

Academic Optimism: A Phenomenological Study

Akademik İyimserlik Kavramına Yönelik Fenomenolojik Bir Çalışma

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Abstract

Academic optimism is linked with student achievement, controlling for the influence of socioeconomic (SES), in many developed countries. The current study adds to the existing literature by providing insightful qualitative data regarding teachers experiences of maintaining and enhancing academic optimism in a developing country. Thus, this phenomenological study aims to explore the lived experiences of teachers with regard to maintaining and enhancing academic optimism in schools situated within low socioeconomic (SES) districts. Snowball sampling is used to collect data. Data collected from in-depth interviews conducted with 20 teachers working in states schools in Istanbul and Tekirdag in Fall 2015 were analyzed using deductive thematic analysis as coined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The preselected themes which consist of collective efficacy, academic press and trust were situated within the theoretical framework of Hoy et al's (2006) academic optimism. Participants' responses show that developing collective efficacy for academically optimistic approach requires an initial focus on a positive change in students' sense of connection to their school. Moreover, participants highlight the significance of alignment of personal goals with macro level developmental goals of the country in their collective practices. An academically optimistic school in terms of academic press is characterized by an acceptance of collective responsibility as a school norm in the current study. Teachers' proactive initiatives of study programs, teacher team meetings are practices that are enacted in schools to enhance academic press. Trust in colleagues is also fostered through a school atmosphere of sincerity and friendship by teachers in the current study. Further research is recommended to explore links between the components of academic optimism and collaborative work with external stakeholders.

Keywords: academic optimism, collective efficacy, academic emphasis

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Öz

Akademik iyimserlik kavramı, birçok gelişmiş ülkede yapılan araştırmalarda sosyoekonomik durum kontrol edildiğinde öğrenci başarısıyla ilişkilendirilmiştir. Mevcut çalışma, gelişmekte olan bir ülkede öğretmenlerin akademik iyimserliği sürdürme ve geliştirme deneyimlerine ilişkin nitel veriler sağlayarak mevcut literatüre katkıda bulunmaktadır. Bu nedenle, fenomenolojik yaklaşımı benimseyen mevcut çalışma, düşük sosyoekonomik (SES) ilçelerde yer alan okullarda öğretmenlerin akademik iyimserliği sürdürme ve geliştirme konusunda yaşadıkları deneyimlerini keşfetmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma grubu kartopu örnekleme yoluyla belirlenmiştir. 2015-2016 akademik yılı Güz döneminde İstanbul ve Tekirdağ'daki devlet okullarında görev yapan 20 öğretmenle yapılan derinlemesine görüşmelerden toplanan veriler, Braun ve Clarke (2006) tarafından geliştirilen tümdengelimli tematik analiz kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Hoy ve diğerlerinin (2006) ortaya koyduğu akademik iyimserlik kavramının teorik çerçevesinde yer alan ve buna göre kolektif yeterlilik, akademik başarıya vurgu ve güvenden oluşan temalar katılımcıların yanıtlarına göre betimlenmiştir. Katılımcıların yanıtları, akademik açıdan iyimser bir yaklaşım için kolektif yeterlik geliştirmenin, öğrencilerin okullarıyla olan bağ duygularında olumlu bir değişikliğe odaklanmayı gerektirdiğini göstermektedir. Ayrıca katılımcılar, toplu uygulamalarında kişisel hedeflerin ülkenin makro düzeydeki kalkınma hedefleri ile uyumlu hale getirilmesinin önemini vurgulamaktadır. Akademik başarıya vurgu açısından akademik olarak iyimser bir okul, mevcut çalışmada kolektif sorumluluğun bir okul normu olarak kabulü ile karakterize edilmektedir. Öğretmenlerin proaktif çalışma programlarına ilişkin girişimleri, öğretmen zümre toplantıları, akademik başarıya olan vurguyu artırmak için okullarda deneyimlenen uygulamalardır. Meslektaşlara güven, bu çalışmada öğretmenler tarafından okuldaki samimiyet ve dostluk atmosferi aracılığıyla geliştirilmektedir. Akademik iyimserliğin bileşenleri ile dış paydaşlarla işbirlikçi uygulamalar arasındaki bağlantıları keşfetmek için daha fazla araştırma yapılması önerilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: akademik iyimserlik, kolektif yeterlilik, akademik başarıya vurgu

Geniş Özet

Giriş

Erken okul iyileştirme çalışmaları öğrenci başarısını etkileyen faktörler arasında sosyoekonomik düzeyin etkisine yoğunlaşmıştır. Pozitif psikolojinin eğitsel süreçlerdeki etkisinin araştırılmasıyla birlikte okulda öğrenci başarısını etkileyen bileşenler arasında akademik iyimserlik kavramı önemli bir bileşen olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır. Hoy et al. (2006) akademik iyimserliği kolektif yeterlilik, akademik başarıya vurgu ve güvenden oluşan bir yapı olarak kavramsallaştırmıştır. Buna göre, kolektif yeterlilik bir okulda çalışan öğretmenlerin öğrenci başarısını arttırmak için gerekli olan uygulamaları birlikte yapabileceklerine yönelik yargılarına işaret etmektedir. Okul düzeyinde akademik başarıya vurgu bileşeni; okuldaki paydaşların öğrencilerin akademik başarıyı arttırmaya yönelik yönelimiyle ilişkilendirilmektedir. Bu bileşen özellikle hedef belirleme ve inancın önemini vurgulamaktadır. Akademik başarıya vurgunun yüksek olduğu okullarda ciddi bir öğrenme atmosferi hakimdir ve öğrenci başarısı için ulaşılabilir yüksek hedefler belirlenmiştir. Öğretmenlerin öğrencilerin öğrenebileceğine ve başarılı olacağına inanırlar. Güven bileşeni ise bir okuldaki paydaşların açıklık, dürüstlük, güvenilirlik, yardımseverlik ilkelerine uygun olarak hareket edeceğine dair olumlu yargılarını içermektedir (Woolfolk-Hoy, 2012). Akademik iyimserliğin; sosyoekonomik

düzeıyü düşük bölgelerde yer alan okullar ele alındığında bile öğrenci başarısını olumlu etkileyen faktörlerden biri olduđu görülmektedir (Woolfolk-Hoy, 2012).

