and institutions should plan to improve the working conditions and rights of the auxiliary staff (Conley et al., 2010).

In his seminal work, Pattington (1946) surmised the role of auxiliary staff [janitor] as the essential personnel in the school system that even affects the administrators' success. However, they are the only school staff not required to have training or education credentials. Therefore, as Conley et al. (2010) stated, auxiliaries or school janitors are treated in policy and administration literature as part of the "physical plant of the schools." The lack of education and expertise in the job description of auxiliary staff also differentiates the role expectations and perceived value of such personnel.

The school administration determines the duties and responsibilities of the personnel in the auxiliary services and generally provides the support services necessary for the daily functioning of the school, such as delivering correspondence and official documents, welcoming and guiding visitors, working in cleaning (Görgülü, 2008; Taymaz, 2008), lighting and heating services, ensuring security at entry and exit, and transporting and placing equipment, materials, and other belongings. Moreover, administrators are responsible for supervising auxiliary personnel who are critical to the day-to-day functioning of schools (Webb & Norton, 1999). School administrators, additionally, must provide appropriate environments for the health and safety of students. However, not employing enough auxiliary staff can make it challenging to achieve this goal. Furthermore, the lack of standards of working conditions and service quality of auxiliary staff can equally lead to poor outcomes. It is worth noting that administrators or principals in the Turkish education system primarily focus on day-to-day management, maintaining

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control, and conducting basic performance assessments of teachers and staff. Due to limited independence within the centralized system, they often refrain from delegating responsibilities or instigating significant school changes (Oplatka & Arar, 2016). Moreover, the Ministry of Education holds the power to implement educational policies (Arar et al., 2017) and retains a minor role in recruiting auxiliary staff in schools.

2.1 | The recruitment of auxiliary staff

The auxiliary staff are nonacademic school employees whose central duties include sanitary and safe school facilities, such as cleaning the classrooms or securing the school environment during or after class hours. The job description of the auxiliary staff is set out in the Civil Servants Law in Turkey; however, the scope of the articles is roughly defined. Moreover, the duties and responsibilities of the auxiliary staff are specified in the administrative regulations or directives issued exclusively for the institution and are carried out in practice within the framework of the law.

The auxiliary staff working in schools in Turkey are generally categorized as permanent staff, part-time staff working within the parent-teacher association (PTA), and staff working within the regulations of the Turkish Employment Agency (TEA), a governmental public employment service. While permanent staff performs regular maintenance and cleaning of the school, those working within the PTA serve voluntarily to meet the school's requirements (TEA, 2013). On the other hand, staff working within the assurance of TEA are temporarily employed in schools and expected to support the school administration. It should be noted that TEA prioritizes disadvantaged or special groups such as ex-convicts, victims of terrorism, and individuals who grew up in orphanages to expand their employment opportunities.

Principally, two types of auxiliary staff are recruited in schools: one is a civil servant, and the other one is the temporary contracted staff. The government employs civil servants through an appointment procedure, and they work as permanent employees. On the other hand, temporary contracted staff are hired as provisional but can also be transferred to permanent positions if they meet the requirements specified in the Civil Servants Law and complete the written/oral exams conducted by the government.

Although certified personnel (teachers, administrators, counselors, etc.) in schools are employed by the Ministry of National Education, there is no standardized arrangement and employment for auxiliary personnel. Generally, the Provincial Directorates of National Education plan and hire auxiliary staff temporarily in cooperation with TEA, where candidates apply for the position. The employment contracts of the auxiliary staff are for a certain period (usually 11 months) and are renewed upon expiry. Their salaries are paid within a set wage schedule, and they are entitled to certain rights (MONE, 2014). The auxiliary staff employed by TEA is entitled to social security benefits as they are insured in an official workplace for the duration of their employment. In addition, their working conditions, salaries, and other rights are also determined by legal regulations. However, their status is unlike permanent civil servants, and their affiliation ends at the end of the employment contract (TEA, 2013). The PTA, a voluntary organization that supports education by ensuring communication and cooperation between the school and the parents, also employs auxiliary staff for schools. The PTA operates to purchase goods and services to meet the school's needs, assist students in financial need, and improve the quality of the school's services. PTAs act according to the Ministry of National Education regulations and cooperate with the school administration (MONE, 2012). It should also be noted that schools do not have a specific budget for hiring auxiliaries in Turkey, which weakens administrators' role in their recruitment process. However, some schools may expect applicants to pass security checks and medical examinations first.

