A Phenomenological Perspective into Teacher Burnout

Öğretmen Tükenmişliğine Fenomenolojik Bir Bakış

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Abstract: This phenomenological study investigates the lived experiences of burnout among English for Academic Purposes instructors at a state university in Türkiye. Utilizing semi-structured interviews with three experienced educators, the research explores their perceptions and definitions of burnout, alongside the underlying factors contributing to their emotional exhaustion. Findings reveal common triggers of burnout, including a lack of appreciation, ineffective administrative practices, and negative dynamics with colleagues and students. Despite exhibiting symptoms consistent with established burnout literature, such as exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy, participants predominantly attribute their emotional fatigue to organizational and interpersonal issues rather than student interactions. Interestingly, the instructors express a complex relationship with their profession, feeling a sense of belonging and commitment to their university, yet grappling with a perceived erosion of meaningful engagement in their work. The necessity for addressing systemic challenges and fostering a more supportive academic environment is emphasized, highlighting the importance of recognizing the interplay between individual experiences and wider institutional dynamics in burnout phenomena. This study underscores the critical need for strategies aimed at mitigating burnout among educators, acknowledging that fostering a positive work culture can enhance both job satisfaction and overall instructor well-being in higher education settings.

Keywords: Burnout;, Phenomenology, Teacher Well-being, Higher Education

Öz: Bu fenomenolojik çalışma, Türkiye'deki bir devlet üniversitesinde Akademik İngilizce (EAP) öğretmenlerinin tükenmişlik deneyimlerini araştırmaktadır. Üç deneyimli eğitimci ile gerçekleştirilen yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler kullanılarak, katılımcıların tükenmişlik tanımları ve bu duygu durumunun altında yatan etkenler incelenmiştir. Çalışma bulguları, meslektaşlar ve öğrenciler ile olumsuz dinamikler, takdir eksikliği ve etkisiz idari uygulamaları yaygın tükenmişlik tetikleyicileri olarak ortaya koymaktadır. Katılımcılar, mevcut tükenmişlik literatürüyle tutarlı olan yorgunluk, sosyal olumsuzluk ve yetersizlik gibi belirtiler gösterirken, duygusal tükenmişliklerini daha çok organizasyonel ve kişilerarası sorunlara atfetmektedir. Öğretmenlerin meslekleriyle karmaşık bir ilişki içinde oldukları görülmektedir; üniversitelerine karşı bir aidiyet ve bağlılık hissederken, işlerine olan anlamlı bağlılığın aşındığını hissetmektedirler. Bu çalışmada, sistematik zorlukların ele alınmasının ve daha destekleyici bir akademik ortamın teşvik edilmesinin gerekliliği vurgulanmakta olup bireysel deneyimlerin ve daha geniş kurumsal dinamiklerin tükenmişlik olgusu üzerindeki etkileşiminin anlaşılmasının önemine dikkat çekilmektedir. Çalışma, eğitimcilerde tükenmişliği azaltmaya yönelik stratejilerin geliştirilmesi gerektiğini vurgulamakta ve olumlu bir iş kültürünün teşvik edilmesinin hem iş tatmini hem de yüksek öğretim ortamlarında genel eğitmen refahını iyileştireceğini göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tükenmişlik, Fenomenoloji, Öğretmen Refahı, Yüksek Öğretim

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1. INTRODUCTION

Burnout is a psychological phenomenon first characterized by Freudenberger in the 1970s as a "state of fatigue or frustration brought about by devotion to a cause, a way of life, or a relationship that failed to produce the expected reward" (Freudenberger & Richelson, 1980, p.13). Over the years, researchers have refined this concept. Maslach and Leiter (2016) define professional burnout as a "psychological syndrome emerging as a prolonged response to chronic interpersonal stressors on the job," characterized by three dimensions: exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001, p.397). The World Health Organization (WHO, 2019) further describes burnout as an occupational phenomenon linked to mental well-being in the workplace, which is also associated with feelings of exhaustion, negativity, and diminished professional accomplishment. As noted by Ghanizadeh and Jahedizadeh (2015), burnout is often a result of chronic stress linked to frequent interactions and close contact with others, making it particularly prevalent in human services professions, where emotionally demanding relationships are common.

