

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Influence of Educational Employees' Policy Alienation on Their Change Cynicism: An Investigation in the Turkish Public-Schooling Context

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CORRESPONDENCE

Tijen Tulubas

tijen.tulubas@dpu.edu.tr

Faculty of Education, Kutahya
Dumlupınar University, Turkey.

AUTHOR DETAILS

Additional information about the author is available at the end of the article.

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Tijen Tulubas 

ABSTRACT

Background/purpose – Policy alienation is considered to be significant for successful policy implementation and is linked to public professionals' attitudes towards change. The current study was conducted to investigate the influence of educational employees', namely teachers' and school administrators', policy alienation on their change cynicism in the context of Turkish public-schools.

Materials/methods – The sample of this quantitative, causal-comparative study comprises of 504 teachers, principals, and vice-principals enrolled in educational master's programs of the Social Sciences Institute in a university during the summer semester of 2020-2021 academic year and the fall semester of the 2021-2022 academic year. Data were collected using two Likert-type scales, the Policy Alienation Scale and the Cynicism about Organizational Change Scale, and then analyzed using descriptive statistics, t-test, ANOVA, and regression testing.

Results – The study revealed that the educational employees had a fairly high level of policy alienation and a low level of change cynicism, although teachers had higher levels of change cynicism over school administrators. Perceived strategic powerlessness of educational employees was the highest ($\bar{x} = 3.37$), and their tactical and operational powerlessness predicted their change cynicism the most, and explained the 26% and 28% of the total variance in change cynicism, respectively.

Conclusion – The findings indicate that educational employees should be involved in policy processes, and that change benefits should be justified with a powerful rationale so as to reduce policy alienation, as this helps to gain their behavioral support for changes and reduces failures. This is also significant as a history of failed change efforts triggers change cynicism.

Keywords – policy alienation, change cynicism, educational employee, teacher, school administrator.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education has long been vital across all societies, but in today's rapidly-changing, knowledge-based world, it has become even more significant for individual, social, and economic advancement. As a result, pressures on education systems to deliver high-quality education and to produce tangible outcomes have increased, and as a result the number of educational reforms and policy changes have increased internationally (Viennet & Pont, 2017). For example, an OECD report indicated that, between 2008 and 2014, at least 450 educational reforms were adopted across OECD countries (OECD, 2015). Similarly, the Turkish national education system, which is the context of the current study, has witnessed more than 15 systemic changes over the past 20 years, in addition to constantly changing legislation and educational directives. However, as several scholars have indicated (Hess, 2013; Pont, 2008; Viennet & Pont, 2017), these educational policies may not all be implemented as planned or end up failing to produce the desired outcomes due to the process of developing and introducing policy bills, and then implementing them into daily practice for teachers, principals, and local educational managers. However, these are two inherently different processes, even though both significantly influence the success or failure of policy implementation.

Policy implementation is defined as “a purposeful and multidirectional change process aiming to put a specific policy into practice...which may affect an education system on several levels” (Viennet & Pont, 2017, p. 6). Policy implementation scholars emphasize that the success or failure of policy implementation depends significantly on the implementers' identification with and commitment to the policy (Ewalt & Jennings, 2004; Gofen, 2014; Keiser, 2010; May & Winter, 2009; Thomann et al., 2018; Tucker et al., 2021). However, policies often fail when they are in conflict with the implementers' personal values and/or self-interests (Tummers et al., 2012), or where the logic behind a certain policy is not communicated clearly or sufficiently legitimized (Borrelli, 2018; Gofen, 2014; Hudson et al., 2019; Van Engen et al., 2019), or where implementers have limited or no tangible influence on policy implementation or attach no meaning to its accomplishment (Lavee et al., 2018, Tummers, 2011; Tummers et al., 2009). These issues in the policy implementation process are considered to cause policy alienation, which relates to public professionals, teachers and school administrators in terms of the current investigation, and feelings of disconnection and disidentification with public policies (Tummers, Thiel et al., 2011).

The idea of change is already embedded within policy implementation (Viennet & Pont, 2017) and new policies often bring about the introduction of substantial changes (Fullan, 2015). Hence, investigations into policy implementation in general, and policy alienation in particular, is closely connected to the literature on change management (Van Engen et al., 2016). Scholars have argued that high levels of policy alienation result in reduced commitment or willingness to change, which in turn can impede effective policy implementation (Thomann, 2018; Tonkens et al., 2013; Tummers, 2011, 2017; Van der Voet et al., 2017) since policy alienation influences teachers' willingness to exhibit behavioral support for the change (Tummers, Steijn & Bekkers, 2011).

Van Engen et al. (2016) signified that public professionals' policy alienation could result in change fatigue and change cynicism. Thus, teachers or school administrators experiencing policy alienation could develop cynical attitudes towards public policies and regard them as a “*political flavor of the month*.” As Tummers et al. (2015) stated, teachers as public professionals are significant in bridging not only enacted and implemented policies, but also

as a connection between governments and citizens. Therefore, teachers' and school administrators' policy alienation and change cynicism could lead to serious problems, with employee willingness to implement change seen as a crucial condition to the effective transfer of change into practice (Higgs & Rowland, 2005; Tummers, 2011).

Change cynicism is characterized with a pessimistic attitude towards change and a tendency to accuse responsible parties of lacking the necessary motivation and capability to accomplish change (Wanous et al., 2000). Scholars argue that change cynicism is a powerful construct that can impede even the best attempts to bring about change through the negative psychological and behavioral reactions of employees, and is a significant variable used to explain employees' resistance or unwillingness to support change initiatives (Stanley et al., 2005; Tolay et al., 2017; Wanous et al., 2000). Employees alienation to the change process increases through them being ignored during the design and implementation stage, as well as their inherent distrust in the likelihood that the change will realize any positive or beneficial outcome, and the failure to perceive any good rationale for the change itself. These factors are also linked to change cynicism in the literature (Abraham, 2000; Broner, 2003; Connell & Waring, 2002; Watt & Piotrowski, 2008). From this perspective, teachers and school administrators who have general policy alienation are likely to develop a pessimistic and accusatory attitude towards policy-dependent change. In other words, the general policy alienation of teachers and school administrators could result in change cynicism.

