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The Floor Is (Y)Ours: Auxiliary Staff Voices Their Persona

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ABSTRACT

The current study investigated the perspectives of auxiliary staff regarding their profession. This study used a holistic multiple-case study design and a qualitative research method. The sample consisted of 45 auxiliary staff who worked in various K12 public schools in the central districts of a city in Turkey and voluntarily participated in the study. The study's participants, which was designed using a case study design, consisted of 45 auxiliary staff working in 11 K12 public schools in the central districts of a province in Turkey who voluntarily participated in the study. A maximum variation sampling strategy, a purposeful sampling technique, was employed for sample selection. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant to gather data for this study. An inductive content analysis method was used to analyze the collected data, and the findings were interpreted accordingly. The results revealed that auxiliary staff perform multiple roles, such as sanitation, kitchen duties, environmental monitoring, administrative tasks, and technical work. Moreover, the auxiliary staff perceived that their various roles contributed to the overall well-being of the school community in schools.

1 | Introduction

Educational institutions play a vital role in students' development, encompassing their personal, social, and academic growth. They achieve this through the instructional activities conducted in classes and by fostering a supportive learning environment through the collaborative efforts of all stakeholders. Practical cooperation and interaction among these stakeholders contribute significantly to creating a positive learning environment for everyone within a school. Hence, it is crucial for educational institutions to provide quality education, recognizing that these institutions are not simply a community of students and teachers but a collective entity that includes parents, administrators, and auxiliary staff (Karataş and Caner 2024).

As each staff member can potentially affect the school climate, dismissing the impact of any individual within the school community forfeits the opportunity to enhance performance (Pounder, Ogawa, and Adams 1995). A comprehensive review of the existing literature suggests that few recent studies have investigated auxiliary staff, who play a crucial role in educational institutions. Hoyle (1986) noted that discussions about auxiliary staff's influence often occur in staff rooms, but there is a need for concrete evidence to support these discussions. Similarly, Conley, Gould and Levine (2010) asserted that although the film industry took the janitors' visibility in schools into account, academics should have acknowledged the intricate details involved in their work. Some researchers (Conley, Gould, and Levine 2010; Magolda and Delman 2016) have also claimed that the subject of auxiliary staff in educational institutions has received limited attention, while Smilie (2022) asserted that scholars have largely overlooked the role of auxiliary staff in the school community.

This study expands on prior research that analyzed administrators' views toward auxiliary staff (Blinded 2024) by focusing

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Summary

- Auxiliary staff often hold disparate views on their job status, with some feeling they need to be more recognized within educational institutions.
- The varying perceptions of working status among auxiliary staff can impact job performance and satisfaction, highlighting the necessity for fair treatment and support.
- Auxiliary staff play a crucial role in fostering a conducive learning environment, ultimately contributing to students' well-being and academic advancement.

on the perspectives of auxiliary staff, who have typically been ignored in the academic sphere. The aim was to comprehensively understand their roles, experiences, and contributions within K12 schools by exploring their perceptions in greater depth.

There is a notable gap in the literature; almost no study has directly investigated the perceptions and experiences of auxiliary staff in educational settings. To address this gap, this study aimed to comprehensively explore the perceptions, challenges, and contributions of auxiliary staff in the educational landscape. This study intends to contribute to a more holistic understanding of the educational ecosystem and its intricate dynamics by exploring the nuanced perspectives of these often overlooked but essential school community members. Moreover, by amplifying the voices of auxiliary staff, this research endeavors to enrich our understanding of the organizational dynamics of school climate and inform practices that foster inclusive and collaborative educational environments. Specifically, the present study sought answers to the following questions.

RQ1 *What are the perspectives of the auxiliary staff on their professional roles?*

RQ2 *What are the views of auxiliary staff on their working conditions and status?*

RQ3 *How do auxiliary staff appreciate their impact on the school community?*

The following sections will be covered in this paper: an overview of auxiliary staff and their significance in schools; a review of previous studies involving auxiliary staff; the study's methodology, including the study design, study group, data collection instrument, data analysis, researcher's role, and trustworthiness; the study's findings and their discussion; and finally, the study's conclusions, which will include implications, limitations, and recommendations for future studies.

1.1 | Literature Review

The term auxiliary staff within educational settings is often referred to interchangeably as support staff, school custodians, janitors, cleaners, or janitors, constituting noncertified individuals who play integral roles in the functioning of educational institutions (Conley, Gould, and Levine 2010). These personnel, recognized as a vital component among school stakeholders (Solone et al. 2019), fulfill responsibilities encompassing cleaning, security, transportation, and maintenance, thus ensuring the efficient operation of educational facilities. Their contributions enhance institutional performance and bolster overall efficiency (Lucas and Buzzanell 2014). However, several studies have shown that educational institutions typically opt to outsource the services of auxiliary staff (Bates, Choi, and Kim 2021; Cuban 2012; Phipps and Merisotis 2005; Wekullo 2017).

Studies have highlighted the issues auxiliary staff face, including inadequate wages, challenging working conditions, limited opportunities for career advancement, staffing shortages, and loss of rights (Magiera et al. 2006). Some studies have examined the potential adverse effects of demanding work pace and challenging working conditions on employee well-being and job satisfaction (Brewer and Clippard 2002; Creagh et al. 2023). Likewise, understaffing in some schools can increase the workload of auxiliary staff, leading to disruptions in school maintenance, cleanliness, and safety (Magolda 2023). The lack of professional development opportunities and rights can further diminish job satisfaction and motivation among auxiliary staff (Smilie 2022). These challenges necessitate employers and institutions to formulate strategies to improve working conditions and rights for auxiliary staff (Conley, Gould, and Levine 2010).