The widespread occurrence of burnout highlights its implications in various fields, particularly those that involve substantial human interaction. Teaching, a profession fundamentally rooted in interpersonal relationships, exemplifies a sector where burnout is frequently reported on a global scale. This has prompted extensive research into teacher burnout, paralleling inquiries in other vocations that require continuous engagement with others. Emotional exhaustion is widely recognized as the core symptom of burnout (Shirom, 2003), along with negative attitudes or cynicism and a diminished sense of professional efficacy. Teacher burnout can be one of the critical areas of inquiry due to its impact on educators' well-being and educational outcomes (Agyapong et al., 2022). Researchers have identified numerous factors contributing to the rapid escalation of burnout syndrome in the 21st century. It has become a significant challenge for educators, reducing job satisfaction and productivity (Gold & Roth, 2013; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014; Marek, Schaufeli, & Maslach, 2017; Mahmoodi-Shahrebabaki, 2019; Bakker & Schaufeli, 2000). Consequently, a number of studies have explored burnout within the educational context, identifying various contributing factors.

While the concept of burnout was originally introduced in the 1970s, comprehensive empirical research began in the 1980s with the development of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) by Maslach and Jackson (1981). Initially designed for human services professionals, this tool has since been adapted for educational settings, resulting in the MBI-ES, which assesses emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001). Numerous studies have classified sources of burnout into individual, organizational, and transactional factors, as well as background (like age and gender) and personality traits (Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2015). Current research indicates that teacher burnout is influenced by both organizational and individual variables. According to a systematic review conducted by Polatcan, Cansoy, and Kılınç (2019), individual factors include self-efficacy beliefs, emotional imbalances, and unrealistic expectations, while organizational factors encompass job satisfaction, perceived administrative support, student behavior, and school climate. They argue that burnout possesses professional, psychological, social, and organizational aspects, with a positive organizational culture potentially mitigating its impact. Existing literature identifies organizational factors, including workload, role conflict, role ambiguity, lack of support, alongside individual factors such as personality traits and self-efficacy as main contributors to burnout (Roloff et al., 2022; Tsang et al., 2022; Pandey& Sayed, 2024; Belay et al., 2023).

Most research on teacher burnout focuses on primary and secondary education contexts (Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2015; Polatcan, Cansoy, and Kılınç, 2019; Menon et al., 2024). However, there is a notable gap in studies addressing burnout among university faculty, despite a smaller volume of literature on this topic (Watts & Robertson, 2011). While quantitative approaches dominate the field (Menon et al., 2024), qualitative studies could provide deeper insights into the phenomenon of burnout within academia. To address this gap, the current phenomenological study aims to explore the experiences of burnout among experienced English for Academic Purposes (EAP) teaching staff at a state university in Türkiye. By examining how these

instructors perceive and experience burnout, this research seeks to enhance understanding of its implications in a higher education context. The following research questions have been explored in line with the purpose and the framework of this study:

1. How do experienced English language instructors define burnout?
2. Which lived experiences of these instructors lead them to associate themselves with burnout? ,
3. What is the cause and progress of their burnout?

2. METHOD

The current study adopts a qualitative approach, which is specifically preferred when the researchers need to explore an issue in a complex or detailed manner; when individuals are expected to share their stories; and when the researchers seek to discover the deeper thoughts and/or human behavior (Creswell, 2013). Considering the "locally situated" and "participant-oriented" (Richards, 2009, p.149) nature of qualitative studies, it was inevitable to choose this design to explore the phenomenon of burnout. The researchers investigated whether and why experienced instructors suffer from burnout and how they describe themselves as experiencing burnout, by focusing on participant perspectives in their natural settings, conditions, and context.

2.1. Research Design: Phenomenology

Phenomenology "is the study of 'phenomena': appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meanings things have in our experience" (Smith, 2018, para.4). As Creswell (2013) puts forward, in a phenomenological study, the aim is to describe 'the common meaning' extracted from the lived experiences of different individuals regarding a specific a phenomenon. In other words, "[p]henomenologists focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon" (Creswell, 2013, p. 107). As a methodological framework, phenomenology has evolved into a process that uncovers reality through individuals' narratives of their lived experiences with phenomena (Moustakas, 1994). Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is an approach that allows the researcher to add the meaning-making element to transcendental phenomenology. As Smith and Osborn (2015) assert "the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them" (p.41) with IPA.

