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Factors Affecting Teachers' Academic Optimism in Secondary Schools

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Abstract

Academic optimism is a vital concept that can help schools overcome the challenges posed by students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. This study investigates the factors that influence the academic optimism of secondary school teachers. Using a phenomenological approach, we collected data through focus group interviews with principals and teachers, employing the maximum variation sampling technique to ensure diverse perspectives. Our analysis revealed three themes that affect teachers' academic optimism: self-efficacy, academic emphasis, and trust in students and parents. Notably, our findings indicate that teachers' experiences of success or failure are the most significant determinant of their academic optimism. Based on these results, we propose actionable strategies to enhance teachers' self-efficacy, ultimately promoting academic optimism in secondary schools.

Key Words

Academic optimism • Faculty trust • Teacher efficacy

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Educators and researchers have long been interested in determining the effectiveness of schools. Recently, the concept of academic optimism has gained attention as a significant construct that can help schools overcome the disadvantages faced by students from low socio-economic backgrounds. Hoy et al. (2006) developed the concept of academic optimism while studying effective schools in response to the Coleman report (Coleman et al., 1966), which found that socioeconomic status was the primary factor determining student success and that school-related factors played a smaller role. Academic optimism is now an established concept.

The concept of academic optimism is deemed a vital aspect that influences the teaching environment in schools, and various studies have investigated its impact on student success (Ateş & Ünal, 2021; Bevel & Mitchell, 2012; Boonen et al., 2014; Hoy & Miskel, 2012; McGuigan & Hoy, 2006; Straková et al., 2018; Wu et al., 2013; Wu & Lin, 2018). The structure of academic optimism revealed by Hoy et al. (2006) is based on Bandura's social cognitive and self-efficacy theories, Coleman's social capital theory, Parsons' organizational health theory, Hoy, Tarter, and Kottkamp's culture and climate studies, and especially Seligman's learned optimism study.

Seligman's study emphasizes that pessimism can lead to self-fulfilling prophecies, while optimism can lead to success, both at the individual and organizational levels. Hoy et al. (2006) argue that optimism is a powerful force for success, and that this idea is reflected in the structure of academic optimism they proposed. Academic optimism has existed not only at the school level but also at the individual teacher level (Beard et al., 2010; Hong, 2016; Woolfolk Hoy et al., 2008), and is considered one of the most important teacher and school characteristics that affect the learning environment and students' success (Ergen & Elma, 2018).

School Academic Optimism

School academic optimism is a shared belief among teachers that schools can contribute to student success, that they can collaborate with students and parents to achieve academic success, and that academic success is important (McGuigan & Hoy, 2006). School academic optimism emphasizes the importance of creating a positive school environment to make learning effective, strengthening students' beliefs about learning, considering academic success as the main purpose of the school, and promoting strong cooperation among the school staff (Hoy et al., 2006). School academic optimism assumes that school staff feel a high level of student achievement and a shared sense of purpose for learning (McGuigan & Hoy, 2006).

Academic optimism highlights the potential for schools to overcome the challenges of socio-economic factors that can impede student achievement and focuses on potential rather than problems. Those who work in a highly academically optimistic school believe that they can make a difference, that students can learn, and that academic success can be achieved. Each teacher sees the students as capable, parents as supportive, and the teaching task as achievable (Hoy et al., 2006). In this context, the academic optimism of the school brings to the forefront the belief that "school staff can effectively achieve the goals related to student learning through collaboration" (Cansoy & Parlar, 2018).

Academic Emphasis. Academic emphasis refers to teachers' behaviors that focus on student success, depending on their efficacy and trust beliefs (Hoy & Miskel, 2012). Hoy et al. (2006) defined academic emphasis as the

pressure for academic achievement and the degree to which the school is driven by the pursuit of academic excellence. [Goddard et al. \(2000a\)](#) explained it as the belief that academic success is important to administrators, teachers, staff, and students. According to [Hoy et al. \(2006\)](#), schools with an academic emphasis set high but achievable academic goals for students; the learning environment is orderly and serious; students are motivated to work hard, and students respect academic achievement. In this context, schools that emphasize academic success prepare and implement regular and serious learning environments. Teachers in these schools set high but achievable learning goals and expectations. Student learning and success are the primary focus of all group members, as well as the main idea of the school. Teaching time is protected and highly valued. Teachers believe that their students can learn and be successful, and in the same way, students believe that all teachers care about and emphasize academic success. Students who devalue or humiliate their academically successful peers are quickly warned ([Goddard et al., 2000a](#)).

Collective Efficacy. Collective efficacy refers to teachers' assessments of the school's teaching staff's ability to plan and implement actions that positively impact student achievement ([Goddard et al., 2004](#)). Teachers' perceptions that they can improve students' learning are based on Bandura's social cognitive theory and self-efficacy research ([Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999](#); [Reeves, 2010](#)). When teachers work together as a team, they can help students succeed ([Wu & Lin, 2018](#)). Collective efficacy gives teachers confidence that they can work effectively with students despite challenges, motivates them to achieve challenging goals and continues until teachers are successful ([Goddard et al., 2000b](#)).

In schools with a strong sense of collective efficacy, teachers serve as models for each other, sharing responsibility, committing to shared beliefs, and learning from each other ([Goddard et al., 2000a](#)). Teachers' perception that they control themselves and their colleagues influences their actions, which are evaluated by the group according to group norms. As a result, collective efficacy affects personal perceptions and group norms, which in turn affect actions ([Goddard et al., 2000a, b](#)). Teachers who have strong collective efficacy beliefs not only establish higher expectations but also invest more effort in attaining them and exhibit greater resilience when confronted with obstacles, as stated by [Tschannen-Moran and Hoy \(1998\)](#). Therefore, schools with high collective efficacy beliefs accept challenging goals and show strong organizational effort and perseverance to increase student success ([Goddard et al., 2000a](#)).