In this regard, the current study aims to investigate the influence of educational employees', namely teachers and school administrators, policy alienation on their change cynicism in the context of the Turkish public schooling system. The Turkish education system is a massive structure, with in excess of 18 million students taught by one million teachers in approximately 53,000 public schools (Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı [Turkish Ministry of National Education], 2021). As the system is centrally governed by the Turkish Ministry of National Education, all decisions and arrangements regarding K-12 education nationwide are taken by the ministry, whilst their implementation is pursued through its provincial offices (Akşit, 2007). Therefore, the author believes that the highly-bureaucratized and hierarchical nature of the system offers a good context through which to study the potential for policy alienation, with both teachers and school administrators in Turkey significantly distanced from educational policy enactments. Furthermore, as a leading scholar of policy alienation, Tummers (2017) identified that most policy alienation studies are conducted in Western countries, and therefore the literature lacks studies that investigate the effects of policy alienation in developing or Eastern countries. Kickert (2010) reiterated that little attention is given to how public professionals react to public policies in the long history of change management literature. The current study also aims to address these two calls, and to contribute both to the policy alienation and change literature by applying the policy alienation perspective to the change cynicism of teachers and school administrators in Turkey. In addition to its contribution to the literature, the findings of the current study would also offer useful implications for public policymakers and educational administrators.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section develops the theoretical background based on the literature on policy alienation and change cynicism, and defines the context of the current study in broader terms.

2.1. Policy Alienation

The model of policy alienation was developed by Tummers et al. (2009) with regards to general work alienation and policy implementation literature. Policy alienation refers to “a general cognitive state of psychological disconnection from the policy program being implemented by a public professional who interacts directly with clients on a regular basis” (Tummers et al., 2009, p. 688). As the definition implies, these researchers first developed the model in order to explore public professionals’ alienation to a specific policy. However, van Engen et al. (2016) studied the same model with a policy accumulation perspective, considering that the accumulation and interaction of pre-existing policy implementation experiences with newer ones could potentially create a predisposition towards policies in general, and thereby influence implementers’ responses to the new policy. As a result, they introduced the term “general policy alienation” and defined it as a “state of mind” which “reflects accumulated past policy experience [based on] professionals’ general perceptions of government policy” (van Engen et al., 2016, pp. 1088-1089). The researchers also showed that policy alienation could be investigated both in specific and general terms, and observed a strong connection between general policy alienation and alienation to a specific policy. More recently, Tucker et al. (2021) argued that despite being initially formulated as an individual-level construct, policy alienation can also be conceptualized at the group level since public professionals operate within a social system and thereby often engage in collective sensemaking.

According to the literature on work alienation, the phenomenon occurs when workers cannot internalize the means or the outcomes of their work, and thereby experience a feeling of unattachment to their job or working environment (Blauner, 1964; Kanungo, 1982). Tummers et al. (2009) borrowed the same notion and postulated that public professionals can develop alienation towards a certain policy when they cannot personally identify with the policy, which therefore differs from work alienation in several ways (Tummers, Thiel et al., 2011). First, public professionals who are alienated from their work do not always experience policy alienation, and vice versa. Second, policy alienation, as an approach, focuses on the policy being implemented rather than the job itself. Third, the policy alienation model considers only public professionals or street-level bureaucrats, as can be seen in the literature on public policy (Thomann et al., 2018). Finally, work alienation is classified within three dimensions; powerlessness, meaninglessness, and social isolation, whereas policy alienation has a bidimensional structure to its model, with powerlessness and meaninglessness.

In fact, Tummers et al. (2009) defined policy alienation as a multidimensional model. Beneath its two main dimensions of *powerlessness and meaninglessness*, they postulated five sub-dimensions to explain low compliance with a policy or policies in general: *strategic powerlessness*, and *tactical powerlessness*; and *operational powerlessness*, *societal meaninglessness*, and *client meaninglessness*. Tummers (2017) later stated that the policy alienation model with its five sub-dimensions offers a useful and coherent theoretical grounding upon which to investigate public professionals’ experiences with new policies.

From the policy alienation perspective, powerlessness refers to public professionals' inability to influence or shape a public policy, whilst meaningfulness refers to their inability to understand the contribution of the policy to their clients, or to society in general (Tucker et al., 2021). Powerlessness can be experienced on three levels: strategic, tactical, and operational. Tummers (2012) defined strategic powerlessness as "the perceived influence of professionals on decisions concerning the content of a policy, as is captured in rules and regulations" (p. 518), and tactical powerlessness as "professionals' perceived influence (or lack thereof) over decisions concerning the way a policy is executed within their own organization" (p. 518). Operational powerlessness, on the other hand, is defined as "the influence of professionals during actual policy implementation" (Tummers, 2012, p. 518) as reflected in their daily practices (see Table 1 for examples).

Table 1. Policy alienation model

<i>Sub-dimension</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Example</i>
<i>Strategic powerlessness</i>	The perceived influence of professionals on decisions concerning the content of a policy, as is captured in rules and regulations.	A teacher feels that the government does not involve teachers in drafting educational policies.
<i>Tactical powerlessness</i>	Professionals' perceived influence over decisions concerning the way a policy is executed within their own organization.	A teacher believes that the school administration does not involve them in designing policy implementations at the school level.
<i>Operational powerlessness</i>	The influence of professionals during actual policy implementation as reflected in their daily practices.	A teacher believes they have low or no autonomy while implementing the policy in their classroom/school.
<i>Societal meaningfulness</i>	The perception of professionals concerning the added value of the policy to socially relevant goals.	A teacher believes that the policy does not benefit the education of society in general.
<i>Client meaningfulness</i>	The perception of the value added for their own clients by professionals implementing a policy.	A teacher believes that the policy does not benefit classroom teaching or the students.

Adapted from van Engen et al. (2016)

Meaninglessness can be experienced on two levels: societal and client. Societal meaningfulness is defined as "the perception of professionals concerning the added value of the policy to socially relevant goals" and client meaningfulness as "the perception of the value added for their own clients by professionals implementing a policy" (Tummers, 2012, p. 518). In summary, when a public professional feels that a policy does not contribute to socially relevant goals, they can experience high levels of societal meaningfulness, or vice versa. Similarly, if they believe that the policy is not helping or contributing to their clients, they can experience high levels of client meaningfulness (see Table 1 for examples). In either case, they attach little or no meaning to the policy's implementation and probably exhibit no genuine support for its realization.