The current study falls under the interpretivist (constructivist) phenomenology paradigm, which looks for an understanding of "participants' social construction of reality" (Richards, 2009, p.148). The interpretivist paradigm makes an effort to understand the subjective world of human experience and the individuals' interpretation of the world around them (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017, p.33) through the participants' point of view (Tracy, 2013). Therefore, this approach is in line with the purpose of this study, which is to investigate the point of view of the instructors suffering from the burnout phenomenon, and to deeply understand how they experience, communicate and share this phenomenon as a socially constructed reality.

One important characteristic of phenomenology is bracketing which could be utilized to ensure validity during data collection and analysis (Chan, Fung & Chien, 2013). Thus, researchers should determine what they already know about the phenomena, their beliefs and values regarding the phenomena and their past experiences in order to concentrate on and communicate accurately the lived experiences of the participants regarding the phenomena (Creswell, 2013; Chan, Fung & Chien, 2013). However, it is also argued that it does not seem possible for researchers to forget about what they already know or to eliminate all past learning and experiences. To this end, Giorgi (2009) describes bracketing "as a matter not of forgetting what has been experienced, but of not letting past knowledge be engaged while determining experiences" (as cited in Creswell, 2013, p.109). Some researchers even suggest postponing the literature review towards the end of the study (Hamill and Sinclair as cited in Chan, Fung & Chien, 2013) for bracketing purposes. Although a small scale literature review was conducted early on in the current study, it was after determining the

research problem and research questions. Furthermore, one of the researchers kept a reflexive diary to keep her background (experiences, ideas, values, and biases) out of the study as much as possible.

2.2. Population and sample

The current research was conducted at the School of Foreign Languages (SFL) of a large public university in Türkiye. The SFL offers various academic English courses for undergraduate students who should survive in the EMI context of the university. The three participants, who are instructors teaching EAP courses at SFL and who openly stated that they were suffering from 'burnout,' were selected via criterion sampling. According to Creswell (2013), in a phenomenological study, the researcher should work with individuals who experience a common phenomenon, and asserts that "[t]he more diverse the characteristics of the individuals, the more difficult it will be for the researcher to find common experiences, themes, and the overall essence of the experience for all participants" (p.187). In the current phenomenological study, the three participants were selected among the experienced instructors based on the following criteria (See Table 1): having at least 20 years of teaching experience; self-reportedly suffering from burnout; and volunteering to participate in the study at their convenience. Although gender is not an important criterion, it should be clarified that all three instructors who accepted to join the study were females.

Table 1.

Demographics of the Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Experience
Ceren	Female	43	21 years
Ela	Female	45	23 years
Leyla	Female	49	28 years

2.3. Data collection tools and procedure

2.3.1. Face-to-face phenomenological interviews with teachers

Interviewing, which "may be defined simply as a conversation with a purpose or may be described as some sort of face-to-face social interaction" (Berg &Lune, 2012, p.105), is the main data collection instrument in this study as this data collection instrument is preferred "particularly when investigators are interested in understanding the perceptions of participants or learning how participants come to attach certain meanings to phenomena or events" (Berg & Lune, 2012, p. 115). To this end, semi-structured interviews were utilized as the main data collection instrument to collect in-depth data. To maintain rich and comprehensible data regarding the experiences of the participants, the interview questions were mostly open-ended questions, such as what and how questions, in order for the participants to open up and elaborate more while telling their stories or experiences. The audio-recorded interviews were conducted face-to-face, and each lasted for about 30 to 50 minutes.

2.4. Data Analysis

While analyzing interview data, the steps suggested by Creswell (2013) by simplifying Moustakas' method were followed. After detailed transcription of interviews, significant statements about how individuals defined and in what way they were experiencing burnout were identified. Then, these statements were grouped into themes to form a *textural description* of what and a *structural description* of how the participants experienced burnout. In-vivo codes (i.e., verbatim examples from participants) were also noted to reach a definition and description of burnout (Creswell, 2103, pp. 234-235). Data were coded and categorized thematically both manually and by using the software, MAXQDA.

Credibility & Trustworthiness

To establish trustworthiness, member-checking was implemented for ethical purposes. Participants reviewed transcripts to correct inaccuracies or sensitive details, providing valuable feedback on the narratives' accuracy and language. The researchers had established trust due to long-standing relationships with participants, encouraging open communication. Bracketing was important to mitigate researcher biases. The researchers critically reflected on their backgrounds and experiences related to burnout, ensuring focus remained on participants' lived experiences. Participants were informed of the study's purpose and processes, with voluntary participation emphasized. All three signed informed consent forms, and pseudonyms were used to ensure anonymity.