Trust in Students and Parents. Having trust in students and parents is crucial for improving learning outcomes. Teachers, parents, and students should work together cooperatively ([Hoy & Miskel, 2012](#)). This involves establishing open, sincere, and reliable relationships between school staff, parents, and students, with the goal of enhancing student learning ([Hoy et al., 2006](#); [Hoy & Tschannen Moran, 1999](#)).

Trust between teachers, parents, and students is a collective effort that is shared at the school level, similar to academic emphasis and collective efficacy ([Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2009](#)). In a trusting relationship, both parties should be vulnerable and trust that the other is competent, reliable, honest, and open ([Goddard et al., 2001](#); [Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999](#)).

When teachers trust their students and parents, they believe that parents can encourage high academic standards without fear of harming them. This emphasis on high academic standards strengthens teachers' trust in parents and students (Hoy & Miskel, 2012; Woolfolk Hoy et al., 2008). Strengthening teacher trust can have a positive impact on their commitment, making them more conscious and willing to participate in the learning process (Goddard et al., 2000a, b).

Teacher Academic Optimism

Academic optimism is a set of positive beliefs that teachers have about their ability to teach all students, build strong relationships with students and parents, and prioritize academic tasks (Beard et al., 2010; Kurz, 2006; Woolfolk Hoy et al., 2008). Teachers who possess academic optimism are engaged, committed, energetic, resilient, and conscientious, and they achieve these qualities not through pressure and punishment but through cooperation and building connections with their students (Woolfolk Hoy et al., 2008).

One important component of academic optimism is the teachers' perception of self-efficacy, which refers to their belief in their ability to influence their students' learning and achievement, even for those who struggle or lack motivation (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998; Woolfolk Hoy et al., 2008). When teachers have high self-efficacy perceptions, they set high expectations for their students, put in more effort, and prioritize academic goals (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001).

Another component of academic optimism is teachers' trust in their students and parents. Teachers who trust their students' openness, ability, and honesty are more likely to create a learning environment that facilitates academic success (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). This trust relationship includes feelings of benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness (Hoy & Miskel, 2012). When teachers trust students and parents and establish a relationship of trust, they are more likely to work in cooperation with them to overcome any problems that may arise during the teaching process (Woolfolk Hoy et al., 2008).

The third component of academic optimism is teachers' academic emphasis, which refers to the belief that their students can achieve academic success, and that the learning environment is orderly and serious (Goddard et al., 2000a). Teachers with high academic emphasis prepare challenging teaching activities for their students, force their students to participate in academic activities, provide effective classroom instruction, and prioritize academic goals (Woolfolk Hoy et al., 2008). The level of effort and success of teachers put into ensuring that their students participate in academic tasks indicates the level of academic emphasis they possess (Beard et al., 2010; Kurz, 2006).

In summary, academic optimism is an important construct for teachers, and it consists of three components: teachers' perception of self-efficacy, teachers' trust in their students and parents, and teachers' academic emphasis. By possessing academic optimism, teachers can create a positive learning environment that encourages academic success and maximizes learning time.

The School's Culture of Academic Optimism

Although teacher academic optimism is a personal characteristic, school academic optimism is an essential aspect of the school culture (Beard et al., 2010; Hong, 2016; Woolfolk Hoy et al., 2008). School academic optimism refers

to a school culture where teachers believe that they can make a difference, students can learn, and academic performance can be achieved (Hoy & Miskel, 2012). The academic emphasis, collective efficacy, and trust in parents and students that make up school academic optimism are in mutual interaction (Hoy et al., 2006; Hoy & Miskel, 2012). When teachers believe that they can teach their students successfully, trust their parents and students, and focus on student success at school, the resulting normative behavior environment shows their effectiveness, trust, academic emphasis, and ultimately academic optimism (Wu & Lin, 2018). Academic optimism is a culture with shared beliefs and norms that sees teachers as capable, students as willing, parents as supportive, and academic success as attainable (Hoy & Miskel, 2012). A school with high academic optimism is expected to have a positive normative culture that will increase teachers' academic optimism and trust in parents and students, and emphasize the higher academic achievement of students (Hong, 2016).

Optimism provides a third perspective on success, apart from talent and motivation. The concept of academic optimism offers possibilities for learning and change in schools. A pessimistic school environment can change, teachers can learn to be optimistic, and administrators and teachers can be empowered to be optimistic, instead of being trapped in socioeconomic factors that create a sense of hopelessness and cynicism (Hoy & Miskel, 2012). Schools with high academic optimism often form a culture of perfectionism, which includes teacher cooperation, a strong community, and high expectations for student success (Best, 2014). Creating a culture of academic optimism requires increasing common competence, building mutual trust, and strengthening academic emphasis (Hoy & Miskel, 2012). Teachers and students must experience academic success, see successful models in stress-free environments and believe in themselves and their abilities to achieve success (Hoy & Miskel, 2012).

Although research has been conducted on many issues related to academic optimism, more research is needed to better understand teacher academic optimism and develop academic optimism theory in schools (Hoy et al., 2006; Hoy & Miskel, 2012). Academic optimism is associated with student achievement, and research has been conducted on many issues related to academic optimism, such as student academic success, professional commitment, factors that contribute to school development, distributed leadership, organizational climate, teachers' academic optimism, social justice leadership, and bureaucratic structure (Ateş & Ünal, 2021; Bevel & Mitchell, 2012; Boonen et al., 2014; Straková et al., 2018; Kurz, 2006; Best, 2014; Cansoy & Parlar, 2018; Kılınç, 2013; Reeves, 2010; Feng & Chen, 2019; Özdemir & Kılınç, 2014). Therefore, determining the characteristics of schools that affect teachers' academic optimism can help us understand why academic optimism differs between schools, determine causal relationships between academic achievement and academic optimism, and find ways to improve teachers' academic optimism. It is also important to consider culture-specific factors that may affect teachers' academic optimism in different contexts, such as Turkey, to identify and eliminate problem areas in schools.