In one of the first academic studies on auxiliary staff [janitors], Pattington (1946) surmised their role as essential personnel in the school system, which affected administrators' success. However, they are the only school staff who do not require training or educational credentials. Therefore, as Conley, Gould and Levine (2010) stated, auxiliary staff are treated in policy and administration literature as part of the "physical plant of the schools." The need for more education and expertise in the job description of auxiliary staff also differentiates the role expectations and perceived values of such personnel.

The responsibilities of auxiliary personnel typically include providing the necessary support services for daily school operations, cleaning, lighting, heating, security, and transportation services (Görgülü 2008; Taymaz 2008), managing correspondence and official documents, greeting and assisting visitors, and other duties assigned by the administrators. The auxiliary staff comprises nonacademic school employees whose primary responsibilities revolve around maintaining sanitary and safe school facilities, including cleaning classrooms and securing the school environment during or after class hours. Although the job description of auxiliary staff is outlined in the Civil Servants Law in Türkiye, the articles within it offer a broadly defined scope. Furthermore, auxiliary staff's specific duties and responsibilities are delineated in administrative regulations or directives tailored for each institution and implemented within a legal framework.

Examining the existing literature indicates a limited focus on educational research specifically addressing auxiliary staff. However, they are occasionally mentioned in studies concerning school support staff (Branham 2004; Griffith 2001), school

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climate (Makki and Kandil 2023), and burnout and job satisfaction (Brewer and Clippard 2002). Additionally, dissertations have explored the experiences of auxiliary staff, offering insights into their working conditions (Glickman 2017; Maxwell 2004; Montoya 2020; Reed 2015).

In a study conducted by Reed and Salazar (1998), the impact of auxiliary staff on school culture was investigated, revealing that their influence is both technical and symbolic and operates through overt and tacit means. Branham (2004) examined the impact of school infrastructure on student achievement and found that schools with inadequate auxiliary staff tended to experience lower attendance rates and lower levels of student achievement. Similarly, Magolda (2023) explored the role of custodial staff in a novel and highlighted that custodians play a significant role in fostering positive relationships with students, faculty, and other staff members.

1.2 | Auxiliary Staff in Turkish Schools

Auxiliary staff in Türkiye are primarily recruited in two categories: civil servants (permanent) and temporary contracted staff. The government appoints civil servants through formal procedures, and they hold permanent positions. Conversely, temporary contracted staff are hired on a provisional basis. However, they may transition to permanent positions if they fulfill the criteria outlined in the Civil Servants Law and successfully pass the government's written and/or oral examinations.

Thus, auxiliary staff working in schools in Türkiye are typically classified into three categories: civil servants, part-time staff affiliated with the parent-teacher association (PTA), and staff employed under the auspices of the Turkish Employment Agency (TEA), a governmental public employment service. Permanent staff members (civil servants) are responsible for school maintenance and cleaning duties. Those affiliated with the PTA offer services to fulfill the school's needs (TEA 2013). Conversely, individuals under the control of TEA are temporarily employed in schools and are expected to support school administration. It is noteworthy that the TEA prioritizes disadvantaged or special groups such as ex-convicts, victims of terrorism, and individuals raised in orphanages to enhance their temporary employment under the act of the Community Benefit Program (CBP).

In schools, while certified personnel such as teachers, administrators, counselors, and civil servants are employed by the Ministry of National Education, there is no standardized procedure for employing temporary auxiliary staff. Typically, Provincial Directorates of National Education collaborates with the TEA to plan and recruit temporary auxiliary staff, with candidates applying for positions. Employment contracts for auxiliary staff are usually for a specified period, typically 11 months, and renewed upon expiration. Salaries are disbursed according to a predetermined wage schedule, and auxiliary staff are entitled to certain rights (MoNE 2014). Although legal regulations govern their working conditions, salaries, and other entitlements, their status differs from that of civil servants, and their affiliation terminates at the end of the employment contract (TEA 2013). Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs), voluntary organizations that foster communication and collaboration between schools and parents, also hire temporary auxiliary staff. They operate by the Ministry of National Education regulations and partner with the school administration (MoNE 2012). It is important to note that schools in Türkiye have a variety of budgets for hiring auxiliaries, which limits their role in staff recruitment. That is, within the centralized system, the autonomy of schools is limited, leading them to avoid delegating responsibilities or initiating significant school changes (Oplatka and Arar 2016), and thus, schools or administrators play a minor role in the recruitment of auxiliary staff in schools.

In Turkish, Demir (2013) observed that students could adopt positive or negative behaviors by emulating auxiliary staff as role models. Several other studies have explored the roles and functions of auxiliary staff in the school climate, concluding that such staff should prioritize fostering caring relationships with students (Acun and Erten 1993), often lack qualifications (Ertör and Akan 2016), and possess inadequate knowledge of the school system (Tok 2002). Köse, Uzun and Öner-Özaslan (2018) study, which investigated the perspectives of school administrators on auxiliary staff working in preschool education institutions, revealed that auxiliary staff have both direct and indirect negative impacts on the school community in preschool. Their findings indicated that staff hired through service procurement (PTA or CBP) were deemed the most effective, underscoring the importance of considering school administrators' preferences when recruiting such personnel. A recent study (Blinded 2024) also investigated school administrators' perceptions regarding employment status, educational contributions, job performance, and school auxiliary staff hiring processes. The study's findings revealed that although auxiliary staff play a significant direct and indirect role in the school community, school administrators perceived their involvement in recruiting auxiliary staff as minimal.

Regarding administrators' perspectives on auxiliary staff, several other studies (Demir 2016; Mese 2009) have revealed principals' dissatisfaction with either an insufficient number of auxiliary staff or inadequate provision of permanent staff (Özdoğan-Özbal 2017). Additionally, other studies (Aslanargun and Bozkurt 2012; Blinded 2024; Sarice 2006) have identified various challenges faced by principals related to auxiliary staff, particularly in managing associated costs (Özdoğan-Özbal 2017). Yavuz (2011) and Blinded (2024) also highlighted the lack of bureaucratic control over hiring auxiliary staff as a challenge for administrators, noting that most administrators prefer hiring through the PTA or the TEA because permanent employment arrangements can negatively impact staff performance.