3. FINDINGS and DISCUSSION

Based on a phenomenological approach, this study focuses on the lived experiences of participants to explore the phenomenon of "burnout." As van Manen (1984) states, phenomenological research concentrates on individuals' real-life experiences and seeks to understand the meanings they attach to these experiences. The immediate experience is the focus, rather than concepts or theories (van Manen, 1984). It is about what it means to be human or what it means to be an individual in various cultures, environments, or traditions. This study aims to derive possible meanings from the lived experiences of these individuals. In line with phenomenology's purpose, this study was interested in participants' lived experiences and the meaning of burnout that emerges from their stories, rather than adhering strictly to theoretical frameworks or verifying whether burnout actually occurred. The results are examined in two parts, considering the two research questions.

Defining and Describing Burnout: The Phoenix

The first research question, "How do experienced English language instructors define *burnout*," was explored by understanding the participants' past experiences in teaching and comparing their levels of stress and burnout from earlier years to today. Each participant provided a personal definition of burnout. Regarding feelings and experiences of burnout and stress during their early teaching years, participants' accounts share notable similarities. All three described themselves as high achievers capable of working long hours under intense conditions, without recalling any signs of burnout despite difficult work environments. Ceren, who began teaching at a prestigious private high school after completing her undergraduate education in ELT, recalls those years positively. She felt "special and different" due to her university entrance exam score and academic success, which fueled her motivation. Although her first years were challenging, marked by difficult students and strict oversight, she remained optimistic, solving problems and feeling a great sense of achievement. While she acknowledged stress for various reasons, particularly due to difficult students, she did not define that stress as burnout. On the contrary, she stated, "I felt useful; for that reason, that stress was bearable." Thus, despite recalling those years as stressful, burnout was not a factor.

Similarly, Ela and Leyla indicated satisfaction with their work environment in the language schools where they began their careers. Upon reflection, there was no evidence of burnout, despite long working hours. Ela was content in her role, feeling successful and appreciated. She noted that the workplace positively affected her ability to cope with challenges. Leyla remembers being anxious and excited about teaching as the youngest teacher with no experience. As the scholarship coordinator for the education unit and a translator, she did not recall symptoms of burnout, despite her hectic schedule. Although they didn't experience burnout during their novice years, these instructors began to feel burnout as they gained more experience, contrary to the expectation that early-career teachers would be more vulnerable (Kim, Youngs, & Frank, 2017). Age is identified as a significant factor related to burnout; that is, "[a]mong younger employees, the level of burnout is reported to be higher than among those over 30 or 40 years old" (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001, p. 410). Other studies, also, report that older teachers exhibit lower levels of burnout (e.g. Chenevey, Ewing, & Whittington, 2008; Koruklu et al., 2012; Sezer, 2012, El Helou, Nabhani & Bahous, 2016; Armstrong, 1977 as cited in Gold, 1985). This contradiction demands exploration into why the experienced instructors in our study experience burnout, especially as all three identify with this phenomenon at a stage in their careers

where they are expected to feel content. Ceren stated, "I think I should stop teaching as soon as possible. I no longer feel any joy in teaching. I just feel as if I am from a different world, and the students are from a totally different world." It seems she not only has lost motivation but also feels alienated. She describes her current situation as a cloud of negativity, which she finds unpleasant. Additionally, she believes she lacks both the power and will to effect change in her circumstances. She no longer finds her job meaningful and describes this feeling as "irritating" and "nerve-racking." The outlook regarding her job is bleak.

Ceren uses the metaphor of the phoenix to describe her understanding of burnout:

> This bird *anka* [Eng. *phoenix*]. So, it burns into ashes and then it comes together. So that's what I feel like. But I can't pull myself together any longer. That's not possible. I'm just ashes now. I've used up all my energy, and it happened from time to time. But every time something happened, I resurrected and returned to life. But now I just think that it's over. It's not going to be the same again any time.

