

Examining the Relationship Between English Teacher Candidates' Burnout Levels and Academic Achievement

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Özet

Tükenmişlik, son zamanlarda eğitimciler arasında sıkça atıfta bulunulan bir kavram haline gelmiştir. Dünya Sağlık Örgütü, tükenmişliği başarıyla yönetilemeyen kronik rahatsızlıkların stresinden kaynaklanan bir sendrom olarak sınıflandırmaktadır. Yapısal olarak tekrarlanabilen çeşitli temalar, tükenmişliğin seçilebilir bir özellik olduğunu öne sürmektedir (Maslach ve diğ., 2001). Tükenmişlik üzerine yapılan yirmi yıllık bir analiz, kavramın üç temel boyutu olabileceğini göstermektedir: duygusal tükenme, duyarsızlaşma ve azalmış kişisel başarı hissi (Maslach ve Leiter, 2005). Tükenmişlik; çeşitli bireysel, idari ve yönetsel parametrelerle ilişkilidir; ancak İngilizce öğretmeni adaylarında tükenmişlik ve akademik başarı arasındaki ilişkiye odaklanan araştırmalar sınırlıdır. Bu nedenle, İngilizce öğretmeni adaylarının tükenmişlik düzeylerini değerlendiren ve bunları akademik başarılarıyla ilişkilendiren bu çalışma, 64 öğretmen adayını kapsamakta ve Kim ve diğ.(2020) tarafından hazırlanan ölçekleri kullanmaktadır. Bulgular, tükenmişlik düzeylerinin genel olarak orta seviyede olduğunu ve başarı ile tükenmişlik arasında bir ilişki bulunduğunu göstermektedir. Katılımcılar zihinsel yorgunluk ve tükenmişlik hislerini ifade etseler de, yaşananların değersiz veya anlamsız olduğu algısını taşımamaktadırlar. Bu durum, öğretmen adaylarının mesleğe yönelik idealist bakış açılarının halen devam ettiğini ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tükenmişlik, başarı, öğretmen adayları, üniversite.

Abstract

Burnout has recently become a frequently cited term among educators. The World Health Organization classifies burnout as a syndrome resulting from the stress of chronic illnesses that cannot be successfully managed. Various themes, which can be replicated structurally, suggest that burnout is a selectable trait (Maslach et al., 2001). A two-decade analysis of burnout suggests that it may have three primary dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment (Maslach & Leiter, 2005). Burnout is related to various individual, administrative, and managerial parameters, and limited research has focused on the relationship between burnout and academic achievement among English teacher candidates. Therefore, this study, which assessed burnout levels among English teacher candidates and combined them with their academic achievement, involved 64 teacher candidates and provided classrooms prepared by Kim et al (2020). Findings indicate that burnout levels are generally moderate and that there is a relationship between achievement and burnout. Although participants expressed feelings of mental fatigue and burnout, they did not share the perception that the events were worthless or meaningless. This suggests that prospective teachers' idealistic perspectives on the profession still persist.

Keywords: Burnout, achievement, pre-service teachers, university

Introduction

The term *burnout* began to be used in the 1970s US to describe people's relationship with their work and the difficulties that arise when this relationship breaks down (Maslach et al., 2001). Freudenberger (1974), a psychiatrist, observed that volunteers at the clinic where he worked were emotionally exhausted and had lost their motivation and commitment, and he used the term *burnout* to describe this situation (Maslach and Schaufeli, 1993). At the time Freudenberger used it, *burnout* was a term used to describe the effects of chronic drug use (Schaufeli, 2017). During the same period, Maslach, who was working at the University of California, conducted an interview study as part of her doctoral program on how people coped with the challenges they faced (1976). A lawyer with

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whom she discussed her findings told Maslach that they referred to this as *burnout* among themselves (Klauer, 2018). After Maslach and her colleagues adopted this term, the study participants also recognized it, and thus *burnout* entered the public lexicon as a new term (Maslach and Schaufeli, 1993). Today, burnout is conceptualized as a syndrome resulting from chronic workplace stress that is not managed effectively (WHO, 2019).