Aim of the Study

The study aims to identify the factors that influence academic optimism among teachers in secondary schools. To achieve this objective, we will explore the question: "What factors contribute to the development of academic optimism among secondary school teachers?"

Method

Research Model

The research was carried out in the phenomenology pattern, which is one of the qualitative research methods. This design was preferred because it revealed the factors affecting academic optimism in secondary schools according to the experiences of school principals and teachers.

Study Groups

The study participants were school principals and teachers working in secondary schools. Data were collected through focus group interviews held separately for each group. The maximum variation sampling method was used to determine the school principals and teacher groups based on criteria such as the number of students in the school, the socio-economic structure of the environment where the school is located, branch, gender, teaching, and managerial seniority. School principals and teacher groups both consisted of seven participants. Since no female school principal is working in secondary school, there is no female participant in the school principals group. The teacher group consists of five men and two women. While the research was planned that the participants would consist of three men and four women.

Participants in the study were identified using a coding system, where the letter "P" indicates the school principal and "T" indicates the teacher. The number following the letter indicates the sequence number in which the participant's personal and professional characteristics are presented in Table 1. The table includes information on the participant's gender, tenure at school, teaching experience (year), management seniority, socio-economic status of the school's environment, number of immigrant or refugee students in the school, and the average number of students in classes.

Table 1

Personal and Professional Characteristics of the Working Groups

Code	Occupation	Gender (F/M)	Working Time at School	Teaching Experience	Management Seniority	The Socio-economic Status of the School's Environment	Number of immigrant or refugee students in school	Average Number of Students in Classes
P1	Principal	M	3	22	19	High	63	46
P2	Principal	M	3	25	17	High	4	45
P3	Principal	M	2	29	25	High	—	35
P4	Principal	M	2	20	11	Low	50	25
P5	Principal	M	2	22	2	Medium	5	30
P6	Principal	M	3	21	12	Medium	14	32
P7	Principal	M	2	17	10	Low	3	11
T1	Teacher	M	3	5	2	High	63	46

T2	Teacher	F	1	8	—	Medium	7	35-40
T3	Teacher	M	4	8	—	Medium	14	32
T4	Teacher	F	7	24	—	High	—	45
T5	Teacher	M	3	10	—	Low	50	25
T6	Teacher	M	3	15	—	Medium	14	32
T7	Teacher	M	3	13	—	Medium	14	32

Data Collection

Before the focus group meetings, participants were provided with a three-page briefing note and interview questions explaining the concepts of optimism, academic optimism, self-efficacy, teachers' trust in parents and students, and teachers' belief in the importance of academics. This was performed 5 days before the interview to ensure that the participants were informed and adequately prepared. The second researcher acted as the moderator for the focus group discussions, and asked the same question to both groups. It was "What are the factors affecting the academic optimism of teachers in secondary schools?"

The interviews were recorded on video, with the first interview conducted with school principals. Although the meeting lasted for 110 min, 9 minutes of off-topic conversation were removed, resulting in 5164 words. The interview with teachers lasted for 148 min, with 43 minutes of off-topic talk removed, resulting in 5204 words.

Data Analysis

The analysis process involved both inductive and deductive approaches. Induction and deduction were used together to reach a series of facts and findings that were broadly compatible with generalizations in line with [Miles and Huberman's \(2015\)](#) suggestion. Deductive analysis was used to study a known phenomenon, and the dimensions of self-efficacy, academic emphasis, and trust in students and parents, which make up the academic optimism of teachers, were chosen as the main categories.

The second stage involved inductive analysis, which served to reveal the phenomenon holistically. The analysis process followed the stages of sorting, coding, categorizing, and defining. The video recordings were watched, and the sections related to the study were written down word for word. The first researcher watched the interview repeatedly, paying close attention to the gestures and facial expressions of the participants, to better understand the phenomenon. The data were coded by identifying meaningful units and preserving the integrity of the relationships between them. The first researcher categorized the coded data, and then both researchers reviewed and finalized the categories in multiple meetings. During these meetings, they decided to combine some categories while separating others in order to reach the final set of categories.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure the internal validity of the study, several strategies were used, such as the participation of multiple researchers, participant validation, and appropriate data collection. Both researchers participated in the focus group discussions, and the second researchers also acted as an expert and checked the consistency of the data during the analysis process. Participant validation was attempted by sending the transcript of the focus group meeting to the participants and asking for their opinions and suggestions. Only one participant responded, and their feedback was taken into account. It was also ensured that all ideas and suggestions of the participants were discussed in both focus group meetings, and the data reached the saturation point.

The first researcher had several biases due to his experience as a teacher and school principal, but both researchers tried to remain aware of these biases throughout the research process. To ensure external validity, the emotions, thoughts, and descriptions of the participants were presented richly and intensely, and examples were given without any abbreviations. The selection of participants from various schools and with different characteristics also increased external validity. Ethical precautions were taken by obtaining a Volunteer Consent Form from the participants and keeping their demographic information confidential.

To summarize, the study employed various strategies to ensure internal and external validity and avoid ethical problems. The biases of the first researcher were acknowledged and addressed, and participant validation was attempted. The presentation of the findings was also designed to increase external validity.

Results

The factors that affect teachers’ academic optimism in secondary schools were identified based on the themes of self-efficacy, academic emphasis, and trust in students and parents, which constitute teacher academic optimism. The following explanations provide a summary of the themes, and Table 2 provides a clear overview of the themes and sub-themes for easy reference.