To her, burnout is defined as exhausting all of one's energy and losing the urge and willingness to move forward. Ceren described this experience of burnout as gradual. It began three or four years ago while managing departmental changes, suggesting that she had been coping with prolonged stress. During this period, she lost confidence in some colleagues and the department due to illogical decisions. The burnout reflects a loss of energy, motivation, and hope. Despite identifying with burnout and believing she has exhausted her energy, she still checks her email, goes to work, and fulfills her duties. This may result from being "governed by a strict sense of moral duty." However, she questions this as a valid motivation for her job. Ultimately, she is not happy with her job anymore, feeling that, aside from financial gain, she cannot achieve her desired outcomes. Moreover, she seeks no responsibilities beyond teaching, indicating withdrawal. While she does not feel physically exhausted, she experiences emotional exhaustion accompanied by bitterness.

As an experienced instructor, Ela also noted that she is dissatisfied and does not find her job meaningful. However, she appreciates its financial rewards and the caliber of students at the university. Ela defines burnout as "being tired of what you're doing and not being able to achieve what you want." She points to slow-moving bureaucracy as a contributing factor. She explains:

> You want to improve things, you want to see development for yourself, your colleagues, your students, and ultimately for the university and the community in general. But at the end of the day, you feel stuck. You can't accomplish what you want because of bureaucracy, limitations, and some relatively unreasonable people.

Ela feels constrained by bureaucratic structures, recognizing that her feelings of burnout began during her administrative responsibilities. While she recalls her diligent work without appreciation, she does not blame her students. Thus, she continues to work hard for them in class. She sometimes doubts her career choice and contemplates not continuing, despite her success and love for her students.

Leyla parallels this experience, describing prolonged stress from various workplace factors. She views her emotional state as one of isolation and numbness. Similar to the other participants, she speaks of withdrawal not necessarily from teaching but from departmental duties. For example, she once actively participated in meetings, but now she merely listens without voicing opinions. She avoids extra roles beyond teaching. Leyla reports losing faith and respect for some colleagues, expressing irritation and reduced tolerance towards them. Nevertheless, she finds joy in teaching, believing the job is rewarding both financially and spiritually. She views teaching as not solely about conveying English grammar but also about helping students with various issues. For her, the most important aspect is "how you touch them." This altruistic perspective deepens the meaning she assigns to her profession. Leyla defines burnout as "not being appreciated by colleagues, not by students," highlighting how she associates burnout with the attitudes and ethical conduct of her coworkers.

Regarding burnout symptoms, participants did not mention physical exhaustion and maintained a sense of control over their work. Nevertheless, due to prolonged stress, they feel emotionally drained and dissatisfied. They easily become irritated by various problems and struggle to function effectively. Ultimately, they feel frustrated and cynical about their jobs. Although they have lost motivation within their departments, they still perceive teaching as meaningful.

Lived Experiences Leading to Burnout

The second main research question of this study had two parts: "Which lived experiences of these instructors lead them to associate themselves with burnout? What is the cause and progress of their burnout" The data pertaining to these questions are categorized into four themes reflecting participants' lived experiences:

1. Not feeling appreciated or valued

2. Issues related to administration

3. Attitudes of colleagues and students

4. Personality traits of the participants

The participants' experiences related to these themes are discussed through Maslach and Leiter's six areas model, which explains the causes of burnout. The six areas are workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values.

Not Feeling Appreciated or Valued

The first common theme extracted from the participants' experiences regarding burnout is the feeling of appreciation and value. The lack of recognition for hard work is a source of stress and burnout. A sense of appreciation may stem from the department, colleagues, higher-ranking administrators, and students.

Both Ela and Leyla mentioned that they have not been appreciated for their hard work within the department. Leyla faced comments suggesting that her achievements were unnecessary and that "no one asked for it." Ela believes their opinions are neither valued nor considered during departmental changes. Ceren shares similar sentiments about feeling underappreciated: "I mean, what I feel is that I am appreciated less than I should be. It's not about achievement; I think I achieve many things. But I don't have anyone I trust telling me, well that's really good work" Therefore, it can be concluded that all three participants suffer from a lack of appreciation.

The lack of appreciation from students is also highlighted as a significant cause of burnout. Although they value student evaluations, they agree on the unfairness of those evaluations. The grade-based relationship between students and instructors complicates this issue. As Ela stated:

Well, I'd like to do this evaluation. If the student is honest, I value student evaluation, but I'm unsure whether it should be included in the calculation of my performance points because we have this grade-based relationship. You know, I am the giver of the grade, and they are the receivers, I mean. Therefore, it complicates things.