Akademik iyimserlik kavramı öğrenci başarısında özellikle sosyoekonomik faktörlerin olumsuz etkilerinden korunmaya yardımcı bir güdüleyici olarak görülmektedir. Sosyoekonomik faktörlere rağmen öğretmenler öğrencilerin başaracağına ilişkin iyimserliklerini koruduklarında ve dış paydaşlar da okulun uygulamalarını desteklediklerinde öğrenci başarısı sağlanabilmektedir (Kirby ve DiPaola, 2011). Ayrıca, bireysel iyimserlik kavramına benzer olarak akademik iyimserlik okulda öğrenilebilir ve geliştirilebilir bir yapı olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır (Smith ve Hoy, 2007). Öğrenci başarısıyla ilişkisi ele alındığında özellikle bağıl değerlendirmeye dayalı değerlendirmeler ile kolaylaştırıcı okul yapısı arasındaki ilişkide akademik iyimserlik aracı rol oynamaktadır (Anderson, et al., 2018). Benzer şekilde kolaylaştırıcı okul yapısı akademik iyimserliği arttırmaktadır (McGuigan ve Hoy, 2006). Akademik iyimserlik düzeyi yüksek olan öğretmenler bağlama dayalı dinamiklere daha dayanıklı olmakta ve bağlamın özelliklerini okulun ihtiyaçlarına göre şekillendirebilmektedir. Ayrıca, söz konusu öğretmenler okulun amaçlarına uygun olarak uygulamaları planlı bir şekilde uygulamaya koymaktadır (Song, 2022). Akademik iyimserliğe yönelik çalışmaların çoğunluğu nicel araştırma modellerinde uygun olarak tasarlanmıştır. Bu durumla ilişkili olarak Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) akademik iyimserliğin bir bileşeni olan güven kavramına ilişkin çalışmalarında nitel verilere dayanan çalışmaların artırılmasını tavsiye etmektedir. Farklı okul seviyelerinde okul içi süreçlerin akademik iyimserlikle ilişkilendirildiği çok sayıda çalışma bulunmasına rağmen, öğretmenlerin akademik iyimserliğe yönelik yaşantılarına odaklanan nitel çalışmalar sınırlıdır. Bu araştırma öğretmenlerin akademik iyimserliği sürdürme ve geliştirme deneyimlerine ilişkin nitel veriler sağlayarak akademik iyimserlik kavramına ilişkin yaşantıların, özün anlaşılmasına katkıda bulunmaktadır.

Yöntem

Bu çalışmada düşük sosyoekonomik ilçelerde yer alan okullarda öğretmenlerin akademik iyimserliği sürdürme ve geliştirme konusunda yaşadıkları deneyimlerin ortaya konması amaçlanarak nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden fenomenolojik yaklaşım benimsenmiştir. Araştırmanın çalışma grubunu 2015-2016 akademik yılı Güz döneminde İstanbul ve Tekirdağ'daki düşük sosyoekonomik ilçelerde yer alan devlet okullarında görev yapan 20 öğretmen oluşturmaktadır. Çalışma grubu akademik iyimserlik kavramına ilişkin zengin deneyimleri olan katılımcılara zincirleme olarak ulaşıldığı kartopu örnekleme tekniği ile seçilmiştir. Çalışmanın verileri 2015- 2016 akademik yılı Güz döneminde derinlemesine görüşme tekniğiyle elde edilmiş ve Braun ve Clarke'in (2006) geliştirdiği tımdengelimli tematik analiz yoluyla çözümlenmiştir.

Bulgular ve Tartışma

Düşük sosyoekonomik düzeyine sahip öğrencilerin oturduğu bölgelerde yer alan okullarda çalışan öğretmenlerin akademik iyimserlik kavramına ilişkin deneyimleri Hoy vd.'nin (2006) akademik iyimserliğe yönelik kavramsal çerçevesine uygun olarak kolektif yeterlilik, akademik başarıya olan okul düzeyinde vurgu ve güven bileşenlerine göre ele alınmıştır.

Bu çalışmada görüşülen öğretmenlere göre okul düzeyinde kolektif yeterliliklerin geliştirilmesi öncelikle okula ilişkin olumsuz zihni modellerin değiştirilmesiyle başlanmalıdır. Öğretmenler özellikle öğrencilerin okulu sosyalleşme yeri olarak gördüğünü belirtmekte ve öğrencilerin okulu öğrenme alanı olarak görerek okula aktif katılımı sağlandığında okul düzeyinde akademik yeterliliklerinin artırılması için ortam oluşacağına altını çizmektedir. Akademik açıdan iyimser bir atmosfer öğrenci öğrenmesinin dersten alınan nota indirgenmemesiyle ilişkilendirilmiştir. Öğretmenlerin görüşlerine göre öğrencinin bireysel durumuna göre gösterdiği gelişimlerin dikkate alınması gerekmektedir. Öğretmenlerin kolektif yeterliliklerinin öğrenci öğrenmesine yönelmesi bireysel dünya görüşlerinin farklı oluşunu bir kenara bırakarak öğrenci öğrenmesini bütünlendirici amaç olarak görmeleriyle sağlanmaktadır.

Akademik açıdan iyimser olan öğretmenler öğrenci başarısı söz konusu olduğunda okulda çalışan meslektaşlarından, sosyal medyadaki öğretmen gruplarından ve üniversitedeki öğretim elemanlarından yardım olarak yeterlilik algılarını güçlendirmektedirler. Yeterlilik algılarının güçlü olduğunu belirten öğretmenlerden bazıları okuldaki öğrenci başarısına yönelik çabaların yetersizliğine ilişkin algının kendi çabalarını engellemesine izin vermediklerini belirtmektedir. Bireysel olarak kendi sınıflarındaki öğrencilerin başarısının sorumluluğunu üstlenmekte ve olumsuz tutumlara karşı kayıtsız kalmayı tercih etmektedirler. Öğretmenler öğrenci başarısında kendi katkıları olduğunu gördüklerinde ve bu katkıları okuldaki paydaşlar tarafından tanındığında okul düzeyinde akademik başarının öncelikli olduğu iyimser bir atmosfer gözlemlemektedir. Diğer öğretmenlere ilişkin mesleklerinde yetersizlik algısına sahip olan öğretmenler fikir alışverişinde bulunmadan bireysel uygulamalarda bulunduğunu belirtmektedir.