Various themes observed in early studies have suggested that burnout has certain identifiable characteristics (Maslach et al., 2001). As a result of twenty years of research, three fundamental dimensions of burnout have been identified: *Emotional Exhaustion*, *Depersonalization*, and *Reduced Sense of Personal Accomplishment* (Maslach & Leiter, 2005). Maslach (1981) defined the first dimension, *Emotional Exhaustion*, as the impairment of an individual's ability to be selfless toward their work or the people they serve as a result of the depletion of their emotional resources. Regarding the second dimension, *Depersonalization*, Maslach (2001) stated that it stems from the individual's attempt to protect themselves from emotional stress by creating an emotional distance from their work or the people they serve and reducing their own compassion. Although this distance is established with the idea that emotions may interfere with work, it is said that excessive distance may cause the individual to approach the person they are serving with an indifferent or negative attitude. For the third dimension, *Reduced Sense of Personal Accomplishment*, Maslach (1997) has linked it to the individual's negative evaluation of themselves in relation to their work or the person they are serving, and has also noted that the individual may be unhappy with themselves and dissatisfied with their achievements at work.

Doctors, nurses, police officers, social workers, and teachers have seen their authority diminish over time and have raised concerns about their reputation (Schaufeli, 2017). The fact that the individuals they serve have higher expectations from them has created a gap between the efforts expended by professionals and the acceptance and gratitude they receive. It is well known that this lack of reciprocity causes burnout in individuals (Schaufeli, 2017). Maslach's (2003) initial studies focused on individuals working in the human services field, and the *Maslach Burnout Inventory* (MBI-HSS) was primarily developed for this field. However, over time, scales were developed for education (1986), for use in all fields (1996), and for students (Maslach, 2003). When the Educator Form was published (1986), the only difference from the main form (MBI-HSS) was the replacement of the word 'recipient' with 'student' (Maslach 1996). Accordingly, it can be said that the foundation for early studies in the field of education was laid by Iwanicki & Schwab (1981), who used the main form with these modifications.

Burn out

Teaching involves working closely with the individuals (students), and burnout has been shown to affect teachers' performance toward their students and colleagues (Maslach, 1999). The first studies on teachers using the Maslach Burnout Inventory were doctoral theses by Anderson (1980) and Schwab (1981). However, the first peer-reviewed article to appear was the 1981 study by Iwanicki & Schwab. Some of the first studies conducted in the field of education focused primarily on testing the validity and reliability of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Gold, 1984; Iwanicki & Schwab, 1981). However, not all of the studies conducted focused on validity and reliability testing. Studies examining the relationships between teachers' burnout and their backgrounds, personal characteristics, and institutional factors have also been conducted (Schwab, 1983).

The causes of burnout among teachers are generally divided into three groups: personal (personality and background characteristics), social (the role of students, colleagues, parents, and the community), and administrative (the role of the school environment/employer) (Agyapon et al, 2022; Chernis, 1980; Pierce & Molloy, 1990). Many studies on teachers and burnout also show findings in these areas. For example, Iwanicki and Schwab (1982a) found in their study of 469 American teachers that certain personal and background characteristics were related to teachers' levels of burnout (Schwab, 1983). When teachers were ranked according to the number of years they had worked, whether they worked in urban or rural areas, their marital status, and their educational degrees, no difference was found in their burnout levels. However, when they were ranked according to their gender, their students' class, and their age, a difference was observed. It was noted that younger teachers had stronger feelings of emotional exhaustion and fatigue. Gender and students' levels were also associated with teachers' depersonalization. It was observed that male teachers had a more negative attitude toward their students than female teachers. Additionally, from an administrative perspective, high school and middle school teachers were found to have a more negative attitude toward their students than elementary school teachers. It was also noted that elementary school teachers had a higher sense of personal achievement.

Iwanicki and Schwab (1982b), in their study, distributed Lizzo, House, and Lirtzman's (1970) Role Questionnaire to teachers in addition to the Maslach Burnout Inventory. Role conflict (teachers facing incompatible demands) and role ambiguity (teachers lacking sufficient information or equipment; not clearly knowing their responsibilities and what is expected of them) were found to have a significant effect on teachers in terms of depersonalization and emotional exhaustion. The dimensions of role conflict and role ambiguity are primarily different, as role conflict has a significant impact on emotional exhaustion and depersonalization dimensions, while role ambiguity has a lesser impact on emotional exhaustion and depersonalization dimensions but a greater impact

on the sense of personal accomplishment dimension. When role conflict and role ambiguity are considered together, the greatest difference is observed in the emotional exhaustion dimension, followed by the depersonalization dimension, and the least difference is observed in the sense of personal accomplishment dimension.