2.2 | Studies related to auxiliary staff

The review of available literature revealed that there appeared to be little educational research specifically on auxiliary (janitorial or custodial) staff. However, they were sometimes included in studies such as school support

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staff (Branham, 2004; Griffith, 2001) studies on school climate (Makki & Kandil, 2023) or burnout and job satisfaction (Brewer & Clippard, 2002). The literature review also revealed that auxiliary staff was subjected to or examined in some dissertations which provide details about working conditions (Glickman, 2017; Maxwell, 2004; Montoya, 2020; Reed, 2015). Likewise, Magolda's (2023) book shed light on the working conditions of such school staff and inspired the present study's authors to delve into the subject.

Branham (2004), who examined the effects of school infrastructure on student achievement, found that students have lower attendance rates and lower levels of achievement in schools with insufficient auxiliary staff. Likewise, Magolda (2023) explored how custodial staff foster learning environments beyond cleaning the classrooms and emptying the trash. Moreover, he uncovered that custodians take pride in their work and their relations with students, faculty, and other staff. In one of the rare empirical studies, Reed and Salazar (1998) explored the nature and extent of the influence of auxiliary staff upon schools. They found that auxiliary staff's impact on school culture is both technical and symbolic and is exerted overtly and tacitly.

In the Turkish context, Köse et al. (2018) study, which examined the views of school administrators regarding auxiliary staff working at preschool education institutions, found that the auxiliary staff has direct and indirect negative effects on the education process in preschool education institutions. Their study further revealed that staff employed through service procurement were the most efficient, and thus, it is essential to consider the preferences of the school administrators in recruiting such staff. Similar results were also reported by Demir (2013), who acknowledged that students could learn positive or negative behaviors by taking nonteaching staff as models. Several studies also handled the auxiliary staff and their functions in the education system and concluded that auxiliary staff is unqualified (Ertör & Akan, 2016), do not have adequate knowledge about preschool education (Tok, 2002), and should be caring and establishing good relations with students (Acun & Erten, 1993).

As for administrators' perspectives concerning auxiliary staff, some studies (Demir, 2016; Mese, 2009) identified principals' dissatisfaction with the insufficient number of auxiliary staff or the inadequate number of permanent janitors (Özdoğan-Özbal, 2017). Some other studies (Aslanargun & Bozkurt, 2012; Sarice, 2006) also found that principals faced various problems stemming from auxiliary staff, especially managing the costs of auxiliary staff (Özdoğan-Özbal, 2017); thus, they hire temporary cleaning staff and compensate them at the minimum wage via PTA. Highlighting the lack of bureaucratic control on hiring auxiliary staff as a challenge for administrators, Yavuz (2011) found that most administrators prefer those employed through PTA or TEA since permanent employment negatively affects the staff's working performance.

3 | METHODS

3.1 | Design

The present study adopted a qualitative research methodology concerning its aim and holistic multiple case study design to explore the administrators' perspectives. In holistic multiple-case study designs, the case is examined through various units of analysis (individual, institution, program, school, etc.) to expose a previously unknown issue and provide a basis or guidance for future research.

3.2 | Study group

The study group of the present study consisted of principals and deputy principals working in K12 public schools in the research area. This study employed a purposeful sampling strategy and explicitly utilized the maximum variation sampling technique to select the study group. This approach aimed to deliberately

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determine participants with diverse characteristics, perspectives, and experiences relevant to the research question. The study aimed to capture a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon under investigation by including participants from various backgrounds, contexts, and viewpoints. This strategy was chosen to facilitate the exploration of multiple dimensions and ensure that the findings reflect the richness and complexity of the subject matter. Thus, school principals and deputy principals in the study group were selected according to their gender, age, and professional and administrative seniority to increase the participants' diversity. Twenty-two school administrators (7 females and 15 males), whose average age was 36, volunteered to participate. The participants' average professional seniority was 13, and the average administrative experience was 8 years. The participants were assigned an alphanumeric code (e.g., P1, P2, etc.) to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Additionally, all participants signed an informed consent form that affirmed the anonymity of the participants, the confidentiality of the data, voluntary participation, and the study followed the guidelines of the Helsinki Declaration throughout the study. The demographic information about the participants is presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1 Participants' demographics.