Öğrenci başarısının vurgulandığı iyimser bir atmosferin deneyimlenmesi öğretmenlerin bireysel uyguladıkları ve okul müdürünün yaklaşımıyla şekillenmektedir. Öğretmenlerden bazıları öğrencinin bireysel ihtiyaçlarına yönelik çalışma programları oluşturduklarını belirtmişlerdir. Öğretmenlerden bazıları okul düzeyindeki uygulamalarda bireysel eksiklikleri olan öğrenciler için hem danışman öğretmen hem de rehber öğretmen belirlendiğini ve kolektif çaba sonucu öğrencilerin eksikliklerin giderilmesinde başarı gösterildiğini belirtmektedir. Öğretmenler akademik başarıya ilişkin güçlü vurgunun bulunduğu ortamlarda öğrencilerin öğrenmesine ilişkin kolektif bir sorumluluk bilincinin geliştiğini deneyimlemektedir. Öğrencilerin merkezi yerleştirme sınavlarında aldıkları skorlar ve yerleştikleri üniversiteler ele aldıkları öğretmenler için motive edici unsurlar olarak görülmektedir. Ayrıca öğretmenlerden bazıları kendi branşlarına yönelik zümre çalışmalarında bulunmuş ve öğrencilerin ders notlarını analiz ederek buna ilişkin gelişime açık aktiviteler oluşturmuşlardır.

Okul müdürünün akademik başarıyı yükseltmek için okul ihtiyaçlarına ilişkin başka paydaşların yardımlarından yararlanması öğretmenler için akademik açıdan iyimser bir atmosferin geliştirilmesini sağlamıştır. Bu çalışmadaki öğretmenlerin görüşlerine göre, okul müdürünün rol modeli olarak başarılı kişileri okula davet edip öğrencilerle buluşturması öğrenci ihtiyaçlarına hitap eden yaklaşımı perçinlemiş ve bununla birlikte okulda başarının öneminin anlaşılmasında önemli rol oynamıştır. Öğretmenlerden bazıları okul müdürünün okul başarısı için çalışmayı bir okul normu olarak yansıttığında bu yaklaşım karşısında kendilerini okulun başarısına ve okul müdürüne karşı sorumlu hissettiklerini belirtmektedir.

Okuldaki güven ortamı okul müdürünün işbirlikçi uygulamaları ve öğretmenler arasında oluşturulan arkadaşlık ve samimi ortam sayesinde oluşturulmaktadır. Öğretmenlerin bazıları öğretmenlerin kendilerini diğer öğretmenlerden üstün görmemesinin ve eksik alanlarda dayanışmada bulunmanın rekabet ortamı yerine işbirlikçi bir ortam sunduğunu belirtmektedir. Buna karşın, öğretmenlerin meslektaşlarının uygulamalarını eğitim dışı çıkarlarla ilişkilendirmeleri güvensiz bir ortam yaratarak akademik açıdan iyimser bir ortamın oluşmasını sekteye uğratmaktadır. Bu çalışmadaki öğretmenlerin görüşlerine göre güven ortamını olumsuz etkileyen bir başka etmen de velilerin öğretmenlerin yeterliliğini sorgulamaları, öğretmenin önerilerini göz ardı etmeleri ve öğretmenin öğrenci öğrenmesine ilişkin görüşlerinin gerçeği yansıtmadığını belirtmeleridir.

Introduction

Cross-societal studies of the influence of socioeconomic status (SES) on student achievement show that SES operates differently when the development of the country is considered / based on the level of the development of the country. To illustrate, using PISA's measure of socioeconomic status, Eriksson et al.'s (2021) study which draws upon 600000 students in 77 communities reveal that wealth possessions as proxy for SES has significant effect on student achievement in the least developed countries. In developed countries, however, the number of books at home as a component of SES is positively linked with student achievement (Eriksson et al., 2021). Despite the variations in the ways SES may be conceptualized, its effect on student achievement is still evident. Furthermore Eriksson et al.'s (2021) study has implications for the ways developed countries may differ from developing countries in their approach towards addressing the influence of SES in schools. Thus, mechanisms which help schools cope with low SES conditions in developed countries may also operate differently in low SES schools in developing countries.

As a line of inquiry in school effectiveness research, academic optimism is one of the mechanisms which is shown to be impactful in raising student achievement despite the allegedly insurmountable influence of SES in schools in developed countries (Hoy et al., 2006; Goddard et al., 2000; Bevel & Mitchell, 2012). Academic optimism is conceptualized as a construct that consists of the school properties of collective efficacy, academic emphasis and trust (Hoy et al., 2006). Controlling for SES, academic optimism is also positively linked with students achievement in Flanders (Boonen et al., 2014) and in the Czech context (Straková et al., 2018). In addition, perceived academic optimism is positively linked with student-centered teaching practices (Ngidi, 2012). However, research on the experiences of practitioners, specifically teachers of academic optimism in low SES schools in developing countries is scant. Thus, further research on the lived experiences of teachers in low SES schools in Turkey may provide insightful data on the mechanisms of academic optimism in low SES conditions in developing countries.

Collective efficacy as the component of academic optimism stems from self-efficacy research. The notion of self-efficacy entails a sense of agency in activities individuals pursue. Thus the beliefs regarding one's capabilities to execute a task are within the domain of self-efficacy research (Bandura and Locke, 2003). Since the conception of the term the ways efficacious beliefs influence actual

performance have been widely studied in school effectiveness research. Distinct from self-efficacy yet similar in function and purpose, collective efficacy refers to group belief that the outcomes of their efforts will produce a desired effect in student learning (Bandura, 1997). Collective efficacy is cognitive in nature and thus, its focus is on beliefs and expectations (Hoy, et al., 2006).

Based upon Bandura's (1977) conception of self-efficacy, collective efficacy stems from four distinct components which are called vicarious experience, affective state, mastery experience and verbal persuasion. Mastery experiences bolster the group expectation of effective completion of future tasks through previous experiences of accomplishment in similar circumstances. Although occasional failures may arise, previous accomplishments may offset any incurring negative effects by instilling the belief that continued efforts will eventually succeed. Higher collective efficacy results in higher resilience in the face of impediments (Bandura, 2000). Vicarious experience, on the other hand, presents other individuals' experiences as sources of developing collective efficacy. In contrast with personal experience, it represents knowledge gained through the observation of others' experiences. Despite being a weaker source of gauging efficacy, modeled behavior may form the basis of inferences regarding one's capability of fulfilling a task. Similarly, suggestion from others can persuade one to have faith in their capabilities. This source of collective efficacy is known as verbal persuasion. Finally, affective state also forms the basis for the judgment of one's capabilities as affective reactions to external stimuli may affect how one chooses to respond to threatening situations. In the educational contexts, studies show that as teachers recognize their colleagues' strengths and learn to work as a team, perceptions of collective efficacy develop and yield positive results (Szcześciul & Huizenga, 2015).

In Chinese context, Tam (2015) concludes that teachers' beliefs constitute a vital role in fostering proactive professional development. Teacher awareness of the influence of their beliefs may be enhanced through an emphasis on a reflective stance towards their beliefs (Farrell, 2015).

Variations in levels of student achievement amongst different school were mainly attributed to socioeconomic status before Bandura's research findings which provide evidence that stronger faculty beliefs in the efficacy of their practice leads to higher student achievement (Bandura, 1997). Studies following Bandura's footsteps and using these four sources of collective efficacy as the basis for further research, Goddard et al (2000) conceptualizes collective efficacy as a construct with two dimensions which are known as group competence and task analysis. Using data from an elementary school in an urban setting, Goddard et al's (2000) early work also shows that collective efficacy is related to student achievement. In this light, some studies focused on the role of teacher collective efficacy in team-based efforts such as Professional learning communities. Effectiveness in professional learning communities is linked with the level of perceived collective efficacy in schools. Setting goals collectively and engaging in data-driven analysis are also related to the level of perceived collective efficacy in schools (Voelkel & Chrispeels, 2017).

The second component of academic optimism, *academic emphasis* refers to the extent to which a school's orientation is directed towards student success. Setting high reachable goals, a seriousness in the learning context and strong belief in the students' abilities to success coupled with respect for high achievers are also markers of academic emphasis in schools (Woolfolk-Hoy, 2012). School level

emphasis on student academic achievement contributes to the relationship between school health and robustness. A school level emphasis on academic achievement is an organizational conduct in healthy and robust schools (Licata & Harper, 1999). Drawing on data from 2257 students, Maxwell et al's (2017) study used national assessment scores from national literacy and numeracy as proxy for student achievement and investigated the impact of perceived school climate on student achievement. The results of the study show that school climate perceptions of faculty predicts school achievement. Using TIMSS 2007 and 2011 data, Nilsen and Gustafsson's (2014) study shows that variations in school press on academic success explains the increased science scores in Norway. Serious learning as a marker of academic emphasis entails a well-designed learning environment which promotes student learning. In line with this argument, when compared with the control group, a 9-year-long disciplinary intervention programme resulted in improved student learning in elementary, middle and high schools (Madigan et al, 2016). Academic optimism is also positively related to instructional practices. Teachers who adopt student centered teaching place their belief in students' ability to learn and structure their instructional practices based upon the instructional needs of the students (Ngidi, 2011).

Using a sample of 1083 teachers and principals, Tarter and Hoy's (1988) earlier study shows that principal influence and morale predict teachers' trust in their colleague. Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) define five dimensions of trust which consist of the following: benevolence, competence, reliability, openness, an overall inclination to "risk vulnerability". Their definitions of trust were trust in colleagues, trust in principal and trust in clients.

Controlling for SES, collective trust is shown to have the strongest impact on school effectiveness (Gray, 2016). Hummel et al (2022) acknowledge that promoting parental trust may pave the way for coping with the indelible links between poverty and student achievement. Similarly drawing on a sample of 1001 students and parents from Swiss primary schools, Neuenschwander' (2020) study shows that parent trust mediates SES effects in language teaching. Moreover, parental trust as it pertains to cooperation with teachers has positive implications for student achievement in math and German. Consistent with the findings, Neuenschwander recommends stronger initiatives regarding low SES parent-teacher collaboration to combat the negative impacts of opportunity gap in schools.

Teacher trust along with teacher agency mediates the relationship between learning-centered leadership and professional development in public schools in Kuwait (Alazmi & Hammand, 2021). With a sample of 887 teachers from 78 Omani middle schools, Hendawy Al-Mahdy et al (2021) investigates the nexus relationships between learning focused leadership of principals, teacher professional learning and teacher trust. Results of the study show that principal leadership has direct effect on the professional learning of teachers. Hendawy Al-Mahdy et al. (2021) further indicates that principal leadership that establishes a climate of trust in schools plays a critical role in developing stronger teacher beliefs in the significance of their professional learning for school performance. In the Turkish context, Bostancı and Bülbül (2018) show that teacher trust in school principal predicts academic optimism at the high school level whereas the same connection hasn't been supported at the primary school level. Certain concerns were raised for studies which investigate the multifaceted role trust which is a component of academic optimism plays in school practices. In earlier studies, Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) study recommended more qualitative research to explore the

role trust plays in school effectiveness as their conceptualization of trust and its links to other school factors have been investigated based upon quantitative data. Aforementioned studies show that studies adopting a quantitative research paradigm encompass the majority of research in this area.

With these in mind, academic optimism entails a learning environment that is conducive to student learning with its focus on beliefs, expectations, behaviors and emotional responses in school level practices. As the literature established the significance of academic optimism for school effectiveness, the stakeholders' experiences of the effects of this construct has been mainly investigated through quantitative data as seen in the aforementioned studies in different cultural contexts. Thus the present qualitative inquiry aims to explore the lived experiences of teachers in low SES context with regard to academic optimism.

Method

Qualitative research paradigm is adopted to examine how teachers in socio-economically disadvantaged schools experience academic optimism in their school level endeavors. As lived experiences regarding the phenomenon of academic optimism is the focus of this qualitative inquiry, the study is framed by the descriptive phenomenology research design. Descriptive phenomenology aligns with a methodological approach which promotes maintaining a critical stance towards preconceived notions with openness and reflection. The triad of reflection, openness and self-inquiry helps the researcher gain an awareness regarding how the researcher as a subject influences the mechanisms of research (Sundler et al, 2019). Thus, the research refrains from making judgments on the data based upon prior convictions. Lived experiences of the participants are the main focus of this approach as these experiences are uncovered through maintaining a stance which incorporates a questioning of the previous assumptions.

Participants

It is a common tradition in qualitative studies to utilize purposive selection procedures to explicate the population of interest and use nonprobability techniques to determine the sources of data (Morgan, 2008) Thus, the present study followed purposive selection procedures to frame the population of interest and utilized chain sampling technique to locate and recruit participants. In line with purposive selection procedures, criterion to determine participants was selected based upon the object of qualitative inquiry in the current study. In this light, Hoy et al's (2006) study suggests that academic optimism is a construct that has a positive influence on student achievement mitigating the negative effects socioeconomic status. With this in mind, it is imperative to provide qualitative data on the experiences of teachers in low SES schools to understand practices and processes which foster an academically optimistic approach. The present study, thus, framed the population of interest as the teachers working in socioeconomically disadvantaged school districts in Tekirdag and Istanbul. Since informal networks were readily available to reach out to key teachers which match this criterion, chain sampling technique, also known as snowball sampling technique, was utilized to recruit participants consisting of 20 subject teachers and school counselors working in socioeconomically disadvantaged schools in Tekirdağ and Istanbul during Fall 2015. As part

of chain sampling, eligible participants who agreed to participate in the study were asked if they could give suggestions for other resourceful informants who match the criterion of the study. Chain sampling draws its strength from resourcefulness as it allows the inclusion of mainly key informants (Patton, 1990). The final demographic characteristics of the participants indicate that the year of experience, as it pertains to the teachers recruited, ranged from 1 to 30. Of the 20 participants, two were school counselors. The remaining teachers included 4 math teachers, 5 teachers of English, 4 biology teachers, 2 geography teachers, 2 physics teachers and a chemistry teacher.

Data Collection and Analysis

The present study utilized semi-structured in-depth interviewing to collect data from 20 teachers who worked in state schools in the cities of Tekirdag and Istanbul. In-depth interviewing enables the researcher to carry out one-on-one interviews with a limited number of participants to scrutinize a specific idea, phenomenon or program through the lens of participants (Boyce, 2006). As Brenner (2006) suggests, deductive approach denotes the framework-led construction of interview questions. Hence, the present study employed the theoretical construct of academic optimism as the core construct which framed the interview questions.

Using in-depth interviewing, teachers were interviewed to elicit their responses on practices that maintain academic optimism in their schools. Specifically, teachers were asked to reflect upon their experiences of practices or processes that maintain collective efficacy, emphasis on student achievement and trust in parents and students. As suggested by Boyce (2006) factual information was asked before opinion questions. For example, teachers were asked to describe general practices oriented towards student achievement and collegial learning in the school before probing further into their impressions of these learning activities in relation to themes of academic optimism. Structure of the interview questions also followed an interview formulation as proposed by Brenner (2006). Thus, core themes of the construct of academic optimism were covered by the interview questions and using core themes as a guide, a set of more specific areas of interest such as leadership distribution, school norms, collegial learning, trust in parents and students were probed further according to participant responses. Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed afterwards. The interviews took place in participants' respective schools between October 10 and December 23, 2015

The present study utilized deductive thematic analysis to analyze the data. Deductive thematic analysis involves a process in which a set of predetermined coding scheme is applied to the data. Braun and Clarke (2021) acknowledge that deductive thematic analysis can be employed when theoretical constructs become the blueprint for further coding and interpretation of the data. The study predominantly employs deductive thematic analysis as the themes and subthemes are conceptualized by the theoretical framework of Hoy et al.'s (2006) academic optimism. Hoy et al. (2006) argue that academic optimism is comprised of school-level collective efficacy, academic emphasis and trust. In this light, the thematic structure of academic optimism is the basis of further interpretation of the data. Inductive thematic analysis is also utilized where coding and theme construction are shaped by the data content (Braun and Clarke, 2021).

Braun and Clarke (2022) recommend a connection between analysis and reflexivity. From this respect, instead of reporting researcher bias, researchers using thematic analysis are encouraged to incorporate researchers' reflection of the lived experiences of the participants. Current study uses personal reflexivity of the researcher as part of the coding and meaning making process which lead to theme construction.

Findings

Collective Efficacy

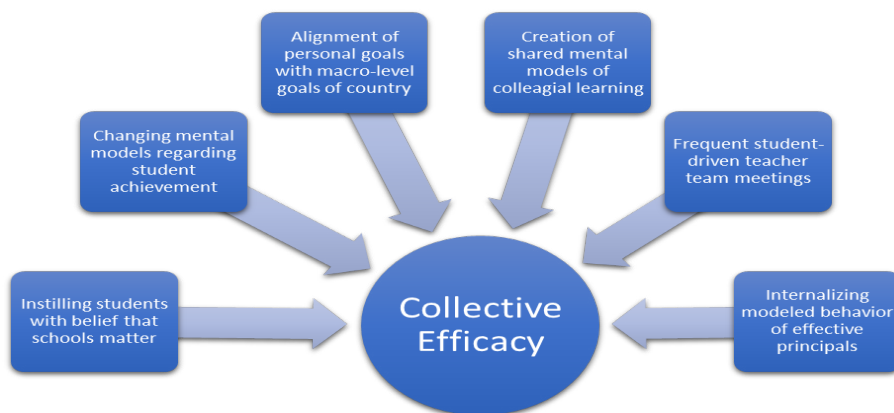


Figure 1. Teacher collective efficacy

Teachers working at low socioeconomic (SES) students mainly report that students in these schools consider school specifically a place of social engagement rather than a place of academic learning. In this light, teachers across all career phases indicate that most students are unaware of the opportunities their learning may bring in the future and thus, they have problems adapting to their school. A change in student beliefs is the first step that should be taken for improved student learning to take place. For them, academically optimistic school culture can only be built after students are instilled with the belief that schools have meaning for students' future. With this in mind, G13, a history teacher with 16 years of experience acknowledges the following:

"We need to adapt the student to the school... our first aim is to enable the student to feel connected to the school. Because they do not feel connected to the school... only after we accomplish this aim, we will try to spark/increase their interest in their learning."

In terms of improving teachers' perception of collective efficacy, teachers in the present study indicate that teacher and student commitment needs to be addressed from a different angle. Instead of focusing on student achievement as the main ingredient and the ultimate goal of teaching, teachers are encouraged to be committed to their teaching practice with a focus on incremental progress in student learning. Commitment that binds a nation's macro level goals with teaching

practice is what brings about optimistic approach towards the efficaciousness of collegial efforts. A teacher, in this light, comments that

“ We need commitment, so if your sense of commitment is similar, (it doesn't have to be the same) we can learn from each other. In the end, even if we hold separate ideological beliefs, we should share the goal of serving the nation. Look, beliefs hold the power... the belief that you can change things...” G14.

Participants also shed light on the conditions that are required for mental models that motivate collegial learning and collective endeavors for academically optimistic culture within schools. Although teachers may not share the same outlook towards life, shared mental towards the ultimate success of students bind teachers towards their collective goals to “change for the better”:

*“For example, the people I get along with, or rather the teachers I exchange ideas with, do not have my political and religious thoughts in common. (When you work with people with different beliefs than your own) it can create prejudice, for example, some people would criticize me for working with teachers who have a different mindset, they would ask “why are you talking with these people?” ... because I saw this in that person, I saw the struggle to change something.”*G14

Goddard's (2000) task analysis as a component of collective efficacy is also reported by teachers in this study as a mechanism of maintaining positive beliefs regarding the success of their practices. In this light, teachers in the present study review the outcomes of their practices and they note that when student achievement is at stake, they engage in a collegial dialogue in which they generate solutions based upon the review of the problematic case. The situation becomes evident in collegial problem-solving discussions which cater for the academic needs of the students with special needs:

“We have students with special education needs. Last year my colleague took on the ones in the 9th grade. Previously, he taught the 12th graders. He didn't know how that process worked because so far, he had always dealt with 11th and 12th graders. When it comes to the new students with special needs, he asked me what he needs to do in the 10th grade and we worked together.” G2

In the present study, teachers who are optimistic about student success believe that their endeavors matter, and they rely on collegial learning in and out of the school to sustain a sense of efficaciousness. Specifically, novice teachers keep contact with their friends from university and with their high school teachers for specific areas of difficulty. Novice teachers use social media to compensate for the lack of collegial learning in their schools. Social media appears to appease feelings of collegial loneliness and insecurity:

“When necessary, there are great groups on Facebook, I write there and try to find a way to find a solution” G1

Bandura's *vicarious experiences*, which derive from an observation and internalization of the modeled behavior as part of a source of collective efficacy, are also noted in the form of implicit mentoring in the present study. A novice psychological counselor of 2 years delineates her observation of school principal's communication strategies as a motivation for improving her practice:

“ My principal values people... Sometimes a very angry parent can come to see you... but I can't always stay calm, and I could give (abrupt) reactions instead of calmly saying “You don't have the right to behave like this.” It is more appropriate to try to calm them down, I think. I can say that this is what I learned from observing my principal.” G2

Teachers in the present study develop their own self-mechanism against non-optimistic influences by claiming an individual ownership on students' achievement and by disregarding the negative situations surrounding their own classroom. A teacher of 5 years of experience, G3 sustains optimism by becoming more individualistic and by focusing on her personal accomplishments with her students:

“For example, my previous 12th grade students, although they did not get into a good university, they still managed to find a spot. They say that without me, they wouldn't have achieved it, which motivates me. I can look optimistically to the future”

G8 similarly acknowledges the following:

“My optimism is not affected. Another teacher closing themselves off and hindering their own professional development is not of concern to me If my students are successful, it is my success,”

Collaborative tasks do not always result in academically optimistic outlook. When a teacher sees that others work as much as she does, she takes on a positive approach towards improving educational activities. However, if she collaborates with a colleague whom she considers incompetent, the frustrations grow to the point where the teacher decides to work alone.

Academic Emphasis

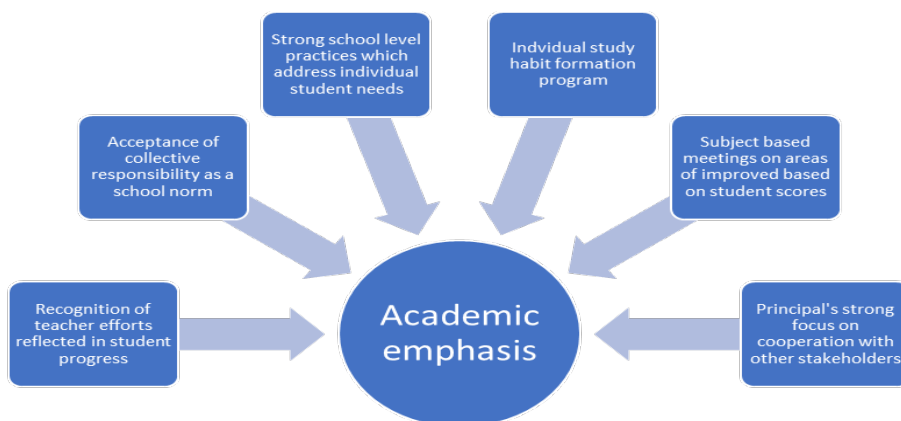


Figure 2. Academic emphasis

A novice teacher takes on a more optimistic outlook on student achievement when she sees that what she implements in her practices matters:

“When I saw a student who never stood out receive a certificate of appreciation, and when I saw a student receive a certificate of recognition, I thought, ‘It must be because they’re working hard.’ Seeing that I was able to make an impact really made me very, very happy.” G2

She acknowledges that the fact that her initiative results in incremental progress is a sign that she can make a difference in students’ academic lives:

“During my group study period, I received such good feedback the students’ progress. I would start each week by asking questions about their study habits. Some started working half an hour a day, then an hour a day, which motivated me even more. At the end of the group study period, I asked them to write feedback and they said very nice things. I can say that the most impactful and important thing for me was the outcome of my study group.”G2

Teachers across all career phases indicate that progress in student scores is a motivating indicator of their success as teacher and student success in national exams as a strong indicator of academic press in their schools. Teachers who view student test scores as the major indicator of student achievement participate in content-based team meetings. Student scores are negotiated between the teachers and teachers engage in discussions to determine areas of improvement. Hence, data based- discussions amongst teacher teams also lead to collegial dialogue which sets the tone for an environment that is conducive to learning. A math teacher of 16 years of experience acknowledges the following about their content-based team meetings:

“We analyze the student data to determine how much learning has been accomplished based upon the percentage of correct answers. Data analysis gives us the opportunity to see which areas I have accomplished our learning goals and which areas need improvement. Everyone in our school shares their results with each other to seek advice” G14

Such collective activities that are a part of collegial learning occur mainly amongst teachers whose content area is in hard sciences according to participants’ views. However, G11, a geography teacher of 12 years of experience, also delineates the following school-level practice in which students with low academic achievement are assigned with a mentor teacher and a school counselor:

“Every teacher in the school took on a student and dealt with this student’s problems. They also coordinated with other teachers during this process. I mean, officially a mentor teacher....in addition to the school counselor was selected. most of those students, out of 7-8 students, 5-6 of them survived, and they continue their education well. That was a positive outcome.”

A school counselor, G2, on the other hand, indicates that she created an initiative which is called academic support programme which features a developmental approach to student learning which concentrates on student progress. In addition to data-driven discussions,G14 a mathematics teacher of 16 years launching study groups to help low achievers gain more efficient study habits proved to be effective in creating a serious learning environment:

“During my group study period, I received such good feedback the students’ progress. I would start each week by asking questions about their study habits. Some started studying half an hour a day, then an hour a day, which motivated me even more. At the end of the group study period, I asked them to give

feedback and their comments were very motivating. I can say that the most impactful and important thing for me was the outcome of my study group.”

In a vocational high school in which low achievers encompass a higher percentage of students, teachers conduct subject based meetings in which they determine areas of improvement:

“For example, the mathematics department at school. A group that sets as an example in this regard. They really hold teacher team meetings, not only on paper, but also in practice. What can we do for children? Our high school has a problem because it is a vocational high school. Our university placement rate is very low. So, they ask questions regarding our success in university entrance exam” G1.

All teachers work together when there are meetings and competitions. I think that such activities have a positive effect on students and teachers.

Teachers indicate that principals’ leadership contributes to the formation of collegial learning as schools’ collective property. Principals facilitate taking collective responsibility for student achievement to become a school norm:

Teachers in the current study delineate how leadership evokes a school norm of supportive behavior among colleagues. Moreover, school administrator’s efforts to motivate teachers through individual consultations and bringing role models to school also signal an emphasis on student needs:

“Our principal did everything he could to persuade teachers to take part in cram courses. Despite the monetary incentive, teachers do not want to spend the weekend at school. Of course, these are personal choices...but the administrator still does his best to persuade them. Why? To increase student success.” G8

“We are in contact with counselling centers. They visit the school and give seminars, we try to bring people who can be role models for our school, our principal arranges these activities” G11.

Trust

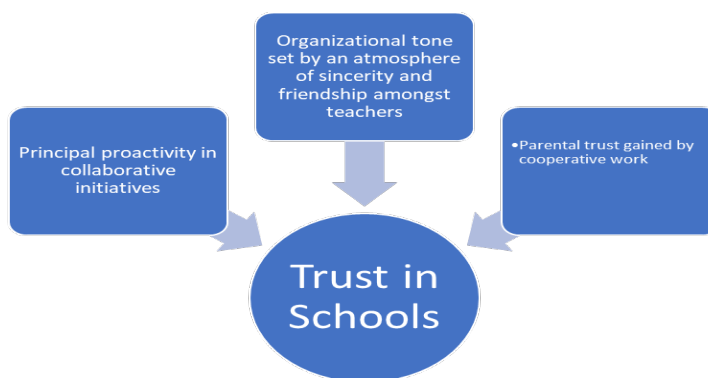


Figure 3. Trust in schools

The participants in the present study explicate that the trusting relationships in low SES schools stem from an atmosphere of sincerity and friendship. Moreover, an emphasis on cooperation

rather than competition in the school is also seen as a way of bonding between teachers for student achievement. Whereas participants with over 20 years of experience indicate receiving help from inexperienced teachers in the use of technology in the classroom as a sign of trusting their colleagues' competence, novice teachers who work with colleagues who are within their age range elucidate supportive behavior as a way of maintaining a sense of security in the school. In this light, these views are evident in the following:

"I trust them...so far, we have all struggled to make the school a place that is conducive for learning, there is a sense of friendship, sincerity for each other. We don't hold grudges for each other, for example, teachers don't think of themselves as better than their peers... there isn't much of an age difference, so we do not have any problems. We are trying to be supportive each other." G5

"Because there is a strong sense of friendship, I feel strong rather than lonely" G1

A teacher with 16 years of teaching experience, G14 conclude that a "common love for the nation, the society brings two teachers together to teach". He further explains that "I even spent lunch time with students solving problems. Other teachers saw it differently"

Teachers who lack trust for their peers often see teacher who provide extra assistance to students as someone with an ulterior motive. These teachers also see student efforts to learn more as a type of "extortion" of good grades. G11 similarly gives the example of an assault that diminishes feelings of security in their school as a factor that decreases trust in collective resilience in low SES schools:

"There are teachers who try to leave the school There are teachers who try to leave because of the school environment, there are teachers who make others nervous of their prospects in the school... because of the assault that took place last year."