In regard to the antecedents and outcomes of policy alienation, the existing literature highlights several factors. The factors causing policy alienation can be listed as a *policy*

offending a public professional's values, beliefs, or self-interests (Tummers et al., 2012), *policymakers' focus on economic logics of action* (which might clash with professional values) (Emery & Giauque, 2003), *policy inconsistency or incoherent policy enactments* (Kerpershoek et al., 2016; van Engen et al., 2016), *a policy entailing multiple accountabilities or tight performance management measures* (Hupe & Hill, 2007; Tummers et al., 2009), *introducing large numbers of new policies* (Huy, 2001), *policies with conflicting political signals* (May & Winter, 2009), *policies pursuing incompatible or illusionary goals* (Börzel & Van Hüllen, 2014; Fotaki & Hyde, 2015), *inability to create a case for the policy (inability to generate legitimacy)* (Bryson et al., 2015; Higgs & Rowland, 2005; van Engen et al., 2019), *implementers' lack of discretion or agency* (Thomann et al., 2018; Tucker et al., 2021; Tummers, 2011; Tummers et al., 2009), and *distrust in senior leaders or work colleagues* (Tucker et al., 2021). On the other hand, studies show that policy alienation can result in *reduced willingness or commitment to change* (Piderit, 2000; Tummers, 2011, 2012; Tummers, Thiel et al., 2011; van der Voet et al., 2017; van Engen et al., 2019), *resistance and rule-breaking* (Tonkens et al., 2013), *lower or ineffective policy performance or outcomes* (Lavee et al., 2018; Thomann et al., 2018), *lower job satisfaction and burnout* (Tummers, 2017; Tummers, Steijn, & Bekkers, 2011) and *reduced psychological well-being* (Usman et al., 2021).

2.2. Turkish Public Education and Policymaking Context

The current study focuses on the primary and secondary level public education in Turkey. As previously mentioned, over one million teachers educate nearly 18 million students in approximately 53,000 public schools across Turkey (Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı [Turkish Ministry of National Education], 2021). The education system is centrally governed by the Turkish Ministry of National Education, and is defined as the most highly-centralized educational system among all countries of the OECD (Akşit, 2007). All educational decisions are taken centrally by the Turkish Ministry of National Education and implemented and observed via its provincial offices (Akşit, 2007; Dağlı, 2007).

The most radical reforms made to Turkey's educational system were applied at the time of the Turkish Republic's foundation, and these initial reforms have been followed by numerous incremental changes right up until the present day. In fact, an investigation into the history of developments in Turkish public education reveals the strong influence of social, political, and economic trajectories on the changing of educational policies (Çiçekçi, 2020; Nohl et al., 2008). Policy context is characterized with numerous and frequent changes, and is often criticized for being overly-exposed to the influence of the government in power at that time (Dağlı, 2007; Gedikoğlu, 2005). Considering the policy changes introduced over the past 20 years, certain structural and curricular reforms stand out. Some of these changes were planned to meet the strategic educational objectives of the European Union following Turkey becoming a candidate country in 2004. For instance, a curricular reform was launched in 2005 which specifically aimed to reduce the content and adapt it to the constructivist methodology of teaching. The reform aroused much debate among stakeholders, with many teachers having expressed their skepticism and concern about the potential and benefits of the change due to a lack of resources and infrastructure (Akşit, 2007; Altınyelken, 2013). In the same year, another policy reform was brought into discussion with the purpose of redefining the roles and responsibilities of the Turkish Ministry of National Education, and to decentralize public education through a power-sharing agreement with local authorities. However, the reform caused widespread controversy and has yet to be enacted.

Another structural reform came in 2012, which brought in a new 4+4+4 structure, with consecutive 4-year periods of primary, secondary, and high school education. With the reform, compulsory education was extended to 12 years, and the school starting age was lowered to 5 years, 6 months. The reform was highly criticized for lowering the school starting age and for causing severe teacher shortages due to the extended period of compulsory education (Soydan & Abalı, 2014). However, the government pursued and supported the reform with additional policies regarding teacher training and appointments, as well as the school starting age. Frequent changes have also been made regarding the selection and appointment of school administrators. As Taş and Önder (2010) indicated, more than 30 regulations have been implemented in this area just between 2004 and 2010, and several more have followed to the present day.

High-stakes examinations are central to the Turkish education model, and are applied at the transition from primary to secondary school, and also from high school to tertiary education. As policies regarding the assessment procedures closely interact with larger curricular and structural policies, numerous changes have also been made to the system of examination in a short space of time, but heated debate continues as to the influence of these high-stakes exams on the whole system (Caner & Bayhan, 2020).

Many amendments have been implemented, whilst others are still in development or have been shelved, temporarily or otherwise. There are probably many more on the horizon, however the current study's scope precludes their mention. However, considering the aforementioned examples, it can be seen that the educational policies mostly have introduced superficial modifications that have often led to fragmented changes, while the core system has stayed much the same to a large extent. Many problems regarding centralized examinations, the curricula, low math and comprehension competencies of students, the training of educational staff, the appointment and promotion of teachers, as well as the selection and appointment of school administrators still await solutions, in addition to today's fundamental issues regarding educational technology integration and the design of accountability and quality measures.

2.3. Change Cynicism

The term "cynicism" is used within organizational literature to refer to "an evaluative judgment that stems from an individual's employment experiences" (Cole et al., 2006, p. 463), and studies of cynicism range from those addressing general cynicism to cynicism with specific foci such as cynicism towards occupations, organizations, managers, or change initiatives (Dean et al., 1998). However, it has been empirically shown that change cynicism differs from general forms of cynicism within the literature on organizational change (Stanley et al., 2005). As such, change cynicism has been defined as "a pessimistic viewpoint about change efforts being successful because those responsible for making change are blamed for being unmotivated, incompetent, or both" (Wanous et al., 2000, p. 133). Employees with change cynicism are considered to develop "a complex attitude that includes cognitive, affective and behavioral aspects resulting in increased beliefs of unfairness, feeling of distrust, and related actions about and against organizations" (Bommer et al., 2005, p. 736). Abraham (2000) stated that change cynics often feel skeptical about the success of change initiatives and refuse to support change wholeheartedly, which in turn causes failures in both present and future attempts to develop and introduce change (Wanous et al., 2000).