Ceren finds student evaluations unfair, feeling unappreciated when she reads certain comments. She states, "I think, from their perspective, what students appreciate more is, you know, whether we were flexible, and our grades were high. There are some individual differences in this, probably. But overall, I think the student evaluations are not fair at all." Despite her dissatisfaction with this evaluation system, she believes student feedback is necessary, ideally in face-to-face interactions where both parties can express concerns and negotiate.

Leyla shares similar views, asserting that evaluations focus too much on grades: "Unfortunately, the majority of the students favor instructors who grant them AAs or BAs. Very few appreciate an instructor's style and effort." The issue extends beyond evaluation fairness to a general lack of appreciation for hard work from

instructors. Those who work diligently are often undervalued by both colleagues and students. According to Maslach and Leiter's model, the feeling of appreciation falls under social reward. When there is a mismatch between hard work and appreciation, burnout becomes inevitable. Social reward may be more important for some people than financial rewards as it is in the cases explained in the current study. If hard work is ignored and when there is lack of appreciation, individuals feel devalued (Maslach, Schaufeli& Leiter, 2001), which explains clearly why the participants feel burnout mainly due to lack of appreciation and recognition of others.

Issues Related to Administration

Another common theme is related to departmental administration. Each participant addresses different aspects of the administration that contribute to stress and burnout. Ceren's feelings of burnout began with her realization of illogical decisions made by department heads. She believes the department is not led effectively. For example, she criticizes the lack of preparedness for blended learning before the pandemic. She suggested that blended learning should have been planned long before the pandemic as there had been other natural disasters in Türkiye, such as earthquakes. However, the department was ill-prepared for the pandemic period.

Leadership qualities significantly influence feelings of burnout. Leyla expresses frustration that some administrators lack essential leadership skills. Ela shares concerns, noting that constant changes have created chaos in the department. According to Lunenburg and Ornstein (1996), when organizational change is not well-planned and effectively managed, it creates anxiety and fear on the subordinates. In such cases, it is not surprising to observe individuals with increased stress and/or burnout.

All three participants reported a lack of control within the department, contributing to their stress level, and burnout. They appreciate some autonomy but agree that insufficient control leads to issues. Ela articulated this sentiment: "I have control over my work to some extent. As I said, at least I can do whatever I like in the class… But this is a two-edged sword, actually. I mean, it is both good and bad… this creates unfairness." Teacher autonomy is essential, but without oversight, there is potential for discrepancies in grading and practices, which may result in inequality. The success of organizations depends on leadership quality, which profoundly impacts community members as they work toward a shared goal (Lahey, 1998). When leadership fails, members tend to experience stress.

Considering Maslach and Leiter's model, control is a factor, which is about not having enough power. The participants in the current study do have control over their work which is quite satisfying for them. Nevertheless, lack of control within the department creates stress and anxiety leading to burnout. In Maslach and Leiter's model, a mismatch regarding fairness feeds burnout in various ways. In this case, the participants feel disappointed by the situation in which not everyone works equally hard.

Attitudes of Colleagues and Students

Another influence on burnout is derived from the attitudes and characters of coworkers and students. Ceren expresses her frustration with complaints about workload and feedback coming from students and colleagues. For instance, she remarks, "we don't really know how to give feedback. I'm not exempt from this. We can be quite harsh and defensive." She believes that careful language use in communication is crucial for a peaceful environment. Ceren feels frustrated about students' mind-set that makes them exaggerate their problems and issues. She also finds some expectations of students not meaningful, such as demanding fun in academic English courses. She finds some student attitudes and comments childish (i.e. not liking the course but liking the teacher; liking the teacher, but not learning anything, etc.). She expects more mature comments and attitudes from them as she thinks they are nice, smart, and respectful. Finally, she feels frustrated about students gossiping about teachers on WhatsApp groups or social media.

Ela and Leyla similarly express frustrations with colleagues' attitudes. Ela feels agitated when coworkers do not meet her standards for hard work and intelligence. Leyla criticizes the lack of ethical behavior among

staff, like gossiping, lacking ethical concerns and empathy, stating that "these attitudes and lack of ethics contributed to my feelings of burnout." According to Maslach and Leiter's model, these concerns relate to community and values. When individuals "lose a sense of positive connection with others in the workplace" (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001, p.415), burnout can occur. When people feel isolated in a community, they start to lose shared values, feeling of membership and belonging. When people have conflicting values such as ethical conflicts or meaningless tasks, again a mismatch occurs. These mismatches in community and values may disturb harmony at a work place, resulting in more people in stress or burnout.