When it comes to parental involvement in school-level decisions, teachers communicate parental distrust in low SES schools. Teachers note that parents question their competence in the teaching practice, disregard their suggestions and shows signs of distrust in teachers' decisions for improved student learning:

How much do the parents trust the teachers, I think there are problems there. I don't believe they listen to my suggestions, and they don't see us as competent enough.

I don't believe I have any influence over parents... maybe it's because we always call them for events like disciplinary actions but parents say "You wish to expel my child from school" G2

In recent years, teachers don't want to take risks... since parents can complain of teachers for minor issues. Let's say that the teacher wants to allocate extra time beyond class hours to improve student scores, but the parents may file a complaint for this practice. G1

As evident in a school counselor's responses, other stakeholders are also involved in the school decisions to fortify trust between school administration, teachers and parents:

For example, we had a student who wanted to drop out of school...her parents didn't want to send her to school because she was a girl. I and our principal reached out to the directorate of education; that was the only solution we could find. We finally convinced the parents. G2

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to explore how teachers understand and develop academic optimism in low SES schools. Participant responses show that teacher and student beliefs in their capabilities shape their efforts in school. Although poor student achievement appears to be the main demotivator, teachers taking a developmental approach focus on the incremental increase in student learning and regulate their motivation. Some teachers close off themselves from external stimuli and focus on their personal accomplishments to ward off negative external influences to maintain their optimism. Teachers believe that an academically optimistic strategy regarding fostering collective efficacy involves helping students change their negative beliefs towards school.

Teacher perception of student achievement and learning direct their instructional strategies. Teachers who believe that test scores are the main indicators of learning engage in data-driven decision making in teams and they review student data to determine the areas of improvement. Similar practices such as the formation of professional learning communities foster collective efficacy and help teachers sustain a sense of collective responsibility (Olivier & Hipp, 2006). Teachers who take a developmental approach create one-on-one programs that cater for the individual needs of the students. Both approaches help teachers maintain an academically optimistic outlook. Previous studies conducted in lower SES schools underscored the contribution of teachers' sense of meaning to teaching performance which also contributed to student resilience (Lavy & Ayuob, 2019).

Schools that emphasize an academic orientation initially set the organizational tone required for serious learning. Teachers in that respect allude to the efforts of their colleagues and also the efforts of the principal as the main components of academic resilience. Whereas novice teachers seek help from their high school teachers and utilize social media for professional purposes when there is little collegial learning in their schools to help them sustain an academic focus, more experienced teachers engage in data-driven discussions with their colleagues. Experienced teachers also set the example to go extra mile for student success. When student achievement is at stake efforts to maintain an academic focus extend beyond the schools walls as some teachers visit student homes to discuss student learning with parents.

The achievement oriented normative press is mainly set by the principal according to respondents in the present study. School principals evoke feelings of respect in teachers which leads to a focus on professional development on the teacher's side. In an early work, Simpson (1976) investigates the role of feelings of concern and pleasure in teacher school administrator relationships and concludes that "leadership" and "support" are two factors that evoke feelings of pleasure. Positive relationships between teacher and principals also have positive influence of teacher commitment (Price, 2011). More recently, studies on respect in teacher-principal interaction determine positive communication and self-development as indicators of respectful teacher behaviors (Güngör et al, 2013)

The present study provides examples of the ways respect can be used effectively in verbal persuasion. As it is seen, evoking feelings of respect in faculty paves the way for persuading them to take on collective responsibility. Similarly, verbal persuasion in the form of talk is also shown to be an effective way of strengthening perceptions of teacher self-efficacy and encouraging risk-taking in teachers' practices (Szczesniul & Huizenga, 2015).

Also, timely interferences by principals to persuade teachers to take on more teaching tasks to improve student learning are also reported. With regard to the type of leadership, distributed leadership and social justice leadership are leadership types that have been linked with developing academic optimism (Thien & Chan, 2020; Feng & Chen, 2019). The current study provides qualitative data to explore academic optimism in contrast with the majority of studies in this field. Results of the present study further show that teachers feel empowered through principal's actions without any reference to a specific leadership distribution. Although early studies show that trust in principals isn't linked with student success (Woolfolk-Hoy, 2012), the current study shows that principals may exhibit implicit mentoring behaviors that teachers observe and internalize to sustain a sense of collective efficacy. Recognition of teacher achievements by the principal can signal a supportive atmosphere which cultivates a sense of collective efficacy (McGuigan & Hoy, 2006).

A sense of friendship and sincerity reign in schools where teachers adopt an optimistic outlook towards student achievement. Such schools are characterized by their focus on cooperation and supportive behavior. In low SES schools, physical security is an issue that needs to be addressed. Teachers in the current study indicate that fears of assault drive teachers to take on teaching posts in other regions. Parental distrust is also an area of concern for teachers in low SES schools. Teachers note that although they set disciplinary norms to model positive student behavior, parents may see these norms as excuses for expelling certain students which problematic behavior.

When school level decision making fails, school principal working cooperatively with teachers involve other stakeholders such as national directorates of education to solve student problems and gain trust from parents. The role trust plays in district leadership is relatively a new area of research. Recent research shows that trust in district leadership forms a source of support for teachers (Adams, 2020). The present study shows that building trusting relationships with parents to more optimistic prospects can be achieved by initiating a stronger contact with district leadership. As a newer line of inquiry, further research could explore possible links between trust in district leadership and academic optimism. Furthermore, teachers in the present study note that parents tend to question teachers' competence in their practices which further leads to a broken communication during teacher -parent meetings. In line with the participants' impressions in the current study, previous studies show that optimistic parents are more satisfied with their child's educational institution and indicate that teachers' practice is a strong support for cultivating students' capabilities (Raty & Kasanen, 2016).

The current study shows that principals set the example for teachers and students in their schools. Despite the impediments it is imperative that school leaders reinforce collaborative collegial dialogue in their schools to help teachers and student maintain a positive learning environment (Smith &

Hoy, 2007). School leaders should be aware of the teacher dynamics in their schools and regularly organize collegial meetings to sustain a sense of community.

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