Reichers et al. (1997) purported that change cynicism can develop due to inadequacies of information regarding change initiatives, a history of failed change efforts, or an

employee's predisposition to pessimism and/or cynicism. Wanous et al. (2000), though, conceptualized change cynicism more as a learned response than a personal predisposition. In the case of change cynicism, employees develop pessimistic attitudes towards change due to their experiences and observations of unsuccessful implementations in the past (Barton & Ambrosini, 2013; Reichers et al., 1997; Wanous et al., 2000), and as a result, they tend to accuse managers or leaders of lacking the motivation or required ability to realize actual change, and may believe that change initiatives secretly serve some hidden motives or self-interests of those in charge (Abraham, 2000; Brown & Cregan, 2008; Brown et al., 2017). In other words, employees lose belief in the potential success of change efforts and prefer not to take changes that seriously (Choi, 2011; Dean et al., 1998).

Change cynicism is conceptualized in the literature based on three theories. Wanous et al. (2000) referred to Vroom's expectancy theory and attribution theory to explain change cynicism. Accordingly, when employees' expectations about change are historically unmet, they are likely to believe that their efforts to support change will be wasted and will make no long-term difference. On the other hand, when employees' attribute failed change attempts to the inability or low motivation of those in charge, they lose trust in them and develop a cynical outlook. However, research has shown that change cynicism does not occur when employees attribute failure to situational factors such as unexpected events or circumstances beyond the control of management. On the other hand, both Brown et al. (2017) and Qian and Daniels (2008) explained change cynicism from the perspective of Salancik and Pfeffer's (1978) information processing theory, which postulates that people develop certain attitudes and behaviors from processing information acquired through social experiences, and which then determine their needs and interest. In that vein, during organizational change, employees observe the management's approach and process the information as they see it so as to form their own judgment. Therefore, whether or not employees have sufficient or reliable information regarding a change initiative, and the way in which they process this information, are significantly related to their change cynicism.

Broner (2003), who studied change cynicism in public school educators, supported this idea and reported that educational employees tend to develop change cynicism when they were not involved in the decision-making process, or when feeling that the change would not lead to a beneficial outcome. Similarly, Connell and Waring (2002) found that the lack of a good rationale for planned changes may lead to cynicism regarding change in the future. Anghelache and Bentea (2012) concluded that educational employees' degree of satisfaction with both past and present change initiatives, their expectancies towards change, and also their perception of personal risk in change efforts determines their attitudes towards changes promoted by educational reforms, and could therefore be significantly related to change cynicism.

The literature indicates that change cynicism could result in several negative outcomes for both employees and organizations. As accumulated by Reichers et al. (1997), change cynicism can decrease employees' organizational commitment, job satisfaction, work motivation and willingness to support change, while also lowering the credibility of managers or organizations and thereby reducing the effectiveness of change programs. Combined, this all poses a significant barrier to successfully achieving any form of planned organizational change (Watt & Piotrowski, 2008).

3. METHODOLOGY

The current study is quantitative and descriptive in nature and was designed using the causal-comparative research method. The causal-comparative method is used to identify causal relationships between independent and dependent variables, enabling researchers to observe whether or not an independent variable has a direct influence on a dependent variable (Schenker & Rumrill, 2004). Causal-comparative methods are also used to investigate whether or not individuals in one group differ from individuals in another according to one or more variables. In brief, causal-comparative research aims to investigate whether an independent variable predicts or explains differences in a dependent variable of interest (Umstead & Mayton, 2018). As the purpose of the current study is to investigate whether or not educational employees' policy alienation influences their change cynicism, the causal-comparative design was considered to be appropriate.

3.1. Participants

The universe of the study comprises 650 educators in total (teachers, school principals, and vice-principals) enrolled in educational master's programs of a university's Social Sciences Institute during the summer semester of 2020-2021 academic year and the fall semester of the 2021-2022 academic year. In order to reach the whole universe, scale forms were sent to the students via e-mail. A total of 527 participants completed and returned the forms, whilst 504 were included in the study as 23 had been improperly completed.

Table 2. Demographics of the sample

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Gender	Female	221	43.8
	Male	283	56.2
Role	Teacher	209	41.5
	Vice-principal	165	32.7
	Principal	130	25.8
School type	Preschool	47	9.3
	Primary school	215	42.7
	Secondary school	151	30.0
	General high school	29	5.8
	Vocational high school	37	7.3
	Special education school	25	4.9
Experience	1-5 years	12	2.4
	6-10 years	87	17.3
	11-15 years	175	34.7
	16-20 years	136	27.0
	21-25 years	63	12.5
	26 years or more	31	6.2
<i>N</i>		504	100.00

Although the sample was taken from a single university, participants from different provinces of Turkey (37 in total) were reached, which implies that a wide representation of teachers were included in the sample. Demographics of the sample are presented in Table 2.

3.2. Instruments and Procedures

Two instruments were used to collect data. Data regarding teachers' and school administrators' policy alienation was collected using the "Policy Alienation Scale" developed by Tummers (2012), whilst data regarding change cynicism was collected using the "Cynicism about Organizational Change Scale" developed by Wanous et al. (2000).

Policy Alienation Scale: The scale is a multidimensional, 5-point, Likert-type instrument developed by Tummers (2012). The scale includes five dimensions: strategic powerlessness, tactical powerlessness, operational powerlessness, societal meaningfulness, and client meaningfulness (see Table 1 for details). There are 20 items in the scale, 14 of which are reverse-coded so as to control participant bias. The scale was developed to test both specific policy alienation and general policy alienation, therefore the scale allows for the replacing of template words with more specific or general terms in order to best fit the context of a study. For example, instead of using "the policy," the researcher may opt to use "educational policies," or they could use "teachers" instead of "public service workers" (Van Engen et al., 2016). As the current study aims to measure teachers' and school administrators' policy alienation in general, the scale items were adapted accordingly. The CFA results for the Policy Alienation Scale showed a moderate level of fit to the model (RMSEA = 0.074, CFI = 0.97, NFI = 0.95, and GFI = 0.95). Cronbach's alpha was measured as being .91 for the whole scale, .78 for strategic powerlessness, .74 for tactical powerlessness, .75 for operational powerlessness, .83 for societal meaningfulness, and .85 for client meaningfulness. These Cronbach's alpha values indicate that the scale is deemed to be sufficiently reliable to measure the construct.

