

Examination of Self-Efficacy and Burnout Dynamics of Preschool Teachers in Turkey and the United States

Maide Orçan¹

¹*Selçuk University, Konya, Turkey*
E-mail: maideorcan@gmail.com

This study aimed to comparatively examine the self-efficacy and burnout levels of preschool teachers in Turkey and the United States. Of the general screening models, the study uses the relational screening model. A total of 90 teachers participated in the study. 32 of the participants were from the United States and 58 were from Turkey. The Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale and Burnout Scale were used in the study. The data were analyzed through the Whitney U-Test. According to the analyses regarding the self-efficacy levels of teachers, a significant difference in student participation sub-dimension as well as in total points in favor of the teachers in Turkey were found. However, no significant difference was found between the two countries with regards to teachers' burnout levels. Regarding the self-efficacy levels of teachers working in Turkey, a significant difference was found in favor of teachers with two to five years of experience in the student participation sub-dimension, while no significant difference was found in the other sub-dimensions and in total points. On the other hand, no significant difference was determined between the self-efficacy levels and years of experience for the teachers in the United States. As for the sub-dimension and total points for emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion of the teachers working in Turkey, a significant difference was determined in favor of those who had a teaching experience of one year or less, while a significant difference was determined only in the mental exhaustion sub-dimension for the teachers in the United States. The difference in question was in favor of teachers with an experience of two to five years.

Keywords: Preschool Education, Teacher, Self-Efficacy, Burnout, Professional Experience.

Introduction

Teachers are important elements of the education system. Teacher is the person taking and applying various decisions as to the ways in which teaching processes are implemented. The effectiveness of this process depends on the quality of the teacher. An effective teacher is the one who is able to demonstrate good teaching (Yeşilyaprak, 2002). A preschool teacher is the one assigned at a preschool education institution, who, provides rich and stimulating environments adapted to the level of development in children and their individual characteristics. A preschool teacher supports children's development in physical, mental, emotional and social aspects, guides them in the most nurturing way in line with their cultural values, and prepares them for primary school education (Blenkin & Kelly, 1996).

The expectations and beliefs of teachers affect their own behaviors, and thereby, the attitudes and successes of the children. A teacher's perception of self-efficacy is one of the most important factors affecting the efficiency of both the teacher and the school, particularly in vocational capacities (Ekici, 2006). A teachers' fulfillment of competencies required by the teaching profession is closely related to not only the quality of the education they had received, but also to their beliefs in their capacity to fulfill their duties and responsibilities (Yılmaz, Köseoğlu, Gerçek, & Soran, 2004). The concept of self-efficacy was first used by Bandura (1977, 1986, 1989) within the context of Social Cogni-

tive Theory. Bandura (1997) defines the concept of self-efficacy as the state of “possessing personal skills to exercise control and conduct over actions requiring the overcoming of potential duties and states”. Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy and Hoy (1998), define teacher’s self-efficacy as their individual judgments regarding the competencies they possess to produce the desired results through - professional development.

Many researchers were intrigued by Bandura’s opinion that the perception of self-efficacy affects the choice of individual’s activities, his/her resoluteness while facing challenges, and the level of efforts and performance. Studies corroborate Bandura’s concept, and indicate that individuals having a high perception of self-efficacy about a situation demonstrate a great deal of effort to see things through, and they do not easily step back when they encounter problems, and are persistent and patient. When looked from this angle, the concept of self-efficacy is among the important traits necessary to emphasize in education (Aşkar & Umay, 2001).

On the other hand, teachers often experience inadequacy, dissatisfaction, and burnout at their job due to the frequent changes in education policies, financial difficulties, work load, lack of student interest, and problems with school administrators (Telef, 2011). The concept of burnout first mentioned in the literature in an article by Freudenbeger in 1974. In this work, “burnout” was characterized as a “professional danger”. Freudenberger (1974) defined burnout as the “state of exhaustion occurring due to failure, exhaustion, loss of energy and strength, or due to unsatisfied needs on internal resources of human” (Sağlam Arı & Çına Bal, 2008). Maslach and Jackson (1981), defined “burnout” as a syndrome having physical and mental dimensions, including physical fatigue, long-lasting tiredness, feelings of desperation and hopelessness, and negative attitudes toward the job, life and other people. In their research, Karakelle and Canpolat (2008), specified certain characteristics of teachers who demonstrate a high level of burnout: (1) They are unable to establish positive relations with their students, (2) tend to think of a single solution when facing negative student attitudes, (3) prefer reprimands (4) refer the problem to the school administration in situations they believe as being more complex, and (5) associate negative behaviors of student in class with reasons unrelated to students’ themselves, such as their upbringing and developmental characteristics. In addition, they indicated that teachers with a high level of burnout generally struggle in generating multiple solutions for problems, have the feeling that what happens in their professional life cannot be controlled by them, and experience ennui.