Table 2

Factors Affecting Teachers’ Academic Optimism in Secondary Schools

Factors Related to Self-Efficacy	Factors Related to Academic Emphasis	Factors Related to Teacher’s Trust in Students and Parents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal Characteristics of the Teacher <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seniority • Gender • Classroom Management Experience • Success Experience • Private Life • Professional development • Physical Characteristics of the School • School Equipment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supportive Behavior • Fair Behavior • Recognition • Communication skills • Participatory Management • School Culture • Transition System from 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demographic Characteristics of Students <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of immigrant or refugee Students • Number of Inclusion Students • Students’ Health Problems • Grouping by academic achievement • Socio-Economic level of the Parent • Parental Intervention in Teacher's

	Primary Education to Secondary Education	Work
• Number of Students in the School	• Parents' Expectations from the School	• Confidence of Parents and Students in School and Teacher
• The School's Teaching Style	• Trust in School Administrators	
• Number of Students in Classes		
• Teacher Performance Evaluation System		

Factors Affecting Teachers' Self-Efficacy

Several factors have been identified as contributing to the academic optimism and self-efficacy of secondary school teachers. These include personal characteristics of the teacher, the school's organization and order, equipment, class and school size, teaching style, and the performance evaluation system. Understanding these factors is important for promoting teacher self-efficacy and improving the quality of education in secondary schools.

Personal Characteristics of the Teacher

Factors related to self-efficacy personal characteristics of the teacher, including seniority, gender, classroom management experience, success experience, private life, and professional development, were found to impact teachers' self-efficacy.

Seniority. The relationship between seniority and self-efficacy perception among teachers was explored, with two different viewpoints emerging. The first viewpoint posits an inverse relationship between seniority and self-efficacy, with teachers' perceptions of their own self-efficacy decreasing as their seniority increases. Participants who hold this view believe that senior teachers may struggle to keep up with changes in technology, decreasing their self-efficacy perception and potential burnout. Another argument made from this perspective is that teaching is a profession better suited to younger people.

"...They are closed to change because their equipment is insufficient in terms of technology." P5

"As people get older, their energy decreases. ... I do not find it appropriate to teach until senior age because even visually, the student likes the young teacher. For example, when I was younger, I wanted to have a hum in the classroom and that boosted my motivation, ... now I don't like noise at all and I always tell kids to be quiet, and I don't like what I'm doing." T4

The second viewpoint challenges this inverse relationship and suggests that self-efficacy perception can be low among both senior and junior teachers. Some participants noted that senior teachers may actually work harder and be more dedicated to their profession than younger teachers. The socio-economic status of the school and its students may play a role in the relationship between seniority and self-efficacy perception.

"I have many teachers working their 35th year at our school. I never want them to go. They work harder than younger teachers. The teacher, who has just completed his fourth year, has feelings of burnout." P3

These viewpoints suggest that the relationship between seniority and self-efficacy perception is complex and multifaceted. Factors such as technology proficiency, energy levels, student demographics, and personal motivation may all contribute to the self-efficacy perception of teachers.

Gender. The principal and teacher groups had differing opinions on whether gender affects teacher self-efficacy. All participating principals agreed that female teachers exhibited high levels of academic optimism due to their dedication and competitiveness.

"When I think about the teachers at my school, I see that female teachers are more optimistic. Women see their students as their own children and try harder," said one principal (P2). Another principal (P5) remarked that *"female teachers compare themselves more with other teachers and attach great importance to this situation. This increases their motivation and compels them to compete and work harder."*

In the teacher group, some participants suggested that men has higher self-efficacy due to their leadership characteristics and having less social roles that women do.

"I ... think that men have a more academic optimism than women in secondary schools due to the leadership characteristics of men and the high social roles of women," said one teacher (T5).

Although the discussions centered around academic optimism rather than self-efficacy directly, the consensus was that competition and the need for greater effort play a role in both concepts.

Classroom Management Experience. During the discussions in the teachers' group regarding the relationship between teachers' academic optimism and gender, it was mentioned that female teachers in secondary schools, particularly in the higher grades, have low self-efficacy perceptions. One reason cited for this was the difference in student behavior toward female teachers, and the perception that female teachers lack sufficient classroom discipline skills. However, it was observed that classroom management skills were just as relevant as gender in determining a teacher's self-efficacy perception. Teachers who excel in classroom management tend to have a positive perception of their self-efficacy, whereas those who struggle with it tend to have a negative perception.

"When considering my current school, I recognize that many female teachers are more successful and competent in their classes than male teachers. I believe that it is a matter of personality, and I do not think it is appropriate to separate teachers based on their gender." T2

The experience of Success. Teachers' experiences of success or failure in their past practices affect their self-efficacy perceptions.

For instance, one teacher (T3) shared his experience of working in a school with illiterate students, where they could help three of their 6th-grade students graduate from high school. This experience increased their self-efficacy perception and provided a sense of accomplishment.

On the other hand, another teacher (T6) shared his experience of trying to help a student who didn't bring a notebook and pen, but eventually stopped trying after feeling that his couldn't do anything more. This experience decreased their self-efficacy perception.

These expressions demonstrate that success or failure, particularly in challenging circumstances, can significantly impact a teacher's self-efficacy perception and motivate or discourage them from continuing their efforts.

Private Life. According to the participants, the family structure and socioeconomic status of teachers impact their self-efficacy perceptions.

One teacher (T3) shared that economic problems due to credit card debts had a negative effect on their psychology, leading to unprofessional behavior toward students. Another teacher (T6) highlighted the importance of having a peaceful family life and good relationships with family members and neighbors, which can enable teachers

to focus better on their work. Both quotes demonstrate that income and family life can affect teachers' self-efficacy beliefs.

Professional development. The participants expressed a general consensus that professional development has a positive impact on teachers' self-efficacy. One participant (T6) emphasized the importance of continuing education and staying up-to-date with the latest information to keep pace with the rapidly evolving education system. They noted that failure to do so can lead to a sense of disconnection from the profession.

Physical characteristics of the school

The physical characteristics of the school can impact teachers' self-efficacy, as highlighted by the following statements related to the organization and orderliness of the school and the cleanliness of the physical environment:

"first, I believe that the physical environment of a school should be good. If the physical environment is good, students and teachers come to school happily." T2

"Physical conditions are also critical. No one works motivated in a run-down school." P1

School equipment

School facilities and equipment play a significant role in shaping teachers' academic optimism and self-efficacy. According to the participants, having access to workshops, laboratories, and gyms in schools makes lessons more effective and efficient.