Cynicism about Organizational Change Scale: This 5-point, Likert-type scale was developed by Wanous et al. (2000) and later adapted to the Turkish education context by Tülübaş and Göktürk (2021). The scale consists of two dimensions: pessimism and dispositional attribution, which each include four items. The pessimism dimension refers to individuals' loss of belief and hope in future change efforts due to their negative experiences of change in the past, whilst the dispositional attribution dimension refers to individuals' tendency to blame managers for their lack of motivation and/or skill to bring about successful change. The CFA results for the Cynicism about Organizational Change Scale show that it has a good model fit (RMSEA = 0.042, CFI = 1.00, NFI = 0.99, and GFI = 0.98). The Cronbach's alpha value was calculated as being .95 for the whole scale, .90 for the pessimism dimension, and .93 for the dispositional attribution dimension, which indicates that the scale is considered reliable to measure the construct.

4. RESULTS

Prior to starting the statistical analysis of the study, normality tests of the data to be used for the two variables of policy alienation and change cynicism were conducted. In order to evaluate normality, mode, median, and arithmetic mean values were compared, and skewness and kurtosis values were also considered (Büyüköztürk, 2007). The results of these normality tests are presented in Table 3.

Equal or close scores of the mean, mode, and median values indicate normal distribution of the data. In the current study, the mean (2.75), mode (2.74), and median (2.74) scores for the policy alienation data were found to be very close; a similar situation

was revealed for the change cynicism data, with very close mean (1.98), mode (1.92), and median (1.93) scores. Skewness and kurtosis scores between ± 1 or ± 1.5 are also considered to indicate acceptable normality. As the results in Table 3 show, the scores of both skewness and kurtosis analysis indicate normality.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics and intercorrelation matrix for study variables

	\bar{x}	<i>SD</i>	1.	2.	<i>Skew.</i>	<i>Kurt.</i>	α
1. Policy Alienation	2.75	0.62	1	0.488*	0.321	0.311	.21
2. Change Cynicism	1.98	0.92	0.488*	1	1.070	0.706	.11

N = 504, **p* < .01

Table 3 also shows the overall relationships between policy alienation and change cynicism of the teachers and school administrators. Bivariate correlations between the two variables show that the policy alienation levels of the teachers and school administrators (\bar{x} = 2.75) was found to be higher than their change cynicism (\bar{x} = 1.98), and that a positive moderate correlation (r = .488, p < .01) exists between these two variables. Descriptive analysis was also conducted in order to evaluate the relationship between the variables' sub-dimensions, the results of which are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics and intercorrelation matrix for sub-dimensions

	\bar{x}	<i>SD</i>	1	<i>1a</i>	<i>1b</i>	<i>1c</i>	<i>1d</i>	<i>1e</i>	2	<i>2a</i>	<i>2b</i>
1. Policy alienation	2.75	0.62	1*	.632*	.790*	.852*	.769*	.786*	.488*	.531*	.385*
<i>a.strategic powerlessness</i>	3.37	1.01		1*	.390*	.512*	.312*	.316*	.280*	.319*	.208*
<i>b.tactical powerlessness</i>	2.66	0.70		.390*	1*	.630*	.474*	.454*	.516*	.511*	.449*
<i>c.operational powerlessness</i>	2.53	0.69		.512*	.630*	1*	.486*	.596*	.454*	.506*	.347*
<i>d.societal meaninglessness</i>	2.97	0.94		.312*	.474*	.486*	1*	.679*	.276*	.306*	.213*
<i>e.client meaninglessness</i>	2.51	0.83		.316*	.454*	.596*	.679*	1*	.312*	.365*	.223*
2. Change cynicism	1.98	0.92	.488*	.280*	.516*	.454*	.276*	.312*	1*	.912*	.937*
<i>a.pessimism</i>	2.06	0.92	.531*	.319*	.511*	.506*	.306*	.365*		1*	.711*
<i>b.dispositional attribution</i>	1.90	1.07	.385*	.208*	.449*	.347*	.213*	.223*		.711*	1*

N = 504, **p* < .01

The scores shown in Table 4 indicate that a positive correlation exists between each of the dimensions and sub-dimensions of the study's variables. High positive correlations can be observed between the policy alienation dimensions of tactical powerlessness and operational powerlessness (r = .630, p < .01), and between societal meaninglessness and client meaninglessness (r = .679, p < .01). Policy alienation was shown to have a higher correlation with pessimism (r = .531, p < .01) when compared to dispositional attribution (r = .385, p < .01), whilst tactical (r = .511, p < .01) and operational powerlessness (r = .506, p < .01) have a moderate correlation with pessimism. On the other hand, societal meaninglessness (r = .516, p < .01) and client meaninglessness (r = .454, p < .01) both correlate weakly with change cynicism. When bivariate correlations are interpreted as a whole, it can be said that policy alienation and its powerlessness dimensions correlate more strongly with change cynicism, especially with its pessimism dimension. In other words,

when teachers feel that they are not involved in policymaking processes and have no control over their implementation, they become more pessimistic about the success of change efforts in general.

In order to analyze whether or not policy alienation and change cynicism change according to the gender and role (teacher, vice-principal, and principal) of the participants, independent-samples *t*-test and one-way ANOVA tests were conducted, the results of which are presented in Table 5. The results show that policy alienation and change cynicism scores changed slightly according to the participants' gender ($t = 2.839, p > .01$; $t = 1.960, p < .05$). The analysis shows that the males had higher levels of policy alienation ($\bar{X} = 2.81$) compared to the females ($\bar{X} = 2.66$); and that the females had higher levels of change cynicism ($\bar{X} = 2.07$) compared to the males ($\bar{X} = 1.91$). In regard to roles, the teachers', vice-principals', and principals' policy alienation levels did not change ($F = 2.054, p > .05$), whilst their change cynicism was shown to have changed significantly ($F = 36.946, p < .01$), and the teachers exhibited higher levels of change cynicism ($\bar{X} = 2.36$) compared to the school principals ($\bar{X} = 1.60$).