2 | Methods

2.1 | Design

The current study implemented a qualitative research approach aligned with its objectives, using a holistic multiple-case study design to gather the viewpoints of the auxiliary staff. In a holistic multiple-case study design, the case is examined across various units of analysis (such as individuals, institutions,

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programs, and schools) to uncover new issues and provide insights or guidance for future research initiatives.

2.2 | Study Group

The participants in this research consisted of 45 support staff from various public 11 K12 schools in the study area. A purposeful sampling strategy, the maximum variation technique, was used to select the study group. This method aims to include individuals with diverse characteristics, perspectives, and experiences relevant to the research question. To comprehensively understand the phenomenon under investigation, auxiliary staff were chosen based on gender, age, and seniority to ensure participant diversity. The study group comprised 38 females and seven males, with an average age of 40 years and an average professional seniority of 4 years or less. Each participant was assigned a unique code to maintain confidentiality and anonymity, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. The study followed the guidelines of the Helsinki Declaration throughout its duration. Table 1

2.3 | Data Collection Instrument

The present study utilized semi-structured interviews to elicit the perspectives of auxiliary staff regarding their roles, experiences, and contributions to schools. The semi-structured interview protocol for data collection was developed through a systematic four-step process. Existing studies in the relevant literature were examined to create an initial draft interview form. Next, the draft form was reviewed by two educational administration experts for content validity, and adjustments were made based on their feedback. Subsequently, the revised form was pilot tested with two external participants. Finally, a language expert assessed the clarity and comprehensibility of the forms. This iterative process developed a comprehensive interview form comprising six main and several follow-up questions for data collection.

TABLE 1 | Participants' demographics.

Variables	Sub-group	*n*	%
Gender	Female	38	84.44
	Male	7	15.56
Age	40 years and under	19	44.19
	40–49 years	16	37.21
	50 years and above	8	18.60
Seniority	1 year or less seniority	27	65.85
	2 years or more seniority	14	34.15
Educational background	Primary School	17	40.48
	Secondary School	5	11.90
	High school	18	42.86
	Associate degree	2	4.76
Status	Permanent	6	13.33
	Temporary	8	17.78
	PTA/CBP Employee	31	68.89

2.4 | Data Analysis

This study utilized content analysis, a systematic method for identifying patterns, themes, and concepts within the data, to gain insight into the meaning and context of the content. Krippendorff (2019) defines content analysis as a research technique that enables replicable and valid inferences from texts to the contexts of their use. The researchers employed inductive data analysis, where they coded recurring concepts that emerged while reading the data. Employing Bingham and Witkowsky's (2022) methodology, the analysis process began with open coding, where researchers discovered emergent topics or concepts from the data. This was followed by pattern coding, in which data were organized into more concise analytical concepts to establish the main themes and findings. In the third step, in vivo codes were used to identify representative data that supported the findings by capturing participants' words. Finally, the results were interpreted in line with existing literature. Moreover, this study adhered to O'Brien et al. (2014) standardized framework for reporting qualitative studies (SRQR) as a reporting guideline. This ensured that the study's findings were effectively communicated and adhered to established qualitative research reporting standards.

This study's iterative inductive data analysis process involved multiple steps to gain a deeper understanding of the data. Recurring patterns in the main category were identified, and typical quotes representing each pattern were collected and arranged to provide examples of unearthed themes. Definitions of related concepts were provided, and relevant sections of the data were emphasized to explore the connections between various themes and categories. The categories and themes in the data were then systematically tabularized, allowing researchers to gradually develop a deeper understanding of the data, refine their interpretation, and derive meaningful insights from study findings.

2.5 | Researcher Role

The researchers in this study played integral roles as impartial observers and diligent analysts. They maintained objectivity by conducting unbiased interviews with auxiliary staff and fostering an unbiased exploration of the subject matter. Their lack of prior knowledge of the interviewees provided a fresh perspective devoid of pre-existing biases. Each researcher conducted individual analyses, upholding the integrity of the research and facilitating robust discussions that enriched the interpretive process. Collaborative reflection enhanced the depth and credibility of qualitative analysis.

2.6 | Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of our qualitative study, we employed various methods to address credibility, transferability,

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confirmability, and dependability. These included prolonged engagement with data, member checking, triangulation of data sources, detailed descriptions of the research context and participants, reflexivity regarding our role and potential biases, peer debriefing, maintenance of an audit trail, and systematic and transparent documentation of the research process.

We used various techniques to improve the trustworthiness of our study. To ensure confirmability, we documented every aspect of our research, including data collection, analysis, and interpretation, to minimize researcher bias and guarantee our findings' accuracy and impartiality. To ensure dependability, we had an external expert conduct an inquiry audit, which scrutinized our research process and data analysis to evaluate the consistency and reproducibility of our findings. We also used thick descriptions to facilitate transferability, which provided comprehensive information regarding our research context, participants, and findings. We aim to enhance our study's credibility and practical significance by implementing these strategies.

Adopting measures based on Cohen, Mannion and Morrison (2007) recommendations, extensive planning, external auditing, expert evaluation, clear data documentation, prevention of researcher bias, comprehensive literature review, theoretical framework, confirmation of participant eligibility, and independent coding was implemented. In addition, an external field expert coder conducted a verification process that involved recoding the data and comparing the results with the original researcher's coding to validate the findings and reinforce the robustness of the analysis. By effectively implementing these measures, the trustworthiness of the research findings was safeguarded, thus enhancing the validity and dependability of the study's outcomes.