Similar results were observed in Farber's (1984a) study, which involved 365 teachers and distributed the Teacher Attitude Survey (TAS, a modified MBI-based scale). When teachers' burnout was compared with factors such as years of service, gender, marital status, and education level, no relationship was found. However, a relationship was found in terms of age and student class. It was noted that teachers in the 21-33 and 34-44 age groups were more burned out and less committed to their profession than teachers in the 45-65 age group. From an administrative perspective, it was observed that working in high schools and secondary schools is more stressful than working in elementary schools, and that teachers working in high schools and secondary schools have lower commitment to their profession and lower satisfaction from working with students. According to the study, teachers in medium-sized schools (600-950 students) were found to be less committed to their profession than teachers in small schools (fewer than 600 students), but no such difference was observed between medium-sized and large schools. It has also been noted that teachers experience less depersonalization when they choose socially integrative actions in response to problems, but experience a greater decrease in personal success when they choose punitive actions.

Setting is also another crucial factor for teachers to have high levels of burnout. In another of his study (1984b), Farber administered the same scale to 693 teachers as the previous one and found correlations between teachers' burnout and administrative problems. The most significant of these was the burnout levels of teachers working in urban and suburban schools. Farber noted that teachers working in urban schools had higher and more consistent levels of burnout. In suburban schools, he observed lower and seasonal burnout. In his study, he also used the term "worn-out teacher" instead of "burned-out teacher." The reason for this is that although his findings corresponded with Maslach's definition of burnout, he wanted to distinguish his findings from Freudenberger's old definition of burnout. When the study was published in 1984, Farber did this to distinguish his findings from Freudenberger's model of burnout, which was based on "determination and dedication" and "ignoring one's own discomfort." Farber's findings, similar to Maslach's, indicated that as teachers were worn out, their commitment to their work decreased, contrary to Freudenberger's findings. Maslach (1999) confirmed Farber's findings and stated that burnout could manifest in multiple ways, including being worn out. He also noted that the number of worn out, or Maslach-type, burned-out teachers was greater than the number of teachers falling under Freudenberger's definition of burnout. In other words, Maslach stated that the number of teachers who burn out due to professional difficulties is greater than the number of teachers who burn out because they are highly committed and dedicated to their work. The administrative data she found in his study (86% of teachers did not find the administrative meetings they attended useful in solving the problems they faced) supports this.

In parallel with studies conducted abroad, there have been various studies in our country examining the burnout status of teachers and teacher candidates (Başol & Altay, 2009; Cemaloğlu & Şahin, 2007; Gündüz, 2005; Köse et al., 2017; Küçük 2023; Küçüksüleymanoğlu & Eğilmez 2013; Ören & Türkoğlu 2006; Tuğrul & Çelik, 2002). Additionally, most studies conducted in Türkiye have used the Maslach Burnout Inventory and have been carried out within the framework of National Education schools.

Gender is one of the most common factors that come to attention. In Baysal's (1995) study, it was observed that female teachers were more exhausted than male teachers in terms of emotional exhaustion, and this situation was attributed to the gender role that women have acquired in society. Girgin (1995), on the other hand, stated that male teachers were more exhausted than female teachers in terms of depersonalization. Furthermore, Ören and Türkoğlu's (2006) study of teacher candidates revealed that female candidates showed more exhaustion in terms of emotional exhaustion, while male candidates showed more exhaustion in terms of depersonalization and reduced sense of personal accomplishment. In addition, when they observed the differences between departments, it was noted that students in the Electronics and Computer Education department showed high levels of burnout, while students in the Preschool Education department showed low levels of burnout. This difference was attributed to the gender composition of the departments (the Electronics and Computer Education department had classes consisting only of male students).