Participant	Gender	Position	Age	Professional experience (years)	Administrative seniority (years)
P1	M	Principal	39	17	10
P2	F	Deputy principal	30	8	3
P3	M	Principal	40	16	11
P4	M	Principal	35	13	6
P5	M	Principal	43	19	13
P6	F	Principal	34	11	5
P7	M	Deputy principal	29	7	2
P8	M	Principal	39	15	11
P9	M	Deputy principal	37	14	9
P10	M	Principal	36	14	7
P11	M	Principal	41	18	14
P12	F	Deputy principal	32	9	3
P13	M	Deputy principal	30	8	2
P14	F	Deputy principal	29	7	2
P15	M	Deputy principal	35	12	6
P16	F	Principal	37	14	10
P17	M	Principal	45	22	16
P18	M	Principal	41	19	14
P19	M	Deputy principal	33	10	7
P20	M	Deputy principal	30	8	3
P21	F	Principal	37	14	9
P22	F	Principal	42	20	15

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3.3 | Data gathering instrument

The present study employed semistructured interviews to gather administrators' perspectives about the roles, experiences, and employment of auxiliary staff in the schools. The semistructured interview form for data collection was developed through a four-step process. First, a draft interview form was developed by analyzing similar studies in the relevant literature. In the second stage, the draft form was presented to three faculty members who are experts in educational administration to ensure content validity. In line with the experts' suggestions, changes were made to the draft interview form. In the third stage, the draft form was employed with two external participants. In the last step, the draft form was submitted to the opinion of a language expert to ensure its comprehensibility. Finally, the five-question interview form (Appendix 1) was developed for data gathering.

3.4 | Data analysis

In the present study, the data were analyzed using the content analysis technique, a systematic way to identify patterns, concepts, and more prominent themes within the data to gain insight into the meaning and context of the content. Krippendorff (2019) defines content analysis as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts to the contexts of their use." The inductive data analysis, where the researchers read through the data and code the recurring concepts as they emerge, is preferred in the data analysis process. Following Bingham and Witkowsky's (2022) inductive analysis cycles, the analysis started with making meaning from the data through open coding, in which the researcher reads the data and identifies emerging topics or concepts. It is followed by pattern coding, which means chunking the data into fewer analytic concepts to develop main themes and findings. As the third step, researchers identify representative data to support findings through in vivo codes from participants' own words to point to data representative of the particular findings. As for the final step of data analysis, the results were explained in line with the existing literature. Additionally, O'Brien et al. (2014) standardized framework for reporting qualitative studies (SRQR) was also considered as a reporting guideline in the present study.

Based on the allocation of the categories formed through the inductive analysis, first, the most recurring patterns within the main category were determined, and then the typical quotes in each pattern were collocated. Second, other related concepts were defined, and relevant sections were highlighted. Finally, all the categories and themes in the data were presented systematically and prepared for interpretation. This cyclic and iterative process of inductive data analysis allowed researchers to gradually develop a deeper understanding of the data and refine their interpretation.

3.5 | Researcher's role

In the context of this study, the researchers undertook the integral roles of impartial observers and diligent analysts. Demonstrating a commitment to objectivity, the interviews with administrators were conducted without predetermined expectations, fostering an unbiased exploration of the subject matter. The researchers' lack of prior familiarity with the interviewees enabled them to approach the data with a fresh perspective, free from preexisting biases. The individual analyses conducted by each researcher underscored the dedication to thorough examination, as insights were independently derived from the interview data. This approach not only upheld the integrity of the research but also facilitated robust discussions that enriched the interpretive process. By cultivating an environment of collaborative reflection, the researchers harnessed diverse viewpoints to enhance the depth and credibility of the qualitative analysis.

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3.6 | Trustworthiness

Qualitative research's validity and reliability concepts correspond to the data's trustworthiness. Since the present study did not employ an instrument with established metrics about validity and reliability, researchers intended to increase the trustworthiness, which covers establishing credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability of the data (Patton, 1999).

Through an audit trail, the researchers tried to establish confirmability, which is the degree of neutrality in accurately portraying participants' responses without the researcher's potential bias or personal motivations. To verify dependability, the researchers employed an inquiry audit by asking an outside person to review and examine the research process and the data analysis to ensure that the findings were consistent and could be repeated. As for ensuring transferability, researchers used thick descriptions to show that the research study's results can be applied to other contexts, circumstances, and situations.