Personality Traits of the Participants

During the interviews, participants referenced their personality traits that might contribute to stress and burnout. They are all educated and qualified high achievers with a strong sense of responsibility, which can drive success but also increase susceptibility to stress. Specifically, strong moral convictions compel them to teach diligently, even amid burnout, but these values can lead to bitterness when they observe a lack of commitment in others. The big five personality traits that may affect the way people cope with stress negatively or positively are neuroticism (being worried, anxious, nervous, insecure, self-conscious), extraversion (being sociable, talkative, affectionate, joiner), openness (being original, imaginative, creative, daring), agreeableness (being good-natured, soft-hearted, selfless, sympathetic, forgiving) and conscientiousness (being conscientious, careful, reliable, hardworking, well-organized) (Lahey, 1998). Research indicates that personality traits such as neuroticism are positively correlated to burnout (Storm& Rothman, 2003; Unaldi et al., 2013) confirming the anxiousness of the participants in our study. Similarly, Ghanizadeh& Jahedizadeh (2015) report that neuroticism and extraversion lead to emotional exhaustion; agreeableness causes depersonalization; and conscientiousness and openness to learning result in personal accomplishment.

The participants described personal traits they believed contributed to their burnout. Ceren has a strong sense of justice and a desire for fairness, particularly in student evaluations. She states, "I am 100% aware that the just world hypothesis is flawed, but this does not stop me from trying to create one." This reflects her commitment to her work despite burnout and may also be linked to her sense of morality as she emphasizes her desire and insistence on fairness several times, just like Ela and Leyla. Ceren has a kind personality and a soft heart and has a "primitive desire to please others in return for love and appreciation is [her] soft spot", which indicates her agreeableness. All three participants attach importance to work ethics and "believe in the power of making things right together" (Ela) and consider "colleagues with low work ethics a disgrace to the profession" (Ceren). Additionally, Leyla identifies herself with awareness and understanding and expects matching understanding and quality at her workplace, without which she feels disappointed: "I think I am constantly in need of cognition, and that is why I find it rewarding, yet challenging, to understand things and I put a considerable amount of cognitive effort in this quest". She also describes herself as a high achiever who sets high standards, which is "another possible reason for [her] feeling of burn-out [because she finds herself] struggling for achieving goals and, to that end, set "relatively" high standards for both [her]self and the workplace". She is also a self-disciplined and goal-oriented individual who works persistently hard to achieve her goals. When being harshly criticized for this attitude instead of being appreciated, she feels burnout. While traits discussed do not perfectly align with the Big Five, a desire for fairness and a strong work ethic are prominent. When these needs are unmet, feelings of frustration, stress, and burnout inevitably follow.

4. CONCLUSION

This study examined the phenomenon of burnout through the lived experiences of three university instructors in Türkiye who identify with this phenomenon. Bruner (1987) emphasizes that life is shaped by individuals' interpretations and narratives, making their subjective experiences valuable for understanding burnout. Data from semi-structured interviews identified common burnout triggers, including lack of

appreciation, mismanagement, negative attitudes of colleagues and students, and certain personality traits. Participants generally aligned with the established literature, which characterizes burnout as prolonged workplace stress manifesting in exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Their descriptions highlight emotional fatigue, a desire to withdraw, and a perceived loss of professional meaning, defining the concept of burnout as an erosion of engagement where initially meaningful work becomes exhausting and unfulfilling (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001).

Despite experiencing emotional exhaustion and cynicism, none of the instructors cited interactions with students as a burnout source, suggesting that workplace dynamics and management play a more significant role in their experiences. The participants expressed a strong sense of belonging and appreciation for their university, which motivates their continued dedication despite burnout symptoms. Their dissatisfaction appears rooted in a lack of recognition, ineffective management, and challenging colleague relationships, aligning with prior research indicating that highly educated individuals are particularly vulnerable to burnout due to elevated expectations and unmet goals (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001).