Regarding age and length of work, Girgin (1995) and Baysal (1995) observed that emotional exhaustion and depersonalization decreased with increasing age and years of service. Gündüz (2005) found that teachers who graduated from education faculties had more negative results than those who graduated from other establishments (teacher training schools, institutes) in terms of both emotional exhaustion and depersonalization and a decrease in personal accomplishment. This difference stems from the length of service and is associated with the experience advantage of teachers who graduated before 1980 (the majority of whom graduated from teacher training schools and institutes). Cemaloğlu and Şahin (2007) state that, contrary to other studies, burnout increases in terms of

emotional exhaustion and depersonalization with advancing age. This relationship can be explained by the fact that teachers become very tired, struggle to perform, and therefore become emotionally worn out, and because they have been working for a long time, they begin to become depersonalized. They also examined the relationship between educational level and burnout, observing that as teachers' educational levels increased, their emotional exhaustion and depersonalization dimensions of burnout decreased. This situation is associated with better preparation in pre-service education and high professional expectations. Additionally, Hong (2010) found in his study that teacher candidates held idealistic views about the profession and that the group without internship experience had the highest "Emotion" score (emotional burnout and depersonalization dimensions are combined under the "Emotion" score), meaning they were less burned out, while they found that the group doing internships had a lower emotion score, meaning they showed higher burnout, and concluded that real classroom experience increased burnout. Ören and Türkoğlu (2006) noted that teacher candidates aged 23 and older had higher burnout, especially in terms of depersonalization.

Beyond individual characteristics, studies show that institutional support systems and psychological factors also prevent burnout. Teachers who receive social support report low levels of burnout and high levels of personal success (Gündüz, 2005). In addition, Jiang and Zhu (2024) found a negative relationship between the adoption of professional identity and burnout in their study of music teacher candidates. It was observed that students' adoption of professional identity led to a decrease in their burnout. In other words, it was stated that professional identity directly reduces burnout. Furthermore, it was found that the adoption of professional identity increases students' psychological resilience. In accordance, the study observed that the adoption of professional identity affects burnout and reduces it not only directly but also indirectly by increasing students' resilience. It was stated that this indirect effect emerged thanks to the "mediating" role of psychological resilience. It has been noted that students with a strong professional identity develop stress management skills, leading to a decrease in their academic burnout levels. Rodríguez-Hidalgo and colleagues (2014) drew attention to students' perceptions of their personal development in their study of teacher candidates in the Early Childhood Education and Primary Education departments. They found that teacher candidates who felt highly burned out perceived their personal development as weak. The most significant difference in self-perception of personal development was observed in the "Efficacy" dimension (the adapted name of "Decrease in Personal Success" in the student form). Cemaloğlu and Şahin (2007), on the other hand, examined the factor of marital status and noted that widowed teachers experience increased emotional burnout, suggesting that problems in their personal lives emotionally exhaust them and may affect their emotional burnout in their professional lives.

As the abovementioned studies summarize that burnout is related to various individual, environmental, and administrative factors, there are limited studies focusing on the relationship between English teacher candidates' burnout levels and their academic achievement. In this regard, the research questions of this study, which aims to determine the burnout levels of English teacher candidates and examine the relationship between burnout and academic achievement, are as follows:

1. What are the burnout levels of teacher candidates studying English Language Education?
2. Is there a relationship between the burnout levels of teacher candidates studying English Language Education and their overall academic achievement?
3. Do the burnout levels of teacher candidates studying English Language Education vary according to age and gender?

Method

Participants

64 pre-service teachers joined the study on a voluntary basis. 37 of them were females and 27 of them were males. Their ages ranged between 20-22. They were the third and fourth year students at a western state university. The rationale why they were asked to fill in the scale is they are the ones who have started the teaching profession.

Data Collection Instruments

The scale "Burnout Syndrome" prepared by Kim et al (2021) was used in this study. They stated that the reliability score was .813 but in this study, the reliability score was .72. It has 3 dimensions: exhaustion, inefficacy, cynicism.

Procedure

After the permission was obtained from the writers and designers (Kim et al), the ethics committee approval was taken. Then the scale was administered to the 3rd and 4th year pre-service English language teachers as they were the ones taking both theory and practice based courses.

Results

1. What are the burnout scores of the pre-service teachers?

Table 1 shows that pre-service teachers had high scores in the items “1. I feel mentally exhausted in relation to my work” (3.23) and “4. I feel exhausted and tired from my work these days (3.21)”. Their low scores were about in efficacy “3. When I think about work, I feel tired and helpless 1.82) meaning that they trust themselves. “My work is not important and is considered useless” had the score of 1.93 highlighting that they think what they do is important.