For instance, a technology and design teacher (T2) stated the importance of having a workshop in school to teach subjects more efficiently. They explained that if they had access to a workshop environment, students would be more enthusiastic and willing to attend lessons. Similarly, the use of modern course tools and materials such as smart boards and internet connections has a positive impact on teachers' self-efficacy beliefs. T5, an English teacher, shared how the smart board applications carried out in schools under the FATİH Project impressed them and made feel more capable, successful, and satisfied in their job.

The number of students in the classes

The size of a class is a significant factor affecting self-efficacy. According to the participants' opinions on this matter, a class size of more than 30-35 students creates a sense of anxiety among teachers, making it difficult to maintain classroom control, track students' progress, and allocate sufficient time to each student. Consequently, teachers' motivation and academic optimism levels decrease when the number of students increases beyond a certain point.

On the other hand, when the number of students is very low, teachers may feel bored and ineffective, especially when students lack interest in the lesson. For instance, a teacher in a village school expressed dissatisfaction with the situation where the number of students was below 10, stating that teaching such classes was tedious. However, it is worth noting that the opinions of teachers in the study centers differ from this view. The experience of participant T3, who taught in a special education course, indicated that the small class size (6-7 students) made communication with students easier and improved academic success. Nevertheless, it is challenging to determine whether the benefits of a small class size apply to public schools as the preparation of students for exams is the primary goal of study centers.

In summary, a class size that is too large or too small can negatively affect self-efficacy. Therefore, the number of students in a class should be appropriate to maintain the teacher's academic optimism and motivation levels.

The number of students in the school

According to the participants, the ideal number of students in a school should be between 300 and 850. One school principal shared his experience, stating that he had control over the school when the number of students was around 800-850, but he had trouble managing the school with 1200 students.

"Last year, there were around 800-850 students at our school, I thought I controlled them all and dominated the field. This year, the number of our students is 1200, and I do not have the same sense of control" P5

In larger schools with more students, maintaining cleanliness, discipline, security, and the smooth running of education takes precedence over academic success. The principal (P2) of a crowded school emphasized this point, stating that their school had 2550 students and they prioritize these issues before academic success.

For adequate participation in competitions and social activities at schools, a minimum of 300 students is expected. One participant (P7) suggested that there should be at least three branches, meaning at least 300 students per grade level, to ensure sufficient participation in various sports clubs and competitions.

The School's Teaching Style

Due to the lack of schools in Turkey, a group of students from morning to noon and a group of students from noon to evening are allowed to serve as two separate schools. This practice is called a dual education system. Teaching in a dual education system can have a negative impact on the academic optimism of teachers, as they must arrive early and leave late from school. This results in many teachers not wanting to teach the first and last lessons of the day.

As explained by participant P4, dual education often requires students to wake up very early in the morning and travel long distances to get to school. As a result, they may struggle to focus during the first few lessons of the day, which can also affect the motivation and enthusiasm of their teachers.

According to participant P5, many teachers and students alike tend to prefer avoiding lessons during the first and last few hours of the day in a dual education system. This suggests that the teaching style and scheduling of dual education need to be revised to better support the needs and well-being of teachers and students alike.

Teacher Performance Evaluation System

Both teachers and school principals have reported that implementing a performance evaluation system with clear results has a positive impact on teachers' academic optimism.

"Having a performance evaluation system increases teachers' academic optimism levels. Some teachers are highly effective and try to excel in their jobs, whereas others may be average. Teachers are aware of their own performance, but when evaluations are conducted, they are prompted to reflect on their work and strive to become more successful. The evaluation system needs to produce clear results," said one school principal (P1).

T1, a teacher who considers himself successful and hardworking, stated: *"I believe that even the performance ratings given by our principal for the first time last year have been effective. At our school, it has had a significant impact. My principal gave me a grade of 100, which assured me that I am on the right track. Teachers need feedback to feel academically optimistic."*

Factors Related to Academic Emphasis

Factors related to academic emphasis are embedded within the themes of management practices, school culture, the transition system from basic education to secondary education, parents' expectations from school, and trust in school administrators. In addition, five sub-themes have been identified under the main theme of factors related to management practices.

Management applications

The factors related to management practices are encompassed by the following sub-themes: supportive behavior, fair treatment, recognition, communication skills, and participatory management.

Supportive Behavior. School principals can increase the academic emphasis of teachers by emphasizing and supporting their activities and events. As teacher (T2) stated, *"When I request support from the principal and they stand behind me, I believe that success will follow."*

Fair Behavior. Fairness in the behavior of principals is an important factor that can affect the academic emphasis of teachers. When principals behave fairly, it can increase the academic emphasis of teachers, while unfair behavior can cause discomfort among teachers and distract them from their work.

"Teachers must have confidence in the fairness of school administration to act accordingly." P5

"I believe that the source of unrest among teachers is the lack of fairness in the principal's behavior. When the principal distributes teaching schedules and shift days fairly among teachers, it contributes to a peaceful and harmonious school environment." P6

Recognition. Recognition and appreciation of teachers' successful work by school management, parents, students, or their colleagues can increase their academic emphasis. T3 mentioned that even the school principal's suggestion of their name for this research was an honor.

"When you receive praise or hear positive feedback, it can be motivating. When students, parents, school administrators, and their colleagues all have something positive to say about your work, it can bring a sense of happiness and inspire you to work even harder." T6

Communication skills. The communication skills of the principal can impact the academic emphasis of teachers. When the principal communicates with teachers in a way that shows care and respect, it can increase the teacher's academic emphasis. In addition, when teachers feel at ease when going to the classroom, it can further enhance their academic emphasis.