3 | Results

In this section, we explore the findings derived from our data analysis, focusing on the typology of auxiliary staff perceptions regarding their working status, competencies, and impact on the school community. The findings of the analysis are presented as auxiliary staff's views on their professional roles (RQ1), working conditions and situations (RQ2), and their impact on the school community (RQ3), respectively.

3.1 | Auxiliary Staff on Their Professional Roles

According to the participants, their daily routines were grouped into six categories: (a) sanitation, (b) kitchen work, (c) monitoring environment, (d) other work, (e) administrative work, and (f) technical work (Table 2). In addition, they are also responsible for performing kitchen duties, including preparing tea, cleaning dishes, and setting up dining halls in schools where meals are provided. Environment and space control are the third most common daily routines of auxiliary staff, which entail opening and closing the school and ensuring that the school premises are kept in order. Furthermore, auxiliary staff support student entry and exit, assist teachers with technical issues and fulfill school principals' administrative demands.

TABLE 2 | Daily routines of auxiliary staff.

Code	f	%
Sanitation	**129**	**59.4**
• Routine cleaning/checking of classrooms/toilets	96	73.6
• Cleaning of administrative/teachers' rooms	19	14.7
• Garden cleaning/controlling, watering plants	13	10.1
• Garbage removal	2	1.6
Kitchen work	**34**	**15.6**
• Brewing/serving tea	17	50.0
• Dish/kitchen/dining hall cleaning	12	35.3
• Mealtime/breakfast/meal preparations	5	14.7
Monitoring environment	**31**	**14.3**
• Opening/closing school	12	38.7
• Opening/closing/ventilating windows	7	22.6
• Control over areas of responsibility	7	22.6
• Turn on/off air conditioning/lights	5	16.1
Others	**11**	**5.1**
• Support for students' entrance and exit	7	63.6
• Help other staff members	3	27.2
• Leftover/unfinished work	3	27.2
• Support self-care for special students	2	18.1
Administrative work	**10**	**4.6**
• Helping teachers	2	20.0
• Photocopying works	2	20.0
• Provision of school supplies	3	30.0
• Informing/guidance of visitors	2	20.0
• Helping students	1	10.0
Technical work	**2**	**1.0**
• We repair broken desks, prizes, and so on.	1	50.0
• Maintenance of machinery/electrical components	1	50.0

3.2 | Auxiliary Staff on Their Professional Roles, Working Conditions, and Situations

3.2.1 | In-Service Training and Courses Attended by Auxiliary Staff

The data analysis indicated that an overwhelming majority of participants enrolled in in-service training or courses to enhance their job performance. Most of these trainings or courses involved mandatory work-related training, such as occupational health and safety, hygiene training, natural gas heating ignition

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training, earthquake awareness training, and other relevant topics. Participants generally perceived this training as valuable regarding sanitation, hygiene, health, and the proper use of chemicals in sanitation. Fewer respondents opted for optional courses such as child development, healthy nutrition, cooking, communication, first aid, and computer use. However, many participants, who were typically newly recruited, reported needing training or courses to improve their job performance.

3.2.2 | The Influence of Disparities in Status on Job Performance

The impact of status disparities on auxiliary staff's job performance was investigated, revealing a diverse range of status designations among participants' workplaces (Table 3). These status distinctions included temporary, permanent, and non-designated status. The perceptions of the auxiliary staff concerning their work status also exhibited changeability. Most participants perceived their work status as advantageous; a considerable number regarded it as neither an advantage nor a disadvantage, and a minority perceived it as disadvantageous.

The participants' opinions regarding their most pressing status are diverse. They contend that the auxiliary statuses that bear the most significant workloads are (a) temporary workers, (b) permanent workers, and (c) all staff at the same level (Table 4). Temporary workers, including CBP- and PTA-employed staff, are perceived to carry the heaviest workload due to their multifaceted task structure and high workload. On the other hand, some participants expressed that permanent auxiliary staff have a heightened sense of responsibility, as they are experienced members of schools and consequently bear a more significant workload.

TABLE 3 | Perceptions of auxiliary staff regarding status differences.

Code	f	%
Advantageous status	**34**	**56.5**
• Permanent worker	28	79.3
– Permanent job opportunity/No fear of dismissal	16	57.6
– Better/regular salaries	9	32.1
– Clear position/job description	3	10,3
• Locally contracted staff	6	20.7
– Good working conditions	3	50.0
– Low workload	2	33.3
– Area of responsibility is defined	1	16.7
No advantages/disadvantages	**15**	**28.3**
– Equal conditions/same task	8	53.4
– Different task/responsibility area	4	26.7
– Non-statutory assignment	3	20
Disadvantaged status	**9**	**15.2**
• Temporary worker/CBP employee	9	100.0
– Not permanent/job anxiety	5	55.6
– Lack of belonging	2	22.2
– Financially different	1	11.1
– High workload	1	11.1

TABLE 4 | Perceptions of auxiliary staff about the way their colleagues do the work.

Code	f	%
There is no difference in the way employees do the work	43	60.8
• Work/task/responsibility awareness	18	41.9
• Same conditions/equal distribution of tasks	17	39.5
• Cooperation/Collaboration/harmony	5	11.6
• Different job/task/responsibility area	2	4.7
• Working as if it were own child's school	1	2.3
There is a difference in the way employees work	**37**	**39.2**
• Personalized/employee-driven	15	40.5
– Permanent/temporary status	6	40.0
– Work ethics/conscience	4	26.7
– Tendency to work individually	2	13.3
– Commitment to school/work	2	13.3
– Sense of duty/responsibility	1	6.7
• Speed/duration of work	9	24.3
– Experienced ones are faster	5	55.6
– Slow until newcomers learn the job	4	44.4
• Work environment/employee relations	8	21.6
– Cooperation/support among employees	5	55.6
– Adaptation of newcomers to the job	3	44.4
• Work/task structure	7	18.9
– The nature of the work/job performed	4	57.1
– Delegation/distribution of tasks	3	42.9

Participants' perceptions of their colleagues' working conditions also varied. Although most participants believed there was no difference in how their coworkers performed their jobs (60.8%), nearly half (39.2%) believed there was a distinction in how they did their jobs. The participants expressed that variations in the way their colleagues performed their duties could be attributed to several factors, including (a) individual/employee-related causes, (b) pace or length of work, (c) work environment or interpersonal relationships among employees, and (d) the structure of tasks or workload.