Each country designs and applies an education system suited to its economic social and cultural structure (Çelik, 2002). Akgün and Şimşek (2011) examined the education system of Turkey and the United States in a comparative study. The study identified substantial differences in the dimensions of purpose, structure, and the process of the educational system in both countries. There are also differences across countries in terms of certification and appointment procedures to become a teacher (Baştürk, 2007; MEB, 2012a; MEB, 2012b; MEB, 2010; MEB, 1999). Ongoing and supportive professional training of in-service teachers is emphasized within the context of the education system in the U.S. A variety of evaluative documents assessing the balance of theory and practice are required from early childhood teachers who work with children of 3 to 5 years of age (Early et al., 2007). School administrations renew and extend the appointment of teachers for next year only for those who meet the criteria and conditions. The appointments of teachers who demonstrate the otherwise are not renewed by the administration, and this pushes the teacher out of the system. There is no such requirement in early childhood education system of Turkey. Once teacher candidates successfully finish their degree and are appointed as teachers through teacher placement exam, they can continue their teaching profession until they retire (Çelikten, Şanal & Yeni, 2005).

The classroom size is another important factor affecting the student and the teacher performance. Studies show that classes with low number of students are more successful in writing, reading, and mathematics, when compared with classes with high number of students (Finn & Achilles, 1999).

In classes with a lower number of students, teachers are able to spend more time with their students. Classes with high number of students create difficulties for the teacher in class management, student control, grading, planning and evaluation (Blatchford, 2009). There are studies that indicated that classroom sizes are high in both Turkey and the United States (Dinçer & Uysal Kolaşın, 2009; Yaman, 2006).

In the light of the information provided above, differences and similarities are observed between the two countries in the education system, teacher training and appointment. The purpose of the present study is to reveal and examine the similarities and differences in self-efficacy and burnout levels of teachers between Turkey and the U.S., and contribute to understanding of the subject in this regard.

Method

The study used the general screening model. The investigation was carried out with teachers working at the central district of Konya in Turkey, and Buffalo province of New York State in the United States. Participation in the study was voluntary. 58 randomly selected teachers working in Konya, and 32 preschool teachers in Buffalo participated in the study. Of the participants, 64.4% were living in Turkey and 35.6% were living in the U.S. 85.6% were female [United States: 26 (81.3%) / Turkey: 51 (%87.9)] and 14.4% were male [United States: 6 (18.8%) / Turkey: 7 (12.1%)]; 52.2% were in the age group of 26-35 [United States: 32 (100%) / Turkey: 15 (25.9%)]; 80% were university graduates [United States: 15 (46.9%) / Turkey: 57 (98.3%)] and 20% had attained a degree in higher education [United States: 17 (53.1%) / Turkey: 1 (1.7%)]; 36.7% had a teaching experience of one year or less [United States: 2 (6.3%) / Turkey: 31 (53.4%)] and 63.3% had an experience of 2 to 5 years [United States: 30 (93.8%) / Turkey: 27 (46.6%)]. 88.9% of the teachers were working in public schools [United States: 25 (78.1%) / Turkey: 55 (94.8%)]; 57.8% were responsible for 16 to 20 children [United States: 17 (53.1%) / Turkey: 35 (60.3%)]; 90% of the children in their classrooms were in the 4-5 age group [United States: 24 (75.0%) / Turkey: 57 (98.3%)]. It was identified in the teacher survey that 31.1% of the teachers chose the teaching profession due to their love of children [United States: 10 (31.3%) / Turkey: 18 (31.3%)], 47.8% due to their desire of becoming a teacher [United States: 12 (37.5%) / Turkey: 31 (53.4%)].

The researcher prepared personal teacher information forms and distributed these to the sample group. The study used the Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale, developed by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001), in order to determine the self-efficacy levels of teachers. This scale was adapted to Turkish by Çapa, Çakıroğlu and Sarıkaya (2005). It is a five point scale Likert type one, and consists of 24 items. The scale includes three sub-factors: (1) ensuring student participation to the course, (2) using educational strategies, and (3) class management. The validity and reliability of the Turkish version of the scale, was measured, and the reliability values of the sub-dimensions were determined as being .82 for “ensuring student participation”, .86 for “usage of educational strategies during the class” and .84 for “class management”. The Cronbach Alpha Consistency Coefficient of the items was determined as being .93.

In order to determine the burnout levels of the teachers, the Burnout scale was used. This scale was developed by Pines and Aronson (1988), and adapted to Turkish by Çapri (2006). The scale is a seven-stage Likert type one, and consists of 21 items. The items of the scale are assigned values in between 1 being “never” and 7 being “always”. The highest point possible is “7”, while the lowest is “1”, and a low point signifies a low burnout level and high point signifies a high burnout level. Similar results to results of the original scale were obtained from the factor analysis carried out to measure the structure validity of the scale. The Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficient, carried out to determine the reliability of the scale, was found to be $\alpha=0.93$. As for the test-retest reliability coefficient, 0.85 was found for the textile workshop group and 0.83 for the teacher group. The scale’s criteria-correlated validity was examined using the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educator Form (MBI-EF), de-

veloped by Maslach and Jackson (1981), and adapted to Turkish language by Ergin (1992). The correlations between the total points of the Self-Efficacy Scale and Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educator Form (MBI-EF) sub-scale points were calculated respectively as being 0.57, 0.30 and -0.22 (Çapri, 2006).

The data were collected in 2012 school year. In order to determine whether the data were in conformity with normal distribution, Kolmogorov-Smirnov (k-s) Test was applied. The results showed that the self-efficacy and burnout scale level point averages of the preschool teachers in the United States and Turkey did not display normal distribution. Therefore, a non-parametric analysis of Mann Whitney U-Test was used to examine the self-efficacy and burnout levels of preschool teachers in Turkey and the U.S. (Büyüköztürk, 2008).

Findings

The findings of the study carried out to examine the self-efficacy and burnout levels of pre-school teachers working in Turkey and the U.S. are presented below. When the Table 1 is examined, it is seen that while there is a significant difference in favor of teachers working in Turkey concerning their self-efficacy level in student participation sub-dimension and total points ($p < .05$), no significant difference was identified in terms of other sub-dimensions. As for the burnout levels, no significant difference was found in two countries.

When the Table 2 is examined, it is seen that a significant difference was obtained in favor of teachers in Turkey with two to five years of work experience, regarding the self-efficacy level in the student participation sub-dimension ($p < .05$). No significant difference was identified in the other sub-dimensions and total points. Likewise, no significant difference was found between the self-efficacy levels and years of teaching experience in the United States ($p > .05$).

Table 1. Results of the Mann Whitney U-Test regarding the self-efficacy and burnout levels of preschool teachers working in Turkey and the United States

Scales	Sub-Dimensions	Countries	N	\bar{X}	S	Mean Rank	Rank Sum	U	P
Teacher Self-Efficacy	Student Participation	Turkey	58	54.98	7.71	52.54	3047.50	519.50	.001*
		United States	32	47.56	10.36	32.73	1047.50		
	Education Strategies	Turkey	58	56.20	7.83	48.88	2835.00	732.0	.098
		United States	32	53.25	7.12	39.38	1260.00		
	Class Management	Turkey	58	58.20	9.46	45.90	2662.00	905.0	.846
United States		32	57.12	8.13	44.78	1433.00			
Total	Turkey	58	168.68	22.53	49.95	2897.00	670.0	.030*	
	United States	32	157.93	22.92	37.44	1198.00			
Teacher Burnout	Emotional Exhaustion	Turkey	58	14.77	5.22	42.27	2451.50	740.50	.113
		United States	32	17.78	6.95	51.36	1643.50		
	Mental Exhaustion	Turkey	58	14.98	3.89	45.72	2651.50	915.50	.916
		United States	32	15.34	4.93	45.11	1443.50		
	Physical Exhaustion	Turkey	58	18.55	5.31	40.73	2281.00	685.0	.066
		United States	32	20.84	5.77	51.09	1635.00		
	Total	Turkey	58	48.19	12.85	41.96	2349.50	753.50	.216
		United States	32	53.96	16.90	48.95	1566.50		

Significance at the level of $p < .05$ was sought.

Table 2. Results of the Mann Whitney U-Test, according to the self-efficacy and burnout levels of pre-school teachers working in Turkey and the United States

Scales	Sub-Dimensions	Countries	Experience Period	N	\bar{X}	S	Mean Rank	Rank Sum	U	P	
Teacher Self-Efficacy	Student Management	Turkey	1 year and less	31	52,09	7,56	23,13	717,00	221,00	.002*	
			between 2 and 5 years	27	58,29	6,58	36,81	994,00			
		United States	1 year and less	2	45,00	12,72	15,00	30,00	27,00	,847	
			between 2 and 5 years	30	47,73	10,43	16,60	498,00			
		Education Strategies	Turkey	1 year and less	31	54,54	8,13	25,76	798,50	302,50	,070
				between 2 and 5 years	27	58,11	7,16	33,80	912,50		
	United States		1 year and less	2	50,00	11,31	14,00	28,00	25,00	,734	
			between 2 and 5 years	30	53,46	7,00	16,67	500,00			
	Class Management	Turkey	1 year and less	31	58,16	11,46	28,32	878,00	382,00	,567	
			between 2 and 5 years	27	58,25	6,68	30,85	833,00			
		United States	1 year and less	2	58,00	8,48	17,25	34,50	28,50	,907	
			between 2 and 5 years	30	57,06	8,25	16,45	493,50			
Total		Turkey	1 year and less	31	164,80	21,93	26,39	818,00	322,00	,132	
			between 2 and 5 years	27	173,14	22,80	33,07	893,00			
	United States	1 year and less	2	153,00	32,52	15,00	30,00	27,00	,847		
		between 2 and 5 years	30	158,26	22,87	16,60	498,00				
	Teacher Burnout	Emotional Exhaustion	Turkey	1 year and less	31	16,25	5,09	34,11	1057,50	275,50	.025*
				between 2 and 5 years	27	13,07	4,92	24,20	653,50		
United States			1 year and less	2	14,50	6,36	11,75	23,50	837,00	.385	
between 2 and 5 years		30	18,00	7,03	16,82	504,50					
Mental Exhaustion		Turkey	1 year and less	31	16,83	3,88	38,21	1184,50	148,50	.000*	
			between 2 and 5 years	27	12,85	2,64	19,50	526,50			
	United States	1 year and less	2	15,00	7,07	14,00	28,00	541,00	.001*		

Physical Exhaustion	States	less							
		between 2 and 5 years	30	15.36	4.93	16.67	500.00		
	Turkey	1 year and less	31	19.93	5.48	32.76	950.00	268.00	.042*
		between 2 and 5 years	27	17.07	4.79	23.93	646.00		
	United States	1 year and less	2	20.50	7.77	15.00	30.00	786.50	.395
		between 2 and 5 years	30	20.86	5.78	16.60	498.00		
Total	Turkey	1 year and less	31	53.03	12.89	34.57	1002.50	215.50	.004*
		between 2 and 5 years	27	43.00	10.78	21.98	593.50		
	United States	1 year and less	2	50.00	21.21	13.50	27.00	677.00	.071
		between 2 and 5 years	30	54.23	16.99	16.70	501.00		

Significance at the level of $p < .05$ was sought.

Discussion

Within the educational context of the U.S., there has been an -increasing cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity in the population of children situated in in early childhood settings (Lim, Maxwell, Able-Boone & Zimmer, 2009). Early childhood educators face difficulties to address the needs of children and their families who come from different cultural environments (Durand, 2008). These differences in the child/family demographics necessitate teachers to be more sensitive to and prepare effective practices for these children and families (Greenberg & Kahn, 2012). In addition, teachers who work in the United States are required to receive training and submit performance evaluation documents to the school administration every year, in order to be able continue practicing their profession. Teachers working in Turkey do not have these types of difficulties/pressures to continue practicing their profession. Considering this data as a starting point, it can be conjectured that the self-efficacy levels of teachers working in Turkey may be high. Aligned with this assumption, Kesgin's (2006) study, conducted in Turkey, found that the self-efficacy levels of preschool teachers were above the average.

Studies carried out in Turkey indicate that early childhood teachers work for long hours, sometimes all day, without a break. Their work hours continue also during the off-classroom times, for generating lesson plans, attending parents' meeting and school-related organizations, and collecting materials for the lesson plan. In particular, early childhood teachers working at child care centers and preschool institutions, work for low salaries with very few or zero benefits. Since the personnel turnover rate in early childhood field is high, there are not enough personnel for these programs, and this may result in employers providing employment to teachers who do not have the essential teaching training and who do not possess the competencies necessary to manage the class in an effective way and spend time with children. In this regard, it has been stated that the enrolled child-adult rate in childcare centers is high (Stewart, 2008). In a study conducted by Ünal (2006), the problems of teachers working in preschool education institutions in Turkey were examined. Considering the findings of his study, Ünal stated that preschool teachers do not participate enough in in-service professional development trainings relevant to their fields, that those who carry out inspections are not competent in providing profes-

sional support and guidance, and that the preschool teachers do not have any time for taking a rest throughout six class hours, which negatively affects their productivity and effectiveness. In the light of this information, it can be argued that the problems experienced by teachers working in the two countries, may have a similar effect on their burnout level.

Teachers who are new to the profession need support in order to acclimate to the existing education system. Depending on the working conditions and the school culture, new teachers are inundated with the processes of struggling, adjustment, continuation and survival. If no adequate support is given, they may put the blame on students, their families, or administrators in order to ease the burden of the differences they experiences and feel better (Nemser, 2003). In Turkey, the quality of the university education provided to early childhood teachers is also questionable. Faculties of Education usually have the highest student-academic ratio in Turkey, when compared to others (Üstüner, 2004). In addition, the establishment of early childhood programs in new universities by low-quality and insufficient number of faculty members is considered as a problem for the training of early childhood teachers (Küçükahmet, 2007). Using this information as a starting point, it can be perceived that the teachers working in Turkey with more years of teaching experience are likely to establish more effective communication methods with their students, and therefore have the means to observe the development of the student more closely and better identify their strengths and weaknesses. In this regard, a teacher who knows his/her student well is likely to have more awareness about the ways in which she/he can motivate and ensure students' participation in the class and the activities.

Regarding the teachers in Turkey, it has been found that those having an experience of one year or less have higher burnout levels in emotional, mental and physical exhaustion sub-dimensions and total points ($p < .05$) than those with two to five years of experience. In light of this it is possible that the teachers with less professional experience in Turkey tend to go through burnout more. Maslach and Jackson (1981) have stated that burnout has a negative correlation with professional experience. Dworkin (2001) stated that inexperienced teachers have higher levels of burnout, while the experienced ones are likely to have learned how to cope with sources of stress. Kandır, Özbey and İnal (2009) examined the difficulties encountered by the preschool teachers in the planning and application stages of instructional programs. The study found that the teachers experienced most of the difficulties while selecting and preparing materials, and due to the high number of children as well as the inadequacy of physical conditions. They found out that the teachers with less seniority experience more difficulties with regards to physical conditions.

As for teachers working in the U.S., it was observed that those who had two to five years of work experience have a higher level of burnout than teachers having an experience of one year and less, only in the mental exhaustion sub-dimension, while there was no significant difference in terms other sub-dimension points and total points. In this regard, it is possible that the teachers in the U.S. do not experience more emotional and physical exhaustion as their professional experience increases, in that they only experience more mental exhaustion.

According to Farber (1991), teacher burnout is an important issue in the United States of America. It is estimated that approximately 20% of the teachers experience some forms of exhaustion throughout their professional lives. Teachers in the U.S. are expected to continue to receive professional training at universities and colleges, and actively participate in in-service training in order to maintain their jobs. It can be speculated that the differences in the body of student populations, and thereby differences in families (ethnic, linguistic, etc.), may be causing teachers to experience more mental exhaustion.

Conclusion and Suggestions

This study showed that there is a significant difference in favor of teachers working in Turkey regarding self-efficacy level, in student participation sub-dimension and total points, while no significant difference was identified in the burnout levels of the teachers in two countries. While a significant difference was found regarding the self-efficacy levels of teachers working in Turkey in terms of student participation sub-dimension in favor of those with work experience of two to five years, no significant difference was determined in other sub-dimensions and total points. However, no difference was identified between the self-efficacy levels of teachers working in the United States and their experience in the total number of years. While a significant difference disfavoring the teachers with experience of one year and less was determined among teachers working in Turkey in terms of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion sub-dimension points and total points, a significant difference in favor of teacher with an experience of two to five years was determined among the teachers working in the U.S. in terms of only mental exhaustion sub-dimension.

In accordance with these results, the study concludes with the following considerations:

- A similar but larger scale study is needed through including different countries and variables,
- Additionally, comprehensive studies are needed that investigate and compare similar issues among teachers and school administrators who work across different levels within different early childhood educational capacities, as well as among those who demonstrate a variety of work experience in terms of number of years,
- Providing supportive courses and seminars to newly appointed teachers is important, these courses and seminars may help them tackle with the difficulties they encounter in the profession,
- Focusing on teacher education and in-service training programs may significantly contribute to the effectiveness of the education and is likely to yield better trained generations of early childhood teachers.

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