Table 5. Results for gender and role variables

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>n</i>	\bar{X}	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	
Policy Alienation	Female	221	2.66	0.604	502	2.839	.005*	
	Male	283	2.81	0.626				
Change Cynicism	Female	221	2.07	0.969	502	1.960	.049*	
	Male	283	1.91	0.879				
	<i>Role</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Sig. Diff.</i>
Policy Alienation	Between groups	130	1.575	0.787	2	2.054	.129	
	Within groups	209	192.045	0.383	501			
	Total	165	193.620		503			
Change Cynicism	Between groups	130	55.017	27.508	2	36.946	.000*	Teacher - Principal
	Within groups	209	373.019	0.745	501	6		
	Total	165	424.036		503			

* $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, Sig. Diff.: Significant Difference

Linear regression analysis was conducted in order to test whether or not policy alienation predicted the teachers' and school administrators' change cynicism. The results presented in Table 6 indicate that policy alienation significantly predicted the teachers' and school administrators' change cynicism, and accounted for 24% of the total variance in change cynicism. In terms of the change cynicism sub-dimensions, policy alienation was shown to have predicted pessimism dimension ($\beta = .531$; $R^2 = .28$) better than dispositional attribution ($\beta = .385$; $R^2 = .15$).

Table 6. Regression analysis: Effect of policy alienation on change cynicism

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	2.098	0.057		36.625	.000
<i>Policy alienation</i>	0.328	0.026	.488		.000
Dependent variable: <i>Change cynicism</i>					
<i>F</i> = 157.252 <i>R</i> = .488 <i>R</i> ² = .24 <i>p</i> < .01					
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	2.007	0.058		34.680	.000
<i>Policy alienation</i>	0.360	0.026	.531		.000
Dependent variable: <i>pessimism</i>					
<i>F</i> = 196.622 <i>R</i> = .531 <i>R</i> ² = .28 <i>p</i> < .01					
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	2.327	0.052		44.913	.000
<i>Policy alienation</i>	0.222	0.024	.385		.000
Dependent variable: <i>dispositional attribution</i>					
<i>F</i> = 87.556 <i>R</i> = .385 <i>R</i> ² = .15 <i>p</i> < .01					

Stepwise multiple regression analysis was also conducted to test whether or not the sub-dimensions of policy alienation predicted the pessimism and dispositional attribution sub-dimensions of change cynicism. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Stepwise multiple regression analysis for sub-dimensions of variables

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	2.651	0.105		25.191	.000
<i>Strategic powerlessness</i>	0.352	0.047	.319		.000
Dependent variable: <i>pessimism</i>					
<i>F</i> = 56.934 <i>R</i> = .319 <i>R</i> ² = .10 <i>p</i> < .01					
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	3.006	0.089		33.660	.000
<i>Strategic powerlessness</i>	0.195	0.041	.208		.000
Dependent variable: <i>dispositional attribution</i>					
<i>F</i> = 22.671 <i>R</i> = .208 <i>R</i> ² = .04 <i>p</i> < .01					
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	1.865	0.066		28.256	.000
<i>Tactical powerlessness</i>	0.389	0.029	.511		.000
Dependent variable: <i>pessimism</i>					
<i>F</i> = 177.095 <i>R</i> = .511 <i>R</i> ² = .26 <i>p</i> < .01					
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	2.116	0.056		37.497	.000
<i>Tactical powerlessness</i>	0.291	0.026	.449		.000
Dependent variable: <i>dispositional attribution</i>					
<i>F</i> = 126.942 <i>R</i> = .449 <i>R</i> ² = .24 <i>p</i> < .01					
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	1.736	0.066		26.361	.000
<i>Operational powerlessness</i>	0.383	0.029	.506		.000
Dependent variable: <i>pessimism</i>					
<i>F</i> = 172.236 <i>R</i> = .506 <i>R</i> ² = .25 <i>p</i> < .01					

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	2.101	0.059		35.697	.000
Operational powerlessness	0.224	0.027	.347		.000
Dependent variable: <i>dispositional attribution</i>					
	<i>F</i> = 68.887	<i>R</i> = .347	<i>R</i> ² = .12	<i>p</i> < .01	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	2.323	0.099		23.573	.000
<i>Societal</i> <i>meaninglessness</i>	0.314	0.044	.306		.000
Dependent variable: <i>pessimism</i>					
	<i>F</i> = 51.778	<i>R</i> = .306	<i>R</i> ² = .09	<i>p</i> < .01	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	2.618	0.083		31.476	.000
<i>Societal</i> <i>meaninglessness</i>	0.186	0.038	.213		.000
Dependent variable: <i>dispositional attribution</i>					
	<i>F</i> = 23.868	<i>R</i> = .213	<i>R</i> ² = .04	<i>p</i> < .01	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	1.914	0.085		21.475	.000
<i>Client meaninglessness</i>	0.086	0.038	.365		.000
Dependent variable: <i>pessimism</i>					
	<i>F</i> = 77.084	<i>R</i> = .365	<i>R</i> ² = .13	<i>p</i> < .01	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	2.098	0.073		29.798	.000
<i>Client meaninglessness</i>	0.328	0.034	.223		.000
Dependent variable: <i>dispositional attribution</i>					
	<i>F</i> = 26.350	<i>R</i> = .223	<i>R</i> ² = .05	<i>p</i> < .01	