3.2.3 | The Effect of Status Differences on the Job Performance

We found that participants' perceptions of the impact of coworkers' status disparities on their job performance varied (Table 5). Approximately half the participants indicated that

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TABLE 5 | The effect of status differences on job performance.

Code	f	%
Status differences affect my job performance	**31**	**57.4**
• **Positively affect**	**23**	**32.5**
• Sense of duty/responsibility	11	47.8
• Taking responsibility for one's area	11	18.9
• Working environment	7	30.4
• Help/support of experienced people	3	42.8
– Adaptation	2	28.6
– Collaboration	1	14.3
– Respect	1	14.3
• Distribution/sharing of work/task	5	21.7
– Clear job description	4	80.0
– Fair work/task distribution	1	20.0
• **Negatively affect**	**8**	**25.8**
• Job insecurity/lack of permanent position	5	62.5
• Circulation of workforce	1	20.0
• Unfair distribution of work	1	20.0
• Increased workload	1	20.0
Status differences do not affect job performance	**23**	**42.6**
• Doing the same work under the same conditions	16	69.6
• Being work/task oriented	4	17.4
• Working in different positions	2	8.6
• Sharing/dividing tasks	1	4.3

status disparities did not affect job performance, whereas more than half stated that they significantly influenced job performance. Two main categories of situations were identified in which status disparities affect job performance: (i) those that have a positive impact on job performance and (ii) those that hurt job performance. *Cases that have a positive impact on job performance* include (a) being aware of one's tasks and responsibilities, (b) having a favorable working environment, and (c) distributing and sharing work effectively. *Cases that negatively affect job performance* include (a) job insecurity, (b) circulation within the workforce, (c) unfair distribution of work, and (d) increased workload.

3.2.4 | The Function of the School Principal in Hiring Auxiliary Staff

Our findings revealed that while some participants asserted that the school principal did not impact their employment, most indicated that the principal did influence their employment. On the other hand, the majority of participants who stated that school administrators played a role in their employment reported that the administrators provided emotional support, such as caring and providing reference and instrumental/informational support, such as providing clues for the procedures at the Ministry of National Education (MoNE).

3.2.5 | Perceptions of Auxiliary Staff Regarding the Working Environment

Most participants reported being generally satisfied with their working environment, whereas 10.3% expressed dissatisfaction. Participants generally described their satisfaction with the environment as enjoying their work, interacting positively with colleagues and administrators, and appreciating the school climate and community. Conversely, those dissatisfied with the environment mentioned challenging and tiring work, negative interactions, and employee gossip.

3.2.6 | Consideration of Working in Another School or Requesting a Transfer

The study results showed that while the majority of participants did not want to work or be transferred to another school, some were open to the idea, and a few felt that they had no right to request a transfer. Among those who did not want to move, the most common reasons were satisfaction with their current working environment, positive feelings about school and friends, and desire to retire from the same institution. Participants who wanted to stay at their current school also noted reasons such as proximity to home, familiarity with the environment, and a preference for the types of work available in their institutions. Conversely, those interested in working at another school mentioned their permanent or temporary status. For instance, some said they would consider a transfer if the new position offered permanent status. Additionally, it was found that those who preferred to work at another institution were typically temporary staff open to working in any setting. They also mentioned a preference for a permanent role in another sector if it was close to their homes and offered better opportunities.

3.2.7 | Advise Others to Work as Auxiliary Staff

The findings revealed that while most participants were willing to recommend working as auxiliary staff in schools, a significant minority disagreed. Those who expressed a willingness to recommend the role mentioned a comfortable working environment, enjoyment of their job, the opportunity to work with educated and supportive individuals, and the need for employees as reasons for their recommendations. They also noted that they would recommend a role to others who enjoyed working with their children, those who did not have better-paying or more secure job opportunities, and those who sought permanent employment. Furthermore, they indicated that working with children in schools was enjoyable despite its challenges and that they were respected and valued by the institution and work environment. In addition, they highlighted the reliability of the work environment, the short-term and disciplined nature of the tasks, and the availability of weekends and official holidays. Conversely, participants who did not

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recommend the role cited its temporary, tiring, and demanding nature as the reason for disapproval.

3.2.8 | Contribution of Auxiliary Staff to the School Community

Participants asserted that they played diverse and multifaceted roles in the school community. The themes that stood out as the most significant contributions of auxiliary staff to the school community in the school were (a) cleaning/sanitation, (b) students' self-care, (c) positive approach, (d) support in educational work, (e) support in administrative work, and (f) support in technical work (Table 6). Regarding *disruptions to work when auxiliary staff are absent from school*, the study's findings revealed that several tasks were identified as disrupted, including cleaning and hygiene, support for teachers, support for security in entry and exit, self-care and feeding of students, and maintenance and repair work in schools. Most participants believed their absence from school would negatively impact cleaning and hygiene tasks.

The findings also reveal that the consequences of disrupted work without auxiliary staff are diverse and complex. Participants identified two categories of adverse effects: those *affecting students* and those *affecting auxiliary staff*. The effects on students were further divided into *environmental* and *educational factors*. Most participants reported that environmental factors, such as unclean toilets and unhealthy environments, as well as educational factors, such as poor education and a lack of responsibility, had a detrimental impact on students. In contrast, the impact of disrupted work on auxiliary staff was seen as an increased workload and disruption of their colleagues' tasks.