"The effective communication skills of the school principal can play a significant role in boosting the academic emphasis of teachers. By showing care and respect toward teachers in their communication, the principal can motivate them to work harder. For instance, greeting teachers standing up and bidding farewell standing up may seem like small gestures, but they can make teachers feel important and valuable, and increase their respect and love for the principal. As a result, teachers leave the principal's office feeling motivated and ready to teach their students." P6

Participatory Management. The academic emphasis of teachers is increased when the school principal adopts a participatory management approach and involves the teachers in decision-making. According to P1, for teachers to feel that the school is their own, teamwork is essential. Rather than leading the school with a team of a few individuals, the principal should observe and identify the interests and talents of each teacher and allow them to

contribute to those areas. This way, teachers can express themselves better and feel more motivated to contribute to the school.

P6 also emphasized the importance of involving teachers in decision-making, as it improves their academic optimism. When teachers feel that their opinions and suggestions are considered, they are more likely to stand behind their decisions and work harder toward achieving academic goals.

However, participants also mentioned that the involvement of the Ministry of National Education in decision-making is equally important in increasing academic emphasis. Many participants expressed their dissatisfaction with the Ministry of National Education's lack of consideration of teacher suggestions, which negatively affected their optimism toward academic work. As P2 stated, when teachers realize that their suggestions are not taken into account, they may lose motivation and not want to contribute.

School Culture

The school's optimistic culture, which emphasizes academic success, increases the optimism and academic emphasis of the teachers. When the school culture focuses on strong achievement, teachers feel compelled to keep up with it, thereby increasing their academic emphasis.

"A school with a reputation for academic excellence has a positive effect on the academic optimism of teachers, especially those who are new to the school. New teachers immerse themselves in the school's culture, express themselves and adapt to the school's culture. The reputation and culture of the school greatly impact a teacher's motivation." P3

Transition System from Primary Education to Secondary Education

During the 2016-2017 academic year, the transition to secondary education in Turkey was determined by central exams known as TEOG, which were held in both semesters of the final year. The exam consisted of 20 questions from six courses. Currently, a similar exam called LGS, is held once a year and is used for transition to secondary education, but many students still take the exam. In both cases, students, parents, and school administrators tend to place more emphasis on the courses that are included in the exam, neglecting the courses for which no questions are asked. This practice reduces the academic emphasis of the teachers of those courses, causing demotivation and a decline in morale.

"For example, students tend to ignore assignments in courses such as technology design, where no questions are asked in the exam, and parents may even pressure teachers to give students undeserved grades in other courses. Teachers become demotivated when they must compromise their standards to accommodate external pressures. This can lead to students openly questioning the relevance of certain courses, asking inquiries such as, "Why do you care so much about this lesson, teacher?" These negative effects reduce the academic emphasis of teachers and can result in a decline in overall academic success." P6

Parents' Expectations from the School.

The expectations that parents have from the school can influence teachers' academic emphasis. Teachers tend to increase their academic emphasis when parents have high expectations, while low expectations may lead to a decrease in academic emphasis.

"As a teacher, I have noticed that the incoming students' classes in our secondary school are influenced by the parents' socioeconomic backgrounds. When I enter a classroom, I can sense the difference in parents' expectations. Some parents have high expectations, while others believe their child will only work in the industry and do not expect much. These varying levels of parental expectations inevitably affect my motivation and emphasis as a teacher." T6

Trust in School Principals'

According to the participants' opinions, teachers' trust in the school principal has a significant impact on their academic optimism and emphasis. When teachers trust their principal, they tend to be more courageous, whereas a lack of trust may lead to caution.

Trusting the school principal means having confidence in their ability to be fair, act as a mediator with parents, support teachers, possess educational expertise, and protect their interests.

"The level of trust in the school principal has the greatest impact on academic optimism. Once, I had to discipline a student, and the parent complained about me to the principal. My principal stood behind me, and it made me delighted, increased my confidence in the principal, and my determination to work. Trusting the principal motivates teachers to love their school and job, and they make an effort to do whatever the principal asks of them. In times of classroom management, student or parent problems, the principal's office is the last resort. Therefore, we should trust the principal academically and expect them to find solutions to problems that we cannot solve. If they cannot solve these problems, they cannot effectively lead the school." - T6

Factors Related to Teacher's Trust in Students and Parents

The factors influencing a teacher's trust in students and parents can be categorized into various themes such as the demographic characteristics of students, the socio-economic level of parents, parental intervention in teacher affairs, and the trust that parents and students have in both the school and teacher.

Demographic Characteristics of Students

The sub-theme of the demographic characteristics of students, which influences teachers' trust in students and parents, includes factors such as the number of immigrant or refugee students, the number of students with disabilities, students' health problems, and the quality of classroom practices.

The number of immigrant or refugee Students. According to the participants, the presence of immigrant or refugee students in a teacher's class and an increase in their number have a negative impact on the teacher's academic optimism.

"Having immigrant or refugee students in class definitely affects academic optimism. The more students there are, the more difficulties arise. These students have different levels of knowledge and need more attention, and they can cause problems in class management." P3

"The increase in the number of immigrant or refugee students in a class decreases academic optimism. Teachers face difficulties in communicating and reaching these students. Teachers' concerns about how to adapt to these students also increase." P4

The Number of Inclusive Students. The participants believe that an increase in the number of inclusive students in a class reduces the teacher's academic optimism and confidence in the students. The teacher may feel inadequate in meeting the needs of these students and may give up on them.

"The high number of inclusive students in a class also reduces teachers' academic optimism. For example, if we must teach 3-4 inclusive students in some classes, teachers immediately express their concerns and say that it is difficult to deal with these students. These students have special educational needs, and teachers may feel that they are not equipped to handle them. Teachers make various attempts to support these students, but if these attempts fail, the teacher's confidence may decrease." P1

Health Problems of Students. The health problems of students can also affect the teacher's trust in the student. Teachers may have lower expectations for such students and may be less optimistic about their academic success.

"When I have information about students who have family or health problems, I am more tolerant towards this student. ... I have lower expectations for these students and less academic optimism about their potential to succeed." T7

Grouping Practices According to Academic Achievement. Grouping by academic achievement, which is still practiced in some schools in Turkey despite the ban by the Ministry of National Education, affects teachers' trust in students. Teachers have less trust in students who are placed in low-achieving classes. This lack of trust reaches such serious levels that teachers may not even want to teach in these classes.

"Grouping Practices According to Academic Achievement causes us to lose both students and teachers. Students may give up and not want to work, accepting their perceived failure. Teachers may not make any effort, thinking there is no expectation of success from this class anyway." P5

"Teachers prefer to teach classes with higher achieving students, and avoid classes with lower achieving students." P2

Socio-Economic Background of the Parent

According to the participants, the socio-economic status of parents is an important factor that influences teachers' trust in parents. As the socio-economic status of parents increases, teachers' trust in them also increases. Conversely, teachers may have lower levels of trust in parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

"Parents with a higher level of education have higher expectations for their children's education and success, and they expect the school to support them in achieving these goals. On the other hand, parents with lower levels of education may not place the same emphasis on education and this can affect the teacher's level of effort and investment in the student. If the parent has a high level of education, we tend to think that this student can succeed, and we may trust the parent and student more and work a little harder to support them. If the education level of the parent is low, and there is no expectation for the student to succeed, the teacher may not invest as much effort either." T3

"There is a class in our school from a low socio-economic neighborhood. No teacher wants to teach this class, and the morale and motivation of the teacher who teaches in that class decreases." T7

Parental Intervention in Teacher's Work

Parents who interfere with teachers' work, try involving themselves in everything and complain to higher authorities when they are dissatisfied, undermine teachers' trust in them regardless of their socio-economic background.

"Today's challenge is the pressure parents put on teachers or the pressure from the institutions they report to. Reducing these pressures is a key factor in boosting teachers' success and academic optimism. Even if our teacher just raises their voice a little, I can feel their anxiety. I wonder if. . .they fear being reported." P6

Confidence of Parents and Students in School and Teacher

Parents and students notice the work of teachers, which can increase their trust in both the teacher and school. *"For example, I asked the children what the secret to their success was. They said that since our teachers are well-trained academically, it reflects positively on us and allows us to receive a good education, making our school successful overall. This means that they find their teachers successful in general, which increases both the teachers' and students' motivation."* T4

"To increase parents' trust in education, first, a dedicated academic approach is necessary. The trust of parents in the school is formed through the academic success of their children." T1

Discussion, Conclusions & Suggestions

In this study, it was examined which factors affect the academic optimism of secondary school teachers. These factors were identified as self-efficacy, academic emphasis, and trust in students and parents. The factors related to self-efficacy were identified as the teacher's personal characteristics, school organization and structure, school equipment, class and school size, teaching style, and performance evaluation system. Personal characteristics of the teacher were further defined as seniority, gender, classroom management experience, success experience, private life, and professional development.

The personal characteristics of teachers that affect their academic optimism are related to their self-efficacy perceptions. For various reasons, the self-efficacy perceptions of senior teachers who have experienced failure tend to decrease, while those of teachers who have experienced success tend to increase. Consequently, experience with success moderates the relationship between teachers' seniority and their self-efficacy perceptions. Almost all the participants in the study emphasized the importance of academic optimism with respect to their gender, and this emphasis appears to be related to their achievement experiences. The analyses indicate that teachers' perceptions of their self-efficacy are influenced more by their experience of success or failure in classroom management than by their gender. This finding is consistent with previous studies, such as [Ergen \(2016\)](#).

The school should be clean and orderly, the workshop, laboratory, and gym, etc. should be present in the school. It has been determined that the fact that there are departments, that the course materials and equipment are complete, that there are as many students as they should be in the classrooms, that the number of students in the school is not too few or more (between 300 and 850), that there is normal education in the school increases the perception of self-efficacy of the teachers. These findings also support the results of previous studies ([Çoban, 2010](#), [Tschannen-Moran](#)

& Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). The reason for the aforementioned school characteristics increasing the teacher's self-efficacy perception is the successful experience of the teacher. The listed school characteristics are indispensable for a teacher to be successful at school. When these features are provided, the prerequisite conditions are met for the teacher to be successful. Otherwise, it is difficult for the teacher to experience success and have a high self-efficacy perception based on this experience.

Two factors related to teacher self-efficacy are the teacher performance evaluation system and professional development opportunities. The analysis results indicate that a performance evaluation system can provide teachers with valuable feedback, promote professional growth, and boost motivation by offering a sense of accomplishment. Mireles-Rios and Becchio (2018) suggest that a successful performance, particularly during a formal observation, can enhance a teacher's perception of self-efficacy, and the feedback provided after the observation can offer verbal encouragement. On the other hand, evaluating a performance as a failure may negatively impact an individual's perception of self-efficacy for the task. However, Mireles-Rios and Becchio (2018) found that acknowledging teachers' strengths in addition to their weaknesses had a positive impact on teachers' self-efficacy perceptions. Their study also revealed that combining feedback in areas of weakness with positive expectations can improve teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy. These findings align with Ebmeier's (2003) assertion that teacher supervision can positively influence self-efficacy when administrators provide coaching, appreciation, and opportunities for dialog with teachers. Thus, contrary to Woolfolk Hoy and Spero's (2005) determination that teacher self-efficacy is primarily formed during the initial years of teaching and remains relatively stable after that, supervision and feedback can have a positive effect on a teacher's perception of self-efficacy and change over time. For feedback to be beneficial for developing teacher self-efficacy, administrators should prioritize the supervision process and provide clear feedback (Mireles-Rios & Becchio, 2018). A teacher who undergoes professional development with feedback is more likely to experience success and have an increased perception of self-efficacy. As a result, the professional development of teachers should be emphasized, particularly at the beginning of their careers. However, this does not mean that experienced teachers do not require professional development. Continuous support for a teacher's professional development in their area of expertise is crucial.

Factors that affect teachers' academic optimism in secondary schools include management practices, school culture, the transition system from basic education to secondary education, parents' expectations of the school, and trust in the school administrator. In terms of management practices, school principals need to support and value the work of teachers, treat them with respect and adopt a participatory management approach. This is consistent with the findings of Woolfolk Hoy et al. (2008), which suggest that variables related to the principal can significantly impact teachers' academic optimism. Therefore, it is crucial for school administrators to implement effective policies and procedures that align with teachers' optimistic attitudes toward their students' academic success.

The results of this study suggest that fostering an optimistic school culture that emphasizes academic achievement can boost teachers' academic optimism and increase academic emphasis. This finding aligns with the ideas of Hoy and Miskel (2012), who argue that shaping the school culture to prioritize academic standards can promote academic success. To achieve this, school principals should prioritize academic performance by setting high

standards, using appropriate assessments, and establishing clear and high expectations for all students. Additionally, the study findings indicate that in order for teachers to trust their principals, principals must be fair, act as a mediator between parents and teachers, support teachers, possess expertise in education and protect teachers' interests. These expectations are in line with prior research that highlights the importance of principals' management practices and the school culture they create in enhancing teachers' academic optimism (Tschannen-Moran, 2009; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015; Woolfolk Hoy et al., 2008). Therefore, it can be concluded that self-confidence is a prerequisite for school principals' management practices and the creation of a positive school culture that can enhance teachers' academic optimism.

In Turkey, a system of centralized exams has been in place for many years, creating an intense competition among students during the transition from primary to secondary education. The courses tested in the exam (Turkish, mathematics, science, history of revolution, foreign language, and religious culture) are given more importance by students, parents, and school administrators, and this emphasis on success is reflected in the academic optimism of teachers for these courses. However, for courses not tested in the exam, there is no academic pressure, resulting in reduced academic optimism for those teachers. For instance, music teachers may struggle to engage students who are preparing for the exam (Umuzdaş & Umuzdaş, 2015). Moreover, the expectations of parents for academic success and high exam performance from their children also affect the academic emphasis of teachers. As parental expectations for school performance increase, so does the academic emphasis of the teacher, and vice versa. These findings suggest that school principals are not the sole determinants of academic emphasis in a school, but rather the performance expectations of students and parents for centralized exams also have a significant effect on the academic emphasis and performance of the school and its teachers.

The research findings indicate that teachers' academic optimism is related to the demographic characteristics of students, the socio-economic status of parents, parental involvement in teachers' work, and trust in the school and teacher by parents and students. Teachers' trust in students decreases when teaching immigrant or refugee students. The number of inclusion students, those with health problems, and grouping practices according to academic achievement also reduced teacher trust. The socio-economic status of parents is a determinant of teacher trust in parents. Teachers are less likely to want to teach in classrooms with low socio-economic status parents. Parental intervention in teacher practices and complaints when their wishes are not met also reduce teacher trust. Teacher work recognized by parents and students increases teacher confidence. Grouping practices according to academic achievement where unsuccessful students are grouped together also lead to more failure. Teachers' distrust of socio-economically disadvantaged families is consistent with previous research results (Kurz, 2006; Woolfolk Hoy & Kurz, 2008). Ultimately, teacher trust in students and parents is based on experience with success.

Since trust is mutual, when teachers trust students and parents, and students and parents trust their schools, this mutual trust improves outcomes and prevents failure to a large extent (Kurz, 2006; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998). Therefore, the finding obtained in this study that parents' and students' trust in the school and teachers affects teachers' trust in students and parents is also in line with expectations. Teachers cannot be expected to trust students

and parents who do not trust themselves, do not cooperate, and complain. Additionally, it is clear that parents and students trust the school and teacher or not is ultimately related to the teacher's successful experience.

Based on all of these evaluations, it can be concluded that the main factor that determines a teacher's academic optimism is their professional success or failure experience. Therefore, this study supports the conceptual framework that suggests that teacher academic optimism consists of the teacher's sense of self-efficacy, academic emphasis, and trust in their students and parents (Hoy et al., 2006; Beard et al., 2010; Woolfolk Hoy et al., 2008).

This research differs from previous studies in a sense that it reveals the connection between the private life of a teacher and their sense of self-efficacy, and ultimately, their academic optimism. According to the findings, a teacher's family structure and socioeconomic status can influence their perception of self-efficacy. Teachers who do not face financial difficulties and have a happy family life in a peaceful city are more likely to have a higher perception of self-efficacy. This finding highlights the interdependence between work and family life, where events in one domain can impact the other. A teacher who experiences unrest in their family or financial difficulties may find it challenging to focus on their students and school, allocate time and make the effort to be successful. Consequently, a teacher's family structure and socio-economic status have a high likelihood of influencing their perception of self-efficacy.

Based on the findings, several recommendations can be made to improve teachers' academic optimism. The primary recommendation is to take measures to increase teachers' self-efficacy perceptions, which can be achieved by enabling teachers to experience success. According to the research, the following steps can be taken to facilitate this experience: (1) ensuring that teachers are fairly compensated; (2) providing opportunities for professional development and offering constructive feedback; (3) transforming the physical environment and materials in schools and ensuring that class sizes are conducive to success with the help of teachers; (4) selecting and training school administrators who implement fair, supportive, and participatory management practices; and (5) supporting vulnerable students and their parents to create an environment in which they can succeed at school.

Ethic

We confirm that the research was conducted in compliance with the ethical standards set by the institutional and/or national research committee, as well as the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its subsequent amendments or equivalent ethical standards. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants who were included in the study.

Author Contributions

This study was produced from the master thesis prepared by the first author under the supervision of the second author.

Conflicts of Interest

There is no conflicts of interest in the research

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