To ensure the trustworthiness merits, a series of measures were taken, such as planning how the research process will be carried out in detail, auditing the whole research process by a field expert, examining the research questions by a field expert, and recording the data so that they can be reexamined when necessary, and stating the bases of the findings to prevent the researcher's prejudices (Cohen et al., 2007). In addition, before the interview form was developed, the literature was reviewed, and the relevant conceptual framework was created. During the interview, the participant's answers were summarized after each question and participant confirmation was obtained. Additionally, to ensure the confirmability and dependability of the coding process, the same data set was coded by two coders independently to make the findings and definitions more evident. In this sense, the research data were recoded by a field expert coder other than the researcher, and these results were compared with the researcher's coding.

4 | RESULTS

In this section, we delve into the findings from our data analysis, describing the typology of school administrators' perceptions regarding auxiliary staff's employment, working status, competencies, and their impact on the educational process.

4.1 | Administrators' perspectives on recruiting the auxiliary staff

In the initial part of this section, we present the administrators' viewpoints regarding their role in recruiting auxiliary staff. As depicted in Table 2, most principals shared insights on various themes, while some focused on specific themes.

As shown in Table 2, administrators' perspectives on their role in employing auxiliary staff in their schools revolved around four key themes: *qualifications*, *impact on the education process*, *performance*, and *modeling*. We found that administrators prioritized the qualifications of auxiliaries, their influence on education, their job performance, and the recruitment models used when hiring them. One administrator explained their criteria: "… *the qualifications and recruitment models impact our decisions while hiring auxiliary"* (P5).

Further analysis of administrators' perceptions revealed two standout themes: "out of jurisdiction" and "dispatch and coordination." These themes indicated that administrators often perceived their role as trivial since they lacked decision-making authority. One administrator expressed this frustration, stating, "… *unfortunately, principals do not have the authorization to hire the auxiliary staff officially. The Ministry appoints them without asking our opinion if there is a vacancy* (P18).

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TABLE 2 Perspectives on auxiliary staff recruitment.

Participant	Qualification	Impact on the education	Performance	Modeling
P1	✓	✓		✓
P2	✓		✓	✓
P3	✓	✓		✓
P4	✓	✓		✓
P5	✓			✓
P6	✓		✓	✓
P7	✓	✓		
P8	✓	✓		✓
P9	✓		✓	✓
P10		✓		✓
P11	✓	✓		✓
P12	✓		✓	✓
P13	✓	✓		✓
P14	✓		✓	✓
P15	✓	✓		✓
P16	✓	✓		✓
P17	✓	✓		
P18	✓			✓
P19	✓		✓	✓
P20	✓	✓		✓
P21	✓			✓
P22	✓	✓	✓	✓

4.2 | Administrators' perspectives on the impact of auxiliary staff's functional status on job performance

In this section, we explore administrators' perspectives on the recruitment model and job performance of auxiliary staff, addressing the second research question. Administrators' opinions on the impact of auxiliary staff's functional status and job performance converged around three main themes.

As illustrated in Table 3, opinions of school administrators regarding the impact of auxiliary staff's functional status on job performance centered around three themes: fear of job loss, belongingness, and working hours. Further analysis showed that administrators generally believed that auxiliary staff in permanent positions were less productive and sometimes disrupted work quality. Additionally, some participants stated that permanent staff acted recklessly, worked inefficiently, and tended to disrupt work due to job guarantees under civil servant law.

Regarding temporary auxiliary staff, some administrators noted that although they faced job loss anxiety, they performed moderately. In contrast, most administrators expressed that temporarily recruited auxiliary staff worked diligently and put in the effort because they aspired to continue working in the following years. Nearly all

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TABLE 3 The impact of status on job performances.

Participant	Fear of job loss	Belongingness	Working hours
P1	✓	✓	
P2		✓	✓
P3	✓	✓	
P4	✓		✓
P5		✓	
P6	✓	✓	
P7	✓	✓	✓
P8		✓	✓
P9	✓		
P10	✓	✓	
P11		✓	
P12	✓		✓
P13		✓	
P14	✓	✓	
P15		✓	
P16	✓	✓	
P17	✓		✓
P18		✓	
P19	✓	✓	✓
P20		✓	
P21	✓	✓	
P22	✓	✓	✓

administrators agreed that auxiliary staff hired through service procurement or local budgets displayed higher job performance, as they felt a strong sense of belonging to the school and a genuine desire to work.