Furthermore, the study underscores the potential contagiousness of burnout, as emotional states can spread among colleagues working closely together (Edelwich & Brodsky, 1980; Bakker & Schaufeli, 2000; Bakker et al., 2001; Hatfield et al., 1993; Bakker, Le Blanc & Schaufeli, 2005). This highlights the importance of fostering supportive work environments and implementing targeted interventions to mitigate stressors that contribute to burnout. Protective factors such as psychological resilience and mindfulness may serve as crucial buffers, influencing how stressors impact burnout (Liu & Du, 2024; Polat et al., 2023).

5. IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Our findings highlight the necessity for institutions to develop strategies that foster a supportive and appreciative teaching environment, such as implementing recognition programs and constructive feedback mechanisms that enhance teachers' sense of value, which in turn can mitigate burnout. Promoting open communication and collaborative practices among colleagues can further foster a positive community, reducing feelings of isolation and disconnection. From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the existing literature by providing a nuanced, phenomenological understanding of burnout among university EAP instructors in Türkiye, underscoring the relevance of Maslach and Leiter's six areas model in explaining burnout within higher education contexts. It demonstrates how personal traits intersect with organizational factors, advocating for a more context-specific application of burnout theories that emphasizes the importance of subjective experiences and social construction in understanding occupational burnout.

Methodologically, the use of interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) proved effective in capturing the depth and complexity of instructors' lived experiences. However, certain research elements of the study, namely the single research site and the small, purposively selected sample of three instructors restricts the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, data collection was confined to one academic term, providing only a snapshot of the participants' experiences. Future research involving multiple sites and longitudinal data collection could offer a more comprehensive understanding of burnout dynamics across diverse contexts and over time. Such approaches could also facilitate triangulation of findings through mixed-methods strategies, enriching the robustness of results. Addressing these limitations will contribute significantly to creating healthier academic environments that support the well-being and retention of highly qualified educators.

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GENİŞLETİLMİŞ TÜRKÇE ÖZET

1. GİRİŞ

Tükenmişlik ilk olarak 1970lerde Freudenberger tarafından, beklentiyi karşılamayan mesleki faaliyetler, bir amaca adanmışlık, yaşam biçimi ya da ilişkilerin neden olduğu yorgunluk ya da hayal kırıklığı olarak tanımlanmıştır. Yıllar içerisinde bu tanım farklı araştırmacılar tarafından geliştirilmiştir. Maslach and Leiter (2016) profesyonel tükenmişliği, işyerinde süregelen kişilerarası stres etkenlerine uzun sureli maruz kalmaya cevaben ortaya çıkan psikolojik bir sendrom olarak tanımlamakta, ve yorgunluk, sinizm ve yetersizliği, tükenmişliği karakterize eden üç boyut olarak eklemektedir (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Dünya Sağlık Örgütü (DSÖ, 2019) tükenmişliği, yorgunluk hisleri, olumsuzluk ve azalan profesyonel başarı ile ilişkili olarak, işyerinde zihinsel iyi oluş hali ile bağlantılı mesleki bir olay olarak tanımlamaktadır. Tükenmişliğin, insanlarla birebir iletişim halinde olunan meslek gruplarında daha çok görüldüğü göz önünde bulundurulduğunda, öğretmenlik değişik sebeplerden tükenmişlikle en çok karşılaşılan mesleklerden biri olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır.

Bu fenomenolojik çalışma, Türkiye'deki bir devlet üniversitesinde Akademik İngilizce (İng., English for Academic Purposes) dersleri veren öğretim görevlilerinin tükenmişlik deneyimlerini derinlemesine incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Tükenmişlik kavramı, özellikle eğitim alanında, mesleğin doğası gereği yoğun etkileşim, yüksek beklentiler ve sınırlı kaynaklar gibi nedenlerle önemli bir sorun olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Akademik İngilizce (Aİ) eğitmenleri, öğrencilere yabancı dilde akademik beceri kazandırma gibi zor bir rol üstlenerek, genellikle geniş öğrenci kitleleriyle ve çeşitli idari talep ve değişikliklerle karşı karşıya kalabilmektedirler. Çalışma, Türkiye'de alanyazında bu alandaki boşluğu doldurarak, İngilizce öğretim görevlilerinin yaşadığı duygusal ve mesleki tükenmişliği, onların kendi bakış açılarıyla ele almayı hedeflemektedir. Bu amaçla, katılımcıların deneyim ve hikayelerini derinlