



Teacher Autonomy as a Predictor of Job Satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the association between teacher autonomy and job satisfaction. To this end, the study employed a relational survey model. The sample of the study included 368 teachers working in different schools of Batman city (Turkey) in the spring term of the 2020-2021 academic year. Teachers representing the population of the research were selected through a random sampling method. Research data were amassed with the “Teacher Autonomy Scale” and “Teacher Job Satisfaction Scale”. The mean scores were calculated and Pearson correlation and simple regression analyses were conducted. Based on the findings of the research, teachers' opinions towards autonomy behaviours and job satisfaction are high level. The results also show a positive and significant relationship between teachers' autonomy and job satisfaction; teachers' autonomy behaviours are meaningful predictors of their job satisfaction. Moreover, teachers' autonomous behaviours reveal 7.2% of their job satisfaction.

Keywords: Teacher, teacher autonomy, job satisfaction.

İş Doyumunun Bir Yordayıcısı Olarak Öğretmen Özerkliği

ÖZ

Bu araştırma öğretmenlerin özerklik davranışları ile iş doyumları arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. İlişkisel tarama deseninde tasarlanan araştırmaya, 2020-2021 eğitim ve öğretim yılı ikinci döneminde Batman (Türkiye) merkezde görev yapan 368 öğretmen katılmıştır. Araştırmanın evrenini temsil edecek öğretmenler tesadüfi örnekleme yöntemiyle belirlenmiştir. Verilerin toplanmasında “Öğretmen Özerkliği Ölçeği” ve “Öğretmen İş Doyumu Ölçeği” kullanılmıştır. Veri analizinde aritmetik ortalama, Pearson korelasyon katsayısı ve basit regresyon analizlerinden yararlanılmıştır. Araştırma sonuçlarına göre öğretmenlerin özerklik davranışlarına ve iş doyumlarına ilişkin yüksek düzeyde olumlu görüş belirttikleri; öğretmenlerin özerklik davranışıyla iş doyumları arasında pozitif yönlü, anlamlı bir ilişki olduğu ve öğretmenlerin özerklik davranışlarının onların iş doyumlarının pozitif yönde, anlamlı yordayıcısı olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Bununla birlikte öğretmenlerin özerklik davranışlarının öğretmenlerin iş doyumlarının %7.2'sini açıkladığı saptanmıştır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Öğretmen, öğretmen özerkliği, iş doyum.

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1 | INTRODUCTION

The teaching profession is regarded not only as a bridge between teachers offering information and students receiving this information, but it is also one of the earliest career professions in which, by its nature, intensive social relationships are experienced as well as being inevitable for social life (Aydın, 2018; Bursalıoğlu, 2010). One of the concrete signs that any profession is regarded as a professional profession is the autonomy that the profession already possesses (Buyruk & Akbaş, 2021). In this regard, it has been claimed that autonomy is a critical term associated with the professional development of the teaching profession (Parker, 2015). Teacher autonomy playing a pivotal role in certain studies aiming to improve educational activities (Freidman, 1999; Limon & Aydın, 2020) may be said to contribute to teachers, students, teaching-learning processes, and educational institutions (Ayrıl et al., 2014; Çolak & Altinkurt, 2017). In the related literature, lots of research efforts in various perspectives have been directed towards the concept of teacher autonomy about which there are certain positive viewpoints (Öztürk, 2011). Deci and Ryan (2000) state that teacher autonomy can be associated with teachers' right to choose their own goals, teaching methods, and educational strategies although Çolak and Altinkurt (2017) define the concept as teachers' decision-making power, competency, and independence towards such issues as students, educational activities and educational institutions. Similarly, Ertürk (2020) argues that teachers' autonomy and freedom for their professional actions are considered as the fundamental elements of autonomy. Teacher autonomy having a great impact upon teachers' professional development (Akçay & Sevinç, 2021) allows teachers to have a voice in decisions related to the schools or, in particular, teachers themselves (Çolak et al., 2017). Autonomy enables teachers to reflect their potentials and increases their organizational commitment. In this regard, it is suggested that teacher autonomy contributes to teachers' being more powerful and effective in educational activities (Ertürk, 2020). The current studies in the education field have been seen to centre upon (Moomaw, 2005). Teacher autonomy is affected by perceived organizational support, teacher specialty, collaboration among colleagues (Kılınç et al., 2018). Teacher autonomy is associated with teachers' morale (Yıldız et al., 2021) and stress (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005), job engagement and satisfaction (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014), and the intent to remain in teaching (Worth & Van den Brande, 2020). As a result of the above-mentioned associations, teacher autonomy is crucial in terms of the effectiveness of schools (Koustelios et al., 2004).

Job satisfaction plays a pivotal role in students' achievements thanks to its effectiveness of teachers and, not surprisingly, educational institutions (Demirtaş, 2010; Lopes & Oliveira, 2020). There have been certain discrepancies about job satisfaction in the literature (Aziri, 2011). In education research to date, the concept of job satisfaction has been extensively investigated in many ways. One of the most comprehensive definitions has been given by Locke (1976) as *"a pleasurable and positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences."* Evans (1997) defines job satisfaction as *"a state of mind encompassing all those feelings determined by the extent to which the individual perceives his/her job-related needs to be met."* Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2021) conceptualize job satisfaction as a motivational structure emphasizing teachers' affective responses to their work. However, according to Zembylas and Papanastasiou (2004), job satisfaction indicates a teacher's affective relationship with his/her teaching role. Job satisfaction is a significant indicator of employees' contentedness (Çolak et al., 2017) and an important prerequisite for organizations to develop an understanding for them and to enable the employees to realize their contributions towards the organization (Zencirkıran & Keser, 2018). It has been suggested that job satisfaction that draws researchers' attention to a great extent due to its effect on the quality of education requires an in-depth examination (Kengatharan, 2020b). Whether teachers gain satisfaction from their organizations depends on numerous variables (Büyükgöze & Özdemir, 2017; Çetinkanat, 2000; Gülbahar, 2020). The levels of teachers' job satisfaction have an impact upon their attitudes towards the job and the performance of the organization. Teachers with a higher level of job satisfaction may be more eager, effective, and efficient while performing educational activities (Çolak et al., 2017) whereas it is unlikely to utter the same for teachers with a low level of job satisfaction (Handsome, 2009).

By the 1930s, investigating employees' attitudes towards their job satisfaction has contributed to the related literature on the variables causing employees to be satisfied or dissatisfied with their organizations (Evans, 1977). It may be stated that there are numerous variables influencing job satisfaction playing a pivotal role in terms of the employees and the organizations to which employees are committed (Limon et al., 2021; Şahin, 2013; Taş, 2017). Of these variables, teacher autonomy has various positive effects on education systems by enabling teachers to be autonomous in a variety of activities related to their professions (TEDMEM, 2015). The fact that teachers'

autonomy increases while fulfilling their educational activities are expected to enhance their job satisfaction as well (Özaslan, 2015; Zencirkıran & Keser, 2018). As a result, it may be asserted that teachers' job satisfaction and, not surprisingly, their productivity are fostered owing to teacher autonomy (Lawson, 2004; Peter, 2013). It is considered inevitable that teachers who have freedom for choosing their methods and strategies have positive attitudes towards their jobs and higher levels of job satisfaction (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Eventually, teachers demonstrating higher levels of autonomous behaviours are said to possess positive emotions and attitudes towards the teaching profession (Canbolat, 2020; Shann, 1998). According to Şentürken & Aytunga (2020), teachers with high levels of autonomy and job satisfaction lead to higher performance in their professional development. Based on the theoretical framework and previous studies, it has been claimed that the aforementioned variables are required to be elaborated upon. This study simply aims to reveal how teachers' autonomy behaviours are associated with job satisfaction. To this end, this study sought answers to the following questions:

RESEARCH QUESTION

1. *What are the levels of teachers' opinions on autonomy behaviours and job satisfaction?*
2. *Are there any relationship between teachers' autonomy behaviours and job satisfaction?*
3. *Do teachers' autonomy behaviours significantly predict their job satisfaction?*

2 | METHOD

Design of the study, population and sample, data collection instruments, implementation process, and data analysis are included under this heading.

DESIGN

This study investigated the association between teachers' autonomy and job satisfaction and employed a relational survey design the purpose of which is to identify the occurrence and extent of change among a range of variables (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009).

POPULATION AND SAMPLE OF THE STUDY

The population of the study consisted of 5.362 teachers from different schools in the province of Batman (*Turkey*) in the spring term of the 2020-2021 academic year. Teachers representing the population of the study were selected through random sampling technique (Balcı, 2013). Of all the teachers in the sample of the study, 368 teachers responded to this research. Based on the criteria in the literature, it is possible to say that the sample of the study ($n=368$) is able to be representative of the entire population in question ($n=5.362$) (Cohen et al., 2000).

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the participants

Variable	Group	Frequency	%
Gender	Female	197	53.53
	Male	171	46.47
Level of Schools	Pre-primary	46	12.50
	Primary	109	29.62
	Secondary	122	33.15
	High School	91	24.73
Professional Seniority	0-5 years	102	27.71
	6-10 years	71	19.30
	11-15 years	62	16.85
	16-20 years	64	17.39
	21 years and above	69	18.75
Level of Education	Master's Degree	48	13.00
	Bachelor's Degree	320	87.00
Marital Status	Single	91	24.70
	Married	277	75.30
	Total	368	100

According to Table 1, out of the total sample size, 197 (53.53%) of the respondents were female and 171 (46.47%) were male. Of all participants in the sample, 46 (12.50%) teachers serve in pre-primary schools, 109 (29.62%) in primary schools, 122 (33.15%) in secondary schools, and 91 (24.73%) in high schools. As for their professional seniority, 102 (27.71%) of teachers had 0-5, 71 (19.30%) 6-10, 62 (16.85%) 11-15, 64 (17.39%) and

60 (18.75%) 21 or more years of experience. As for their levels of education, 48 (13.00%) of teachers had master's and 320 (87.00%) bachelor's degrees. 91 (21.30%) of teachers were single and 277 (75.30%) were married.

DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

Teacher Autonomy Scale

Teacher autonomy was measured through the “*Teacher Autonomy Scale*” (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009) that was based on self-report. The Turkish version of the scale was adapted by Sökmen (2018). The scale is unidimensional and has three items. It was designed in a 6-point Likert scale form. In this scale, the degree of agreement varies from (1) *Strongly Disagree* to (6) *Strongly Agree*. A sample item is “*I am free to choose among teaching method and techniques during everyday teaching*”. The scale's Cronbach's Alpha was calculated to be $\alpha=.84$ (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009). As for its Cronbach's Alpha found in its Turkish version, it was found as $\alpha=.77$ (Sökmen, 2018). However, Cronbach's Alpha found in the current study was found as $\alpha=.70$. According to this result ($\alpha=.70$), the scale's reliability was supported (Karagöz & Bardakçı, 2020).

Teacher Job Satisfaction Scale

Teachers' job satisfaction was measured through the scale developed by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2010). This scale was adapted to Turkish by Yerdelen (2013). The scale consists of only one dimension and three items. It is a 5-point Likert scale. In the first item, (1) refers to “*never*” and (5) refers to “*a great deal*”. In the second item, (1) refers to “*never true*” and (5) “*always true*”. Lastly, in the third item, (1) refers to “*never*” and (5) “*always*”. A sample item is “*Have you ever thought of quitting the teaching profession?*” The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was computed as $\alpha=.71$ by Skaalvik & Skaalvik (2010). On the other hand, it was computed as $\alpha=.87$ by Yerdelen (2013). It was $\alpha=.80$ in this study. According to this result ($\alpha=.80$), the scale's reliability was supported (Karagöz & Bardakçı, 2020).

DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS

Teacher Autonomy Scale and *Job Satisfaction Scale* were delivered to the teachers in the sample through online communication tools. The research data were processed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 and several sets of statistical analyses were performed. Firstly, whether there was missing or wrong data in the dataset was investigated (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). However, no missing or wrong one was found. Secondly, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was carried out in order to determine whether the sample is generated from a normally distributed population. In this regard, kurtosis and skewness values were analyzed. It was decided that the dataset was suitable for parametric statistical analysis (Büyüköztürk, 2017). Frequency (f) and percentages (%) towards the personal information of the respondents were computed. The mean (\bar{X}) and standard deviation (SD) of the respondents' responses to all the statements in both questionnaires were investigated in order to disclose teachers' opinions on autonomous behaviours and job satisfaction. With an aim to unveil the aforementioned relationship, correlation and simple regression statistical techniques were performed. *In the first place*, Pearson's correlation coefficient analysis measuring the linear association between normally distributed variables was conducted. *Secondly*, a simple regression analysis was carried out to examine whether autonomous behaviours of teachers predicted their job satisfaction (Balçı, 2013).

RESEARCH ETHICS

Ethical approval (approval date: 28.05.2021 and number: 2021-2/17) was taken from Batman University.

3 | FINDINGS

This section covers the findings concerning descriptive analyses, teachers' opinions towards their autonomous behaviours and job satisfaction, the relationship between teachers' autonomous behaviours and job satisfaction, and the predictor role of teachers' autonomous behaviours on their job satisfaction.

Teachers' opinions regarding their autonomous behaviours and job satisfaction

Table 2 depicts the means and standard deviations concerning teachers' opinions on their autonomous behaviours and job satisfaction.

Table 2. Means and standard deviations concerning teachers' opinions on their autonomous behaviours and job satisfaction

	N	\bar{X}	SD
Teacher Autonomy	368	5,34	.75
Teacher Job Satisfaction	368	4,05	1,03

As shown in Table 2, teachers' opinions regarding the Teacher Autonomy Scale rated on a 6-point Likert type are above the average ($\bar{X}=5,34$, $SD=.75$). Within the context of higher levels of opinions of teachers participating in the study towards autonomous behaviours, it may be concluded that the respondents felt themselves autonomous. In addition, teachers' opinions regarding Teacher Job Satisfaction Scale rated on a 5-point Likert type are above the average ($\bar{X}=4,05$, $SD=1.03$). Hence, teachers reported higher levels of opinions on job satisfaction.

The relationship between autonomous behaviours of teachers and their job satisfaction

Table 3 displays the correlation matrix representing the relationship between autonomous behaviours of teachers and their job satisfaction based on teachers' opinions.

Table 3. The correlation matrix between autonomous behaviours of teachers and their job satisfaction

		Teacher Job Satisfaction
Teacher Autonomy	<i>r</i>	.268**
	<i>p</i>	.000

** $p < 0.01$

As noted in Table 3, a statistically-significant and low-level positive association between autonomous behaviours of teachers and their job satisfaction ($r=.268$; $p<.000$) was found.

The predictor role of teachers' autonomous behaviours on their job satisfaction

Table 4 presents simple regression analysis results regarding whether teachers' autonomous behaviours predicted their job satisfaction.

Table 4. Simple regression analysis results concerning the predictor role of teachers' autonomous behaviours on their job satisfaction

	Teacher Job Satisfaction		
	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant		5,675	.000
Teacher Autonomy	.365	5,312	.000
$R^2=.072$			
$F=28,215$ $p<.05$			

As seen in Table 4, simple regression analysis results have indicated that autonomous behaviours of teachers are meaningful predictors of their job satisfaction. Accordingly, teachers' autonomous behaviours predict their job satisfaction ($\beta=.365$, $p<.05$) positively. Furthermore, autonomous behaviours of teachers reveal 7.2% of their job satisfaction level [$R^2=.072$; $F=28,215$; $p<.05$] (Büyüköztürk, 2017).

4 | DISCUSSION

The current study aimed to explore the association between the autonomous behaviours of teachers and job satisfaction. The first sub- statement of the study concerning *teachers' opinions on autonomous be according to teachers and their job satisfaction* was evaluated pursuant to descriptive findings. According to the results obtained in the study, teachers had a higher level of opinions regarding autonomous behaviours. This finding is said to be significant since the perception that teachers had sufficient freedom in their professional activities is expected to significantly contribute to fulfilling roles and responsibilities assigned to them (Ertürk, 2020). Moreover, the autonomy granted to teachers in selecting course materials, determining method and techniques to be used in

educational processes, and preparing the curriculum may be said to enhance the levels of teachers' opinions towards autonomy (TEDMEM, 2015). Kılınç et al., (2018) report that teacher autonomy plays a key role in teaching activity and the quality of teachers as the actors of this activity. Parker (2015) also highlights that ensuring autonomy to teachers may be a suitable starting point to resolve current problems in schools. Akçay and Sevinç (2021) state that fostering the level of teacher autonomy may increase teachers' motivation, efficiency, and organizational engagement. In the literature, there are various studies lending support for the finding of the study that the level of teacher autonomy is high (Al-Siyabi, 2016; Buyruk & Akbaş, 2021; Sökmen, 2018; Yıldız et al., 2021). In addition, there are certain studies proposing that the level of autonomous behaviours of teachers is moderate and above (Çolak & Altınkurt, 2017; Çolak et al., 2017; Ertem et al., 2021; Şentürken & Aytunga, 2020; Yazıcı & Akyol, 2017). Further findings from this study indicate that teachers have positive and higher levels of opinions on their job satisfaction. It is also vital to emphasize these findings with respect to individual (Ertürk, 2021) and organizational contexts (Taş, 2017). Inasmuch as, higher levels of job satisfaction suggest that teachers have positive feelings, opinions, and attitudes towards their occupations (Zencirkıran & Keser, 2018). The concept of job satisfaction is related to motivation (Zembylas & Papanastasiou, 2004) and enhances teachers' organizational engagement (Al-Siyabi, 2016). In short, having a higher level of job satisfaction increases teachers' efficiency and performance. Not surprisingly, teachers with high productivity and performance are more effective and efficient in schools (Taylor et al., 2003). Thus, teachers with a high level of job satisfaction are observed to be more engaged and prosperous in educational activities (Çetinkanat, 2000). School principals are inarguably expected to display necessary effort in order to enhance teachers' job satisfaction (Taş, 2017). However, previous studies in the literature support the finding of the current study that teachers had higher level of job satisfaction (Al-Siyabi, 2016; Demirtaş, 2010; Kengatharan, 2020b; Sökmen, 2018). In addition, there are certain research results in the literature that find that teachers' job satisfaction is moderate (Ayan et al., 2009; Çolak et al., 2017; Demirtaş & Alanoğlu, 2015; Ertürk, 2021; Şahin, 2013; Şentürken & Aytunga, 2020).

As for the second sub-statement of the study investigating the relationship between the autonomous behaviors of teachers and their job satisfaction, a low-level, positive, and meaningful association was observed. Accordingly, teachers' job satisfaction may likely be enhanced by enabling them to make their own decisions of their own will and to display their points of view in classes where educational activities are carried out (Ertürk, 2020). The inclusion of teachers in certain plans regarding educational activities and their display of creativity by articulating their ideas may increase teachers' job satisfaction (Zencirkıran & Keser, 2018). In addition to job satisfaction, autonomy does not only foster teachers' organizational engagement but also ensures educational activities to be performed effectively and efficiently (Ertürk, 2020). The positive and significant relationship obtained in this study is said to be supported by previous studies in the literature (Al-Siyabi, 2016; Fradkin-Hayslip, 2021; Kengatharan, 2020a; 2020b; Koustelios et al., 2004; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014; Şentürken & Aytunga, 2020; Worth & Van den Brande, 2020). On the contrary, there are certain studies clarifying the little significant relationship between autonomy in curriculum and job satisfaction (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). Furthermore, according to the results of certain studies, a negative association was found between teacher autonomy and job satisfaction (Esfandiari & Kamali, 2016).

With regards to the third and last sub-statement of the study, it was explored whether the autonomous behaviours of teachers predicted their job satisfaction significantly. The results of simple regression analysis indicate that the autonomous behaviours of teachers are a positive and significant predictor of teachers' job satisfaction. This result is also supported by previous studies in the literature (Çolak et al., 2017; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014; Şentürken & Aytunga, 2020; Taylor et al., 2003). Moreover, in the current study, teachers' autonomous behaviours reveal 7.2% of their job satisfaction. In a study conducted by Çolak et al. (2017), the dimensions of teacher autonomy reveal 21% of teachers' job satisfaction; however, the dimensions of teacher autonomy reveal 19% of teachers' job satisfaction in a study carried out by Şentürken and Aytunga (2020).

5 | RESULT

Based on the findings of the study, the level of teachers' opinions on their autonomous behaviours and job satisfaction are high; there is a positive-oriented and meaningful relationship between the autonomous behaviours of teachers and their job satisfaction and teachers' autonomous behaviours are a significant predictor of their job satisfaction.

6 | LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The current has some limitations. *First*, the sample was limited with teachers working in the province of Batman. *Second*, the present study was carried out with the teachers working at state schools. *Third*, the data of the study were collected through questionnaires. The opinions of the participants were limited to the items in the questionnaires. *Fourth*, due to the outbreak of Covid-19, the research data were obtained with the assistance of online data collection methods. In the light of the limitations above, certain recommendations were made to practitioners and researchers. In this regard, efforts may be directed to the regular investigations of teachers' job satisfaction by school principals in order to maintain teachers' job satisfaction. Certain precautions may be taken in the light of those investigations. Involving in decision-making concerning educational activities and supporting teachers in their teaching preferences are of great importance to attain teachers' job autonomy. Moreover, similar studies can be conducted in relation to different variables as a predictor of teachers' job satisfaction. The association between teacher autonomy and job satisfaction may be elaborated by using mediator variables. Further studies may be extended to the teachers working in private schools. A comprehensive study may be performed by including other provinces. Similar studies may be carried out with school principals. Qualitative studies may be conducted in order to provide an insight into the variables affecting teacher autonomy and job satisfaction.

STATEMENTS OF PUBLICATION ETHICS

I declare that the research has no unethical problems. Ethical approval (approval date:28.05.2021 and number:2021-2/17) was taken from Batman University.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest. The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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