Table 1

Descriptives

Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
IN3 When I get good results, I feel a sense of accomplishment	64	1.82	1.13
C1 My work is not important	64	1.93	.92
IN4 In my work I am confident	64	2.14	.98
IN2 I am making a helpful contribution	64	2.31	1.02
C4 I feel my identity is disappearing	64	2.46	1.36
E3 When I think of work, I feel tired	64	2.54	1.06
E2 I feel chest discomfort when I think about work	64	2.54	1.08
C3 My current job does not seem to help my career	64	2.59	1.38
IN1 If I have a hard time, I tend to respond appropriately	64	2.62	1.11
C2 my attitude toward work is not active	64	2.84	1.19
E4 I feel exhausted	64	3.21	1.33
E1 I feel mentally exhausted	64	3.23	1.08

2. Is there a relationship between the pre-service language teachers' burnout scores and achievement (GPA)?

The Anova test result showcases that there is a relationship between the teacher candidates' burnout scores and GPA. Higher GPA scores are found to lead to the less burnout score.

Table 2

The relationship between burnout scores and GPA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	32.00	23	1.39	1.89	.03
Within Groups	29.43	40	.73		
Total	61.43	63			

3. Do the burnout scores of pre-service language teachers vary in terms of gender and class?

In terms of gender female students show higher burnout scores (30.7) compared to the males (29.6) but this is not statistically significant as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Burnout scores in terms of gender

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	P value
TOTAL	Males	27	29.66	7.25	1.39	.9
	Females	37	30.75	6.73	1.10	

When it comes to the class, the third year students showed higher burnout scores (32.31) and there is a statistically significant difference between 3rd and 4th grade pre-service teachers as highlighted in Table 4.

Table 4
The relationship between burnout scores and class

Class	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	P value
3rd year	32	32.31	5.76	1.01	.01
4th year	32	28.28	7.46	1.32	

Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the burnout levels of English language teacher candidates and the relationship between achievement and burnout. The findings indicate that the participants' burnout levels are generally at a moderate level. Although the participants report feelings of mental fatigue and exhaustion, they do not agree with the perception that their work is worthless or meaningless. This suggests that teacher candidates still maintain an idealistic perspective towards the profession. Rodríguez-Hidalgo et al. (2014) found a similar relationship, reporting that students with high perceptions of professional competence had lower levels of burnout.

One of the most noteworthy findings of the study is the significant relationship found between academic achievement (GPA) and burnout. The results show that as GPA increases, the level of burnout decreases. This finding is consistent with some studies (Akbaba, 2014; Atik & Çelik, 2022; Özcan & Sallabaş, 2024) on teacher candidates. Their study also showed that academic motivation and success reduces burnout, which in turn has a positive effect on academic achievement. Similarly, Qin et al. (2022) stated in their study that self-efficacy and coping strategies reduce burnout. These findings reveal that academically successful students with high self-efficacy perceptions are more resilient to burnout.

Although no significant difference is found according to gender, it is observed that the average burnout scores of female students are slightly higher than those of male students. This result shows partial differences from the other studies (Ören & Türkoğlu, 2006; Agdelen & Batur, 2019), in which female students were reported to score higher in the dimension of emotional burnout. In this study, however, the difference was not statistically significant. Therefore, it can be said that the effect of gender on burnout may vary across different samples.

Finally, a significant difference was found in terms of grade level, and it was observed that third-year students had higher burnout scores than fourth-year students. This result overlaps with the findings of Hong (2010). In Hong's study, it was stated that teacher candidates without practicum experience experienced less burnout, while those with real classroom experience had higher burnout scores. Similarly, a study published in the *Journal of School Psychology* (2019) stated that teacher-student relationships play an important role in burnout, and difficulties with students increase emotional exhaustion in teachers. This finding explains why burnout increases as teacher candidates gain more classroom experience.

The results obtained show that the burnout experiences of teacher candidates are not merely an individual problem, but also a phenomenon that directly affects the future of the education system. The level of burnout associated with academic achievement may determine teacher candidates' readiness for the profession and the performance they will demonstrate in the classroom in the future. Therefore, it is of great importance for universities not only to focus on academic achievement but also to strengthen students' psychological resilience and self-efficacy perceptions. In this way, healthier and more motivated teachers can be trained, which in the long term will contribute to the improvement of educational quality.

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