The results of the stepwise multiple regression analysis indicate that all of the policy alienation sub-dimensions significantly predicted the pessimism and operational attribution dimension of change cynicism. Tactical and operational powerlessness respectively accounted for 26% and 25% of the total variance seen in pessimism. On the other hand, tactical powerlessness accounted for the 24% of total variance in pessimism, whilst operational powerlessness accounted for only 12%. Strategic powerlessness significantly but very weakly predicted both pessimism and dispositional attribution (10% and 4%, respectively). Similarly, the meaninglessness dimensions also very weakly predicted the pessimism and dispositional attribution. Societal meaninglessness predicted 0.9% of pessimism and 0.4% of dispositional attribution, whereas client meaninglessness predicted 13% of pessimism and 5% of dispositional attribution. According to the standardized regression coefficient (β) results, it can be interpreted that tactical and operational powerlessness were found to be the strongest predictors of pessimism towards change, and that tactical powerlessness was shown to be the strongest predictor of dispositional attribution, as in casting blame on the managers for failures in past change efforts.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The current study investigated educational employees' policy alienation and change cynicism in the Turkish public-school context, and in particular explored the causal relationships between teachers' and school administrators' policy alienation and change cynicism within an educational context characterized by frequent policy changes designed

from a top-down approach under the scrutiny of the centralized Turkish National Ministry of Education. The results showed that educational employees have moderate levels of policy alienation and low levels of change cynicism, whilst teachers have slightly higher change cynicism than administrators. The study also showed that policy alienation and change cynicism correlate moderately and that policy alienation significantly predicts change cynicism for both teachers and educational administrators.

One primary finding of the study was that the teachers and school administrators did not develop a high level of change cynicism. Yet, the finding requires attention since change cynicism does not occur that fast, making the accumulation of past failed change attempts in the history of an organization a significant factor. As Choi (2011) stated, change cynicism can turn into a “self-fulfilling prophecy and can create a vicious cycle” (p. 488) once it emerges, and as validated by previously repeated failures, it has a strong potential to persist and spill over to affect other dimensions of work life. Scholars also argue that change cynicism is not a personal disposition but a learned response which addresses the change initiatives rather than a specific person or people, so factors causing cynicism are extraneously created rather than being autogenic or intrinsic (Broner, 2003; Reichers et al., 1997; Wanous et al., 2000). What is even more harmful perhaps, is that once emerged, change cynicism can transfer from an individual disposition to an organizational climate (DeCelles et al., 2013). Therefore, teachers’ and school administrators’ change cynicism should be regarded seriously before being allowed to fester and grow stronger. One possible measure to manage levels of change cynicism could be managing the attributions of teachers and administrators with regards to failed change attempts. Wanous et al. (2000) indicated that change cynicism often does not occur when employees attribute failed change attempts to situational factors such as unforeseen or uncontrollable forces or events. In other words, if employees are convinced that the managers are not liable in terms of being blamed for the failure, they are unlikely to develop dispositional attribution and their hope for the future change attempts are thereby retained untainted. Hence, providing detailed information about possible causes of failures, or a slow pace of change, as well as involving employees in all stages of the change implementation process could help in this regard (Wanous et al., 2004).

The fact that situational attribution does not lead to change cynicism might also explain the low levels of change cynicism seen in the current study for educational employees. As previously mentioned, the Turkish education system is highly centralized, with policy decisions made at the ministerial level rather than more locally or at the school level. Therefore, educational employees could attribute any failures direct to the Ministry of National Education rather than to managers at the organizational level, who actually have significantly limited discretion in implementing national policies. As school-level managers lack control over such policy initiatives, they may not be blamed for any lack of change. From another perspective, educational policies in the Turkish context are occasionally open to governmental influence, and thus can be said to be politicized (Dağlı, 2007). As such, changes in government are highly likely to reflect upon educational policy practices, and therefore educational employees could be attributing failed, frequently-changing, or suspended policies to political actors rather than blaming their managers. Although these explanations have some grounding in the existing literature, they await validation through future empirical research on these issues.

As for the policy alienation of educational employees, the current study shows that their policy alienation is considerably high. This finding is significant considering the strong influence of policy alienation on implementers’ willingness to behaviorally support future

change efforts (Lavee et al., 2018; Thomann et al., 2018; Tummers, 2012; Tummers et al., 2012; Van Engen et al., 2019). Although the mean scores for all dimensions of policy alienation were found to be at or slightly above moderate levels, educational employees in the Turkish public-school context demonstrate high levels of strategic powerlessness and societal meaninglessness when compared to other dimensions. As the finding implies, teachers and school administrators feel that they are not actually involved in the policy design and thus have no control or say over educational policies. Lilja (2020) reported that academics who had no voice in new policy enactment had difficulty perceiving the actual outcomes expected with any new policy, and thus experienced strategic powerlessness. As a result, academics can have difficulty internalizing the policy and can feel pushed to implement a policy that does not reflect their own values or interests. In the same vein, educational employees in the current study seemed to feel powerless in shaping policies that directly interfere with or change their daily professional practices. However, change scholars argue that involving employees in change decisions is of crucial importance to gain their acceptance and behavioral support for its implementation (Broner, 2003; Brown & Cregan, 2008; Judson, 1991; Sagie & Koslowsky, 1994; Stanley et al., 2005; Wanberg & Banas, 2000). When professionals are not involved in the change process, they may believe they have no influence on the rewards or sanctions of the change policy (Lipsky, 2010).

However, it may be said that the nature of involvement in policy decisions can also change. For example, some scholars have said that sense of involvement can also develop if professional associations such as teaching or education unions display a strong stance during the drafting of policies, have substantial influence on public debate, and effectively represent employees' values and interests. Therefore, educational employees' direct involvement might not actually be necessary to support strategic powerlessness (Bouma, 2009; Tummers, 2011; Tummers et al., 2012). Viennet and Pont (2017) supported the same idea from the policy implementation perspective; stating that successful policy implementation should engage teaching unions as key stakeholders early on in discussions about new policies or changes in the planning stage. In the present context, although nearly 72% of educational employees in Turkey are registered to one of the existing 35 unions (Avcı, 2021), most have only a weak level of faith in their unions' ability and motivation to realize change for the benefit of the schools or educators, and believe that the unions often act with political motive or seek to work towards their own benefit or interest (Avcı, 2021; Eraslan, 2012; Kara, 2016; Karaman & Erdoğan, 2016; Köybaşı et al., 2016; Taşdan, 2013; Yasan, 2012). In light of these findings, it may be stated that educational employees in the current study may feel strategically powerless due to their inability to participate within educational policy drafting, either directly or indirectly, through their professional associations.

In regard to causal relations between policy alienation and change cynicism, the current study showed that educational employees' policy alienation predicts their change cynicism to a considerable extent. Although their strategic powerlessness and societal meaninglessness levels were found to be higher, tactical and operational powerlessness influenced change cynicism more strongly than all the other dimensions. For one thing, tactical and operation powerlessness is directly related to school-level and classroom-level policy change implementations; the former referring to professionals' involvement in school-level decisions and plans regarding policy implementation, whilst the latter refers to the extent of their discretion and agency in classroom implementations. Tucker et al. (2021) found that powerlessness resulting from organization-level processes strongly influenced

professionals' willingness to implement new policies, whilst limiting their professional discretion and agency during the planning and implementation of these policies, which thereby potentially increased their operational powerlessness. Similarly, Tummers (2011) and Tummers et al. (2012) stated that discretion is integral to perceived operational power, and inability to retain discretion due to strict policy rules or weak professional status increase operational powerlessness, which in return can reduce professionals' behavioral and attitudinal support for change. DeHart-Davis and Pandey (2005) claimed that as bureaucratic control increases, delegation of decision-making authority to those actual implementing the changes can decrease, which weakens their discretion and autonomy. Thomann et al. (2018) went even further in this regard, stating that "the evidence encourages scholars and practitioners to move from the question whether frontline workers should be granted discretion to how to best make use of frontline workers' discretion instead" (p. 583). Researchers from change cynicism literature such as Brown and Cregan (2008), Choi (2011), Qian and Daniels (2008), Stanley et al. (2005), and Wanous et al. (2000) also signified the crucial role of participative decision-making climate in organizational change, and stated that employees' involvement in the planning and execution of change correlates negatively with change cynicism. These previous findings and postulations lend significant support for the current study's findings. The literature also offers some support for the weak influence of strategic powerlessness on change cynicism noted in the present context. For instance, Freidson (2001) attributed public professionals' weaker strategical powerlessness to the stratified nature of public organizations, postulating that public professionals are often disconnected and weakly-associated with senior management or elites in professional associations. However, change cynicism is closely connected to the everyday practices of professionals, and thereby builds upon the accumulation of their observed failures of change implementations. As such, it may be said that tactical and operational powerlessness could directly affect change cynicism, whilst strategic powerlessness may have none or an indirect effect (Bouma, 2009; Tummers, 2011).

Contrary to some previous research in the literature, the current study showed that meaningfulness had a positive but very weak effect on the change cynicism of educational employees. For example, Tummers (2011) found that societal and client meaningfulness had a significant correlation with willingness to change, and was a stronger predictor of commitment to change compared to powerlessness. Similarly, Van der Voet et al. (2017) found that client meaningfulness negatively influenced commitment to change. In the change literature, scholars have indicated that a legitimized case for change, a recognized need or a legitimate rationale could increase a perceived meaningfulness of change and thereby increase employees' likelihood to support change (Brown et al., 2017; Connell & Waring, 2002; Mathews, 2009). The contradiction between the current study and earlier findings could be explained from different angles. For one thing, none of the former studies addressed change cynicism, which is not the same as resistance, willingness, or commitment to change (Broner, 2003). Additionally, these other studies were not conducted with educational professionals, and the results might therefore be said to be liable to change according to the context. Although public schools are indeed public organizations, they have unique characteristics that differ from many other public organizations. In addition, Tummers' (2011) study addressed specific policy alienation, whilst the current study addressed general policy alienation, and therefore the two perspectives may yield differing results.

In fact, teachers and school administrators' level of societal and client meaningfulness was found in the current study to be moderate rather than low, which indicates that they were skeptical about the benefits of new policies to both the society (school community in this regard) and their clients (i.e., their own students) and tended to find at least some policies meaningless. Previous research has shown that large numbers of policy changes and policy inconsistency over a prolonged period can increase professionals' sense of societal meaningfulness (Nishii et al., 2008; Tummers et al., 2012; van Engen et al., 2019). Similarly, May and Winter (2009) claimed that the more difficulty professionals have comprehending the benefits of new policies to their clients, the more they are likely to experience client meaningfulness. In this case, legitimation and justification of the policy in the eyes of the implementers does seem to matter (Bryson et al., 2015; Gofen, 2014; Tummers et al., 2015). There is some evidence in the literature regarding the execution of conflicting policies in the Turkish educational context as perceived by teachers (Altinyelken, 2013; Küçüker, 2010), which might go towards explaining the observed educational employees societal and client meaningfulness.

The current study investigated the human dimension of educational policy and change management, and addressed the psychological underpinnings of policy implementation and change processes as perceived by educational employees. As for policymakers, the insights gained from the current study suggest that a significant need exists to create opportunities to increase teachers' and school administrators' perceived involvement in policy design and implementation. Opening up policies for public debate in which all stakeholders and professional institutions can freely share their opinions, taking concerns into account from all levels, allowing for teacher participation in the organizational-level planning and policy implementation, and supporting teacher discretion and agency in their daily practices are suggested as some of the ways that policy alienation may be decreased and behavioral support for prospective policies increased. With regards to change cynicism, both senior and middle-level managers should not ignore past failures of change, but rather address and honestly talk over them, take responsibility and acknowledge any mistakes that may have been made, and to clarify the underlying reasons for such failures so as to decrease educational employees' dispositional attribution. In the same vein, through publicizing and celebrating successful change implementations and acknowledging the contributions made by all parties could help to reduce teachers' pessimism about educational change.

As for future research on this topic, there are certain questions that still require an answer. For one thing, to the authors' knowledge, the current study is the first investigation into Turkish educational employees' policy alienation, and which has shown that further research is still necessary in order to develop a deeper insight in this area and to delineate more comprehensive pictures regarding the relationships between policy alienation and policy implication attitudes of educational employees. Additionally, the influence of policy alienation on different change-related attitudes such as willingness, resistance, or commitment to change is deserving of empirical attention, and studies could be designed that measure these constructs in relation to specific policies and cases of change.

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Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available upon request from the corresponding author.

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ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTOR

Tijen Tulubas, PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Educational Administration at Dumlupınar University, Kütahya, Turkey. Her research interests include organizational behavior, higher education management, leadership, culture and identity. She has published numerous articles in leading international journals, authored a book and three book chapters on education/management.

Email: tijen.tulubas@dpu.edu.tr

ORCID ID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9406-8361>

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