3.2.9 | Attitudes of School Stakeholders Toward Auxiliary Staff

Generally, participants believed that most school stakeholders had favorable perspectives on auxiliary staff, amounting to 92.5% of the responses. Conversely, a small proportion of participants asserted that they occasionally encountered negative attitudes from specific individuals, although these instances were infrequent.

When the perceptions of the participants were asked about their *communication with the other staff*, it was found that auxiliary staff at schools were addressed by other stakeholders (the principal, vice principal, teachers, students, and parents) using formal titles such as "ma'am/sir" or their names. For instance, administrators typically address them as "Mr./Mrs.," "while teachers refer to them as "Mr./Mrs., sister/brother," and students address them as "sister/brother/aunt/Mrs." Parents often address them as "Mrs., sister," and their colleagues address them as "using their names."

According to a significant proportion of participants, administrators typically displayed favorable attitudes towards auxiliary staff, such as requesting assistance, remaining calm, promoting harmony, demonstrating comprehension, and making them feel

TABLE 6 | Contribution of auxiliary staff to the school community at the school.

Code	f	%
Sanitation	**34**	**39.5**
- Clean/hygienic environment	34	100
Self-care	**18**	**21.0**
- Personal hygiene	7	38.9
- Help at feeding time/meals	5	27.8
- Helping with toileting	3	16.7
- Protecting/reminding personal materials	3	16.7
Positive approach/communication	**12**	**14.0**
- Motherly/fatherly affection	5	41.6
- A friendly welcome	3	25.0
- Taking care of sick students	2	16.7
- Being a role model	1	8.3
- Welcoming parents	1	8.3
Support in teaching activities	**11**	**12.7**
- Support/help to teachers	7	63.6
- Assist in classroom activities	4	36.4
Administrative works	**8**	**9.3**
- Help/support/security at entrances and exits	4	50.0
- Informing the administration when they see something wrong	2	25.0
- Support in student studies at the weekend	1	12.5
- Photocopying	1	12.5
Technical works	**3**	**3.5**
- Maintenance/Repair	3	100.0
Disruptions	**58**	**100.0**
- Cleanliness/hygiene	35	60.3
- Support when teachers need	9	15.5
- Support in security/entry-exit	6	10.3
- Personal hygiene/self-care/nutrition/finding belongings	5	8.7
- Maintenance	3	5.2
Impacts of Disrupted Work	**53**	**100.0**
Impact of disrupted work on students	**44**	**83.0**
Environmental factors	39	88.7
- Dirty toilets/Health problems	17	43.6
- Unclean/unhygienic environment	17	43.6
- Disrupted areas/dysfunctional equipment	4	10.3
- Unsafe environment	1	2.5
Educational factors	5	11.3
- They cannot get a good education	3	60.0
- Enabling them to take responsibility	2	40.0
Impact of disrupted work on auxiliary staff	**9**	**17.0**
- Increased workloads	4	44.4
- Work/tasks of other employees are disrupted	4	44.4
- Motivation decreases	1	11.1

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valued. However, they were occasionally subjected to unfavorable attitudes, including inappropriate tones, and assigned tasks beyond their responsibilities. Additionally, the participants reported that other school stakeholders, including teachers, students, and colleagues, exhibited positive attitudes toward them.

3.2.10 | Requests of Other School Personnel From Auxiliary Staff

According to the findings, most did not report school personnel making personal requests (44%), whereas some stated that school personnel occasionally made personal requests (22%). Generally, most participants reported that school personnel made these requests during their work hours, and many auxiliaries did not consider requesting tea or coffee as a personal request but as part of their duties. However, most participants reported that managers made more personal requests, and a few stated that they did not make personal requests. Similarly, most participants stated that the teachers did not make personal requests, but when they did, they were polite. Likewise, most stated that students did not make personal requests. However, those who requested water or other materials (such as napkins, paper, cups, etc.) or were asked to call their families (e.g., when sick or forgot course materials) were not considered personal requests.

4 | Discussion

The current study investigated the perspectives of auxiliary staff regarding their profession. The overall findings revealed that the working status of auxiliary staff varied among individuals, with some feeling undervalued or overlooked in the school community. Many auxiliary staff believed that their efforts should be recognized and respected, as they play a vital role in the smooth functioning of the educational institution. Several participants emphasized the need for improved working conditions and job security, particularly for temporary contracts. Auxiliary staff have demonstrated competencies beyond traditional roles, such as fostering positive relationships with students and teachers and contributing to the school climate. Many have sought professional development to enhance their skills and expand their roles. Some have emphasized the importance of adaptability and flexibility in meeting diverse needs. Support staff, including special educational needs coordinators and nonteaching personnel, have been essential in facilitating inclusive practices and creating nurturing environments, particularly for students with behavioral, emotional, and social difficulties (Burton and Goodman 2011). They have established positive relationships with students and parents, offering immediate support and building trust in one-on-one settings, which promotes student well-being (Littlecott, Moore, and Murphy 2018). This contrasts with traditional teacher-student power dynamics that can impede addressing health and well-being issues effectively. In conclusion, auxiliary staff play a critical role in enhancing the school environment and student well-being. Their ability to nurture relationships, provide immediate support, and create a conducive atmosphere highlights the need for schools to recognize and utilize their unique capabilities in fostering a positive and inclusive learning environment (Kerr and Crawford 2024; Littlecott, Moore, and Murphy 2018).

Regarding their impact on the school community, auxiliary staff believed they were indispensable and crucial in creating a safe, clean, and conducive learning environment for students. Participants also emphasized the significance of their contributions in supporting student well-being and academic success. Several auxiliary staff members expressed frustration over the lack of recognition of their efforts and advocated for greater acknowledgment of their role in the educational community.