One administrator's view on the efficiency of auxiliary staff's job performance was as follows:

> The temporary ones are more efficient because they are not in the status of a civil servant. … Staff working on temporary contracts are productive because they worry about their contracts for the following year (P1).

Regarding belongingness, one administrator emphasized

> … when the school pays the salaries of the staff, they have a higher sense of belonging. Their work is more attentive and organized. They are more open to learning and adapting to the school's organization (P9).

Similarly, some administrators highlighted the role of working hours in auxiliary staff's job performance. One of the participants expressed their perceptions concerning working hours as follows.

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> Usually, the auxiliary staff works for eight hours per day. … As a dual education school administrator, I must overcome the staff shortage by exceeding their working hours. But it affects their job performance negatively (P15).

4.3 | Administrators' perspectives on expected and current qualifications of auxiliaries

In this section, we present the administrators' perspectives on the expected and current qualifications of auxiliary staff, addressing the third research question. The findings related to this question are summarized in Table 4.

Analysis revealed administrators valued *technical*, *personal*, and *conceptual qualifications* when recruiting auxiliary staff. For *personal qualifications*, administrators stressed the importance of high communication skills, crisis intervention abilities, courtesy, and a sense of responsibility. One administrator stated,

TABLE 4 Expected and current qualifications of auxiliary staff.

Participant	Technical qualifications	Personal qualifications	Conceptual qualifications
P1	✓	✓	
P2	✓	✓	
P3	✓	✓	
P4	✓	✓	
P5	✓	✓	✓
P6	✓	✓	
P7	✓	✓	✓
P8	✓	✓	✓
P9	✓	✓	
P10	✓	✓	✓
P11	✓	✓	
P12	✓	✓	
P13	✓	✓	
P14	✓	✓	
P15	✓	✓	
P16	✓	✓	
P17	✓	✓	
P18	✓	✓	
P19	✓	✓	✓
P20	✓	✓	
P21	✓	✓	
P22	✓	✓	✓

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> They should have courtesy and good communication skills. … they should know how to speak with children. They should know how to talk to the teacher, the administrator, or the parents (P7).

Regarding *professional commitment*, participants emphasized that auxiliaries should see the school as their home, love their job, and excel in crisis intervention. They should also possess practical communication skills when dealing with school administration, teachers, students, and parents. Additionally, working harmoniously at school and having high psychological resilience were seen as essential.

All participants agreed that auxiliary staff should possess adequate *technological competencies* to address any technical issues in the school. Some administrators also expected auxiliaries to be familiar with organizational policies, guidelines, and ethical standards while remaining open to learning and self-improvement. One administrator summarized the competencies expected of auxiliary staff:

> … auxiliary staff should have calmness, speed, good communication skills, psychological resilience, the ability to intervene in times of crisis and knowledge of the organization procedures of the schools (P10).

4.4 | Administrators' perspectives on the influence of auxiliary staff on education

In this section, we present administrators' views on the influence of auxiliary staff on education, addressing the fourth research question. These perspectives are summarized in Table 5.

As illustrated in Table 5, the administrators' perspectives on the influence of auxiliary staff on education were categorized into two themes: *positive* and *negative effects*.

4.5 | Positive effects of auxiliary staff on education

Positive impacts of auxiliary staff on education included contributions to school organization, cleanliness, security, maintenance, repair, and support. Administrators believed that auxiliary staff helped maintain order in schools. One administrator highlighted their positive impact, stating

> They positively contribute to the education process. … they will ensure smooth functions such as cleaning, maintaining and repairing the school environment (P14).

> Since they are responsible for cleaning and maintaining school environments, they contribute to the educational process positively if they fulfill their duties (P12).

4.6 | Negative effects of auxiliary staff on education

We found that negative concerns were also expressed, with some administrators noting that auxiliary staff sometimes displayed excessive familiarity with parents, made untimely remarks to students, disrupted the school climate, and failed to fulfill their assigned tasks. Some administrators mentioned the negative impacts of the auxiliary staff on the education process, which are as follows.

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TABLE 5 Influence of auxiliary staff on education.

Participant	Positive effects	Negative effects
P1		✓
P2	✓	
P3		✓
P4		✓
P5	✓	
P6		✓
P7		✓
P8		✓
P9	✓	
P10		✓
P11		✓
P12		✓
P13		✓
P14	✓	
P15		✓
P16		✓
P17	✓	
P18	✓	
P19		✓
P20	✓	
P21		✓
P22	✓	

> They certainly influence the education process negatively, especially if they do their job incompletely…. like dominoes, if the auxiliary is careless or does not pay attention to their hygiene or the hygiene of the environment, their actions or performance affects everything (P7).

> One of the dynamics of the school is the auxiliary…. we cannot talk about education when the cleaning services in the school are disrupted or when everyone is talking about the school's filth (P20).

5 | DISCUSSION

This study has yielded several valuable insights. First, it has provided us with a deeper understanding of the perspectives held by administrators regarding the auxiliary staff within their schools. We found that administrators felt ineffective in recruiting auxiliaries in their schools since their recruitment was not under their control. They

15206807, 2024, 3, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/pits.23105 by Akdeniz University, Wiley Online Library on [05/02/2024]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

commonly stated they have no role in permanent recruitment processes except their minor roles in temporary employment by the PTA. Explicitly, we found that the role of school administrators in recruiting the auxiliary staff in their schools is more prominent and influential in recruiting the auxiliary staff with the local budget; nevertheless, they seem less decisive in the appointments made for permanent status. Thus, their role in recruiting the auxiliary should be redefined, and more decision-making positions should be offered to the administrators. That is, if administrators can be more in the role of employers, they will be more effective in supervising employee performance and the proper execution of work. This finding of the present study is consistent with past research (Arar et al., 2017; Oplatka & Arar, 2016), which claimed that administrators had limited independence in delegating responsibilities or instigating significant school changes due to the centralized education system in Turkey.

Our findings also indicated that the auxiliaries in permanent positions felt privileged due to their civil servant positions. However, the so-called advantages arising from recruitment differences between employees should be eliminated to increase job performance, and an equivalent job definition should be made for permanent and temporary employed auxiliaries. Such an arrangement may also fulfill the expectations of administrators who demand some regulations for the employment of auxiliary staff with permanent positions in which the schools and administrators also play a decisive role.

Regarding the functional status of the auxiliary staff, we found that some administrators think employing them as permanent staff is the proper way. They believe that permanent employment can offer many advantages, resulting in job security, increased productivity, and a lower turnover rate. On the other hand, some administrators argue that contracted or temporary staff is a more flexible employment model and may find it easier to adapt to the seasonal demands of the school. In other words, we found that while some administrators thought the staff should be employed full-time, others argued that part-time or contractual employment was more appropriate for their employment model. The dilemma seems rooted in administrators' experiences in smoothly managing the regular work of auxiliary staff in their schools. Some administrators likely believe that state-appointed auxiliary staff do a better job because being in a permanent position increases their belongingness and makes them see the school as their home, and thus, they perform more sincerely.

On the other hand, those who consider temporary ones more productive depend arguments on the fear of job loss. Since temporarily contracted auxiliaries want to guarantee their positions in further years, they might perform their duties better. We believe that the recruiting model of the auxiliary might be a minor issue if the job descriptions of the auxiliaries are defined in advance and if the administrators' supervision of the job performance is authorized through regulations. Regardless of their recruitment model, the auxiliary should be solely in the control of the administrators, and the decisions should be based on the school's needs and the staff's qualifications. In sum, some of the above findings of the present study concerning job performance and recruitment models align with several other studies (Köse et al., 2018; Özdoğan-Özbal, 2017; Smilie, 2022; Yavuz, 2011), which found that staff employed through service procurement were the most efficient.

Another common opinion uncovered in the data analysis was the inadequacy of the auxiliary and the need for in-service training for the staff. The administrators in the present study mostly found the number of the auxiliary staff as inadequate or unqualified to maintain their tasks in schools. Moreover, some also considered that auxiliaries should be trained in communication skills and official procedures of the schools. The finding concerning the insufficient number of auxiliary staff is consistent with previous research (Demir, 2016; Mese, 2009; Özdoğan-Özbal, 2017), which found that principals dissatisfied with the inadequate number of permanent janitors and that auxiliary staff is unqualified (Ertör & Akan, 2016).

The analysis of the gathered data also revealed that participants prefer a contracted staff employment model based on the auxiliaries' job performance. Moreover, most of the participants deemed the contracted status of the auxiliary staff should be renewed yearly, and administrators should be in a decisive position in the recruitment process. Administrators who suggested a performance-based model stated that a commission should be established to recruit the auxiliary staff, and the administration's opinion should be considered in the final decision. Some participants also think a registry grade or in-service promotion system should be involved in increasing the job

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performance of the auxiliary. In this aspect, they offered that the performance of the auxiliary staff should be assessed every 3 months through surveys with the participation of teachers, students, and parents.

The present study's findings also uncovered that administrators consider the technical and personal qualifications and conceptual capabilities of the auxiliaries while recruiting them in their schools. Moreover, we found that administrators believe the auxiliaries to have positive and negative effects on the education process, which is consistent with previous research (Demir, 2013; Köse et al., 2018; Reed & Salazar, 1998).

Although the present study did not intend to examine directly, further analysis concerning some variables, such as gender and seniority of the administrators, also revealed some findings worth mentioning. For instance, it is found that female administrators are more interested in the performance of auxiliary staff than male administrators. The finding concerning female administrators giving more weight to the job performance of the auxiliaries than males may be related to their institutions preschools, where they prioritize hygiene and cleanliness. Likewise, it is found that the perspectives of deputy principals are generally more negative than those of principals. It may be because deputy principals must deal with the conflicts and disagreements between the school administration and the auxiliary staff. Additionally, it is also found that while school administrators with more professional seniority and administrative experience focus more on the sense of belonging of the auxiliary staff, the less experienced administrators emphasize efficiency more. The reason for such a difference might be that the less experienced administrators are more success-oriented than others.

6 | CONCLUSION

The views of school administrators regarding auxiliary staff's functions, employment models, and working conditions exhibit notable variations. Some administrators recognize the pivotal role of auxiliary staff in maintaining order, security, and overall school functionality. They advocate for improvements in the auxiliary staff's working conditions and job status. Conversely, others perceive the contributions of auxiliary staff as less critical compared to other educational activities within the school. However, it is noteworthy that most school administrators acknowledge the invaluable support of auxiliary staff in ensuring a healthy and safe learning environment through their efforts in areas such as cleaning, maintenance, catering, and more. Administrators collectively recognize that auxiliary staff, in one way or another, contribute to the care and enhancement of the teaching and learning process within the school.

The insights from school administrators regarding auxiliary staff's job performance, competencies, effects on the education process, and employment models offer valuable information that can inform measures to enhance service quality and decision-making in schools. Particularly, administrators' recommendations for improving auxiliary staff's job performance hold significance for business and management strategies. For instance, effective business management practices can boost staff productivity, minimize process disruptions, and elevate school service quality. Inclusive discussions involving stakeholders such as teachers, students, parents, and PTA members can provide invaluable insights into the specific needs and expectations of the school community. Engaging stakeholders in shaping personnel policies ensures alignment with these particular requirements. Similarly, implementing key performance indicators can facilitate progress assessment and identify areas for refinement in auxiliary staff performance. Moreover, extending job security to permanent staff can foster a sense of belonging within the workforce.

Based on the findings, it is evident that several avenues for improvement exist to enhance the performance of auxiliary staff in schools. Clear and well-defined roles and responsibilities, communicated effectively to staff and school administration, can mitigate confusion and improve overall coordination. Implementing training programs aimed at enhancing technical skills, effective communication, and crisis intervention can significantly contribute to the qualifications of auxiliary staff. Collaborative initiatives with universities or professionals can tailor training programs to the specific needs of auxiliary staff, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of improvement efforts.

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Furthermore, recognizing and rewarding performance within a structured system through performance bonuses, certificates of appreciation, or opportunities for career advancement can serve as a motivating force and elevate performance quality. Establishing regular feedback channels between administrators and staff helps identify areas for improvement and reinforces positive conduct. Additionally, a comprehensive evaluation system can provide a holistic understanding of performance dynamics, fostering a culture of continuous enhancement guided by feedback and performance evaluations. By implementing these suggestions and business management strategies, schools can work toward improving the work performance of auxiliaries and creating a more positive and productive school environment.

Incorporating the views of school administrators regarding personnel in auxiliary services is essential for effective school management. These views should be objective and reflected in management decisions. Therefore, involving other interested parties and administrators is crucial when determining personnel policies. Various strategies, including training opportunities, improved working conditions, and enhanced motivation, must be developed to increase the job performance of auxiliary staff.

In conclusion, school administrators' perspectives on the status, working conditions, competencies, and job performance of auxiliary staff are vital components of school management. The administrators desire to play a practical role in decision-making processes related to the employment of auxiliary staff, regardless of the employment model. These insights should be considered when formulating personnel policies and striving to enhance job performance. In sum, the findings of this study offer valuable insights into administrators' perspectives on school auxiliary staff, emphasizing the need for redefining administrative roles, addressing recruitment model issues, and recognizing the significance of qualifications and performance. Additionally, it underscores the impact of auxiliary staff, both positive and negative, and proposes areas for improvement through training and regulation.

7 | LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Despite the substantial contributions made by the present study, it is essential to acknowledge the inherent limitations that have shaped its scope and findings. These limitations underscore the research process's intricacies and offer insights into potential avenues for future investigations.

7.1 | Methodological limitations of the study

Initially, it is crucial to note that the analysis provided is entirely descriptive and should not be misconstrued as having a causal relationship. Additionally, the outcomes we have obtained rely on self-reported answers from administrators, potentially leading to variations between their perceptions and the factual trends. Moreover, as a relatively small-scale regional survey, this study is perhaps an exploratory form for the administrators' perspectives on the employment models and their roles in recruiting auxiliary staff in schools.

The study collected viewpoints from administrators employed in public schools in a city along Turkey's Western Mediterranean coast. Consequently, its focus is not directed toward administrators in the private school sector who may not have received as much attention or administrators who work in other parts of the country. Additionally, it's important to note that this study takes an interpretive approach, relying on the subjective interpretations of our participants. As a result, their perspectives should be approached with careful consideration. Eventually, expressing genuine viewpoints and discussing personal views can be challenging, particularly in an environment where the Ministry of Education wields significant influence.

The results of the present study might not be generalizable to other settings; however, the findings strongly suggest that the voices of administrators on the role of auxiliary in education need to be examined to gain a richer understanding of the nature and extent of the implications of the influence of auxiliary staff upon the education

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system. Thus, the transferability of this study's findings to diverse contexts is crucial for understanding the broader applicability of the research outcomes. While the study was conducted within a specific setting, its implications resonate with a more comprehensive range of situations due to the underlying principles and methodologies employed.

Additionally, the contextual nuances of the study site must be carefully examined when attempting to apply these findings to other settings. Cultural variations, socioeconomic conditions, and institutional frameworks can impact the degree to which the results hold in different contexts. Therefore, a thoughtful assessment of these factors is essential to determine the extent to which the insights derived from this study can be extrapolated to other situations and to ensure that any adaptations made remain aligned with the core principles that underpin the research.

7.2 | Suggestions for further research

The insights garnered from this study hold significant implications that extend beyond the confines of the current research, offering valuable perspectives for various stakeholders and paving the way for informed decisions and actions in relevant fields. Thus, potential researchers could conduct more comprehensive studies on the status and working conditions of the auxiliary staff. These studies may be beneficial to compare the situation of staff working in schools in different regions and to get a general view of this issue. Moreover, more detailed studies on the auxiliary staff's competencies and training needs can help identify more effective strategies to improve their job performance. Finally, studies can be conducted to compare the effectiveness of different strategies for improving the job performance of the auxiliary staff. These studies can provide administrators with more information on which strategies are more effective in improving the job performance of these staff.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization: Suleyman Karataş and Mustafa Caner. *Methodology*: Suleyman Karataş and Mustafa Caner. *Resources*: Suleyman Karataş. *Data curation*: Suleyman Karataş. *Writing—original draft preparation*: Suleyman Karataş. *Writing—review and editing*: Mustafa Caner. Both authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data supporting this study's findings are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The study approved by the Akdeniz University Social and Human Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee. All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards and the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. Informed consent was obtained from all participants included in the study. Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

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APPENDIX 1: Interview form

Demographic information

Gender:

Age:

Position:

Professional experience (years):

Administrative seniority (years):

Interview questions

1. Are there any personnel working in the auxiliary services in your school? If yes, what is their working status? (Civil servant, PTA Employee, TEA Employee, etc.)
2. What are your views concerning your role in recruiting auxiliary staff in your school?
3. What are your views concerning the impact of the recruitment status of the auxiliary on their job performance?
4. What are your views on the qualifications that the auxiliary staff should have, and to what extent do your current personnel carry these qualifications?
5. What are your views on the effects of the auxiliary staff on the education process?

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