The primary finding of this research highlights the extensive range of skills demonstrated by auxiliary staff that extends beyond their conventional responsibilities. Participants highlighted their capacity to cultivate favorable relationships with students and teachers, pay tribute to the school climate, and adjust to diverse needs. Their ability to cultivate favorable relationships with students and teachers and adaptability to various needs emphasize their indispensable role in shaping the educational environment. Additionally, this study revealed a strong desire for professional development opportunities to improve these skills and expand their role within the school community. Providing professional development opportunities to enhance their abilities further may enable auxiliary staff to make substantial progress in strengthening the school community. Identifying and capitalizing on these competencies can also augment auxiliary staff's efficacy in supporting the school community. Investing in T&D programs can empower auxiliary staff to contribute substantially to the school community. This finding aligns with the findings of Blinded (2024) that auxiliaries in schools need in-service training in several aspects.

The role of administrators in the recruitment process was investigated, and most participants reported that the principal did not contribute to their employment. In particular, those with temporary status were informed that they were hired through TEA or PTA, indicating that the principal had no role in the process. Similarly, since the government employed those with permanent status, the school principal did not play a specific role in their case. This finding is consistent with Blinded (2024) study, in which administrators perceived their role as insignificant in recruiting auxiliary staff.

The present study revealed considerable variation in the job status of auxiliary staff, with some individuals needing more support within educational institutions. This disparity is evident in differing perceptions of employment stability, recognition, and workplace conditions. While some participants considered their position beneficial, others emphasized issues related to short-term contracts and the absence of permanent employment. The results of the present study concerning the status of auxiliary staff are consistent with Blinded (2024) findings, which showed that civil servant status conferred a sense of privilege on those in permanent positions. This disparity emphasizes addressing auxiliary staff concerns to foster a harmonious and inclusive workplace environment.

Furthermore, this study revealed considerable variation in the perceptions of auxiliary staff concerning their employment status. For example, most participants viewed permanent

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workers and locally contracted staff as favorable statuses because of the assurance of job security and enhanced working conditions. Conversely, those on temporary contracts expressed apprehensions regarding job insecurity and a lack of association with educational institutions. The divergence in perceptions underscores the necessity for fair and equitable treatment and support for all auxiliary staff members, without exception.

Many participants asserted that there needed to be discernible differences in how their colleagues performed their duties. This can be primarily attributed to the awareness of the auxiliary staff's job responsibilities and the equal distribution of tasks and similar conditions in which they work. However, our analysis also revealed that participants believed permanent and locally contracted auxiliary staff possessed the most favorable status. Most participants opine that permanent workers are deemed advantageous because they have permanent job opportunities and job security, their salaries are better and more regular, and they are not subject to the anxiety of unemployment. Additionally, locally contracted auxiliary staff is another status that is considered favorable due to improved working conditions, reduced work intensity, and workload. The present result aligns with the conclusions reached by Blinded (2024), who found that administrators believe that contracted staff employment models impact the performance of auxiliaries and that locally contracted auxiliary staff perform better.

Our findings revealed that temporary and CBP employees are often considered disadvantaged auxiliary staff. The primary reason for this perception is the scarcity of permanent employment opportunities and the ensuing job insecurity. Moreover, the absence of affiliation with the educational institution and a sense of belonging further contribute to the disadvantages experienced by temporary status employees.

Our findings revealed that most participants acted with a sense of duty and responsibility and that they and their colleagues performing their work correctly positively impacted job performance. They also noted that experienced staff in the work environment positively affected job performance by providing assistance and support to new employees, such as by teaching and orienting them to the job. They also stated that clear job descriptions provided by administrators, which specify the location and areas of responsibility, prevent confusion and positively contribute to regularizing work and employee work performance. Most participants indicated that status differences among auxiliary staff did not impact job performance as they performed the same tasks under the same conditions. They also mentioned that they are task-oriented, work in different positions with the same status, and share the same tasks with other staff who do not affect their job performance. Cases reported not to affect job performance included performing the same tasks under the same conditions, being task-oriented, working in different positions with the same status, and sharing the same tasks with other staff.

Participants opined that job disparities from individual/employee-initiated differences were connected to the auxiliary staff's permanent or temporary nature and the employees' work ethics principles. Participants posited that those with a permanent status exhibited a greater sense of ease and carried out less work because of the assurance of job security. Conversely, those with temporary status indicated that their manner of work was distinct due to the fear of termination or the perception that the job was temporary or seasonal.

We found that work performance efficiency usually varied depending on employees' seniority and experience. According to participants, more experienced employees can generally complete tasks more quickly and efficiently because they better understand the job and its requirements. In contrast, novice employees may take longer to complete tasks as they are still learning roles. We further found that work environment/inter-employee relations also played a significant role in shaping the way employees work. Many participants indicated that cooperation and support from colleagues contributed to the success of their work environment.

Moreover, approximately half of the participants believed adapting new colleagues to the work environment and the job-teaching process was effective. On the other hand, the work/task structure was viewed by the majority as intrinsically linked to the nature of the work/job and the distribution of tasks among employees. This suggests how tasks are allocated and the responsibilities assigned to each employee significantly impact the overall work environment.

This study highlights the importance of auxiliary personnel in creating a secure, hygienic, and productive learning environment for students. The participants emphasized the impact of auxiliary staff on student well-being and academic achievement, stressing their indispensable role within the educational system. Their contributions extend beyond simple administrative tasks, encompassing a commitment to nurturing student well-being and fostering academic success. The participants reported that they made various contributions to the school community, such as maintaining a hygienic environment by ensuring the cleanliness of the school, promoting personal hygiene in students' self-care, supporting students as if they were their children with a positive approach and motherly affection, assisting teachers in classroom activities, and providing assistance, such as security at the entrance and exit of students in administrative work. However, the findings also revealed a lack of recognition of their efforts, underscoring the need for greater acknowledgment of their vital contributions to the school community. Despite their significant contributions, auxiliary staff expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of recognition of their efforts, indicating the need for greater acknowledgment of their role within the academic community.

In general, we found that auxiliaries believe they positively influence the school community, consistent with previous research (Blinded 2024; Demir 2013; Köse, Uzun, and Öner-Özaslan 2018; Reed and Salazar 1998). Our findings were similar to those Bastian et al. (2019) reported, who found that auxiliary staff could play an integral role in helping schools promote students' academic and social-emotional development.

5 | Conclusion

This study provided several valuable insights. First, it has provided us with a deeper understanding of the perspectives held

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by auxiliary staff regarding their profession, occupational status, competencies, and implications for the school community. The research revealed a sophisticated comprehension of auxiliary staff experiences, emphasizing their diverse perceptions and involvement in educational establishments. Moreover, the investigation reveals the multifaceted viewpoints and roles of auxiliary staff in educational institutions and elucidates the intricacies surrounding their positions and experiences.

The findings obtained through the inductive data analysis uncovered critical information about the various roles and responsibilities of the auxiliary staff. For instance, the analysis revealed the typical daily routines of auxiliary staff that ensure the smooth operation of schools. Furthermore, the analysis revealed disparities in status and their impact on job performance, underlining the need for fair treatment and support for auxiliary staff. These findings serve as a basis for action and improvement and provide a pathway for creating more equitable and supportive work environments.

The findings of this study provide important insights into the attitudes, functions, and experiences of auxiliary personnel in educational institutions. By examining topics such as job status, skill sets, and influence on educational outcomes, this study enhances the understanding of auxiliary staff's role in furthering the objectives of the educational community. Addressing auxiliary staff concerns and using their expertise is crucial to improving their performance and fostering a favorable work atmosphere. The study also indicated that variations in working conditions underscore the significance of developing an inclusive work environment that supports auxiliary staff.

This research underscores the positive interactions of auxiliary staff with students and teachers and the multifaceted nature of their role in fostering a supportive educational environment, which ultimately contributes to the broader school climate. Nevertheless, the absence of acknowledgment of their efforts has emerged as a considerable issue, suggesting the necessity for a greater appreciation of their contribution within the educational sphere.

The results of the inductive analysis also revealed disparities in the status and interactions between auxiliary staff and stakeholders. These findings offer a thorough understanding of the experiences of auxiliary staff in educational institutions and present opportunities for intervention and improvement. The findings indicate that recognizing and acknowledging their contributions and promoting positive interactions among stakeholders is critical to creating a supportive and inclusive work environment for auxiliary staff. By addressing these issues and leveraging their strengths, educational institutions can maximize the efficacy of auxiliary staff and create a favorable working atmosphere that promotes student accomplishment.

5.1 | Recommendations and Implications

The findings of this study have led to practical recommendations aimed at addressing the challenges faced by auxiliary staff and enhancing their experiences. The results emphasized the importance of providing opportunities for professional growth, equitable working conditions, and positive interactions among stakeholders. Moreover, recognizing and valuing auxiliary staff contributions can foster a positive and supportive work environment, boosting staff morale. Implementing these recommendations can help educational institutions create an inclusive and nurturing community that acknowledges and values the diverse perspectives and contributions of the auxiliary staff.

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made to enhance the circumstances of auxiliary staff. The following suggestions are proposed.

- Providing opportunities for professional growth to strengthen proficiencies and broaden responsibilities within the academic community.
- Ensuring equitable working conditions and job stability for all auxiliary staff members, including those with temporary contracts.
- Acknowledging and valuing the indispensable contributions of auxiliary personnel to the school community.
- Fostering cordial interactions and cooperation among stakeholders within academic institutions.
- Establishing a supportive and inclusive work environment that respects auxiliary staff's diverse perspectives and experiences.

5.2 | Limitations

The present study yielded noteworthy outcomes, but it is equally important to recognize its inherent constraints, which have influenced its extent and findings. These constraints highlight the complexities of the research process and suggest avenues for future research.

5.2.1 | Methodological Limitations of the Study

As a small-scale regional study, it explored participants' perspectives working in public schools in Türkiye's Western Mediterranean region. It is important to note that this study did not include auxiliary staff working in private institutions or other regions of the country. Additionally, the interpretive methodology used in the research relied on the participants' subjective opinions; however, caution should be exercised when considering the participants' perspectives, as the significant presence of the Ministry of Education may have influenced them.

The study's implications may not be universally applicable; however, its findings emphasize the need to consider auxiliary staff's viewpoints and capabilities to understand the educational system's consequences better. Thus, applying the research results to various settings is crucial to grasp their broader implications

It is crucial to analyze the context-specific complexities of the examined locations to expand the scope of this study's implications. Variables such as cultural nuances, socioeconomic conditions, and institutional frameworks can affect the

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generalizability of the results. Careful evaluation of these factors is necessary to determine the applicability of these insights to other contexts.

5.2.2 | Suggestions for further Research

The results of this study have far-reaching implications that extend beyond its immediate scope and offer helpful information for several parties. This, in turn, can lead to better-educated decisions and actions in the pertinent sectors. Therefore, future researchers could conduct more extensive studies on auxiliary staff's status and working conditions. Such studies may be advantageous in comparing the circumstances of staff members working in various regions and gaining a comprehensive understanding of this issue.

This study did not assess student interactions with auxiliary staff. Future research should consider this aspect to gain a more comprehensive understanding. Additionally, evaluating students' perceptions of auxiliary staff functions can provide valuable insights. Involving multiple stakeholders in educational institutions may provide a clearer picture.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, Suleyman Karataş. Engin Karadağ. and Mustafa Caner.; methodology, Suleyman Karataş. and Mustafa Caner.; resources, Suleyman Karataş; data curation, Engin Karadağ. and Gülsüm Sertel; writing—original draft preparation, Suleyman Karataş, and Mustafa Caner.; writing—review and editing, Mustafa Caner All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions. The data supporting this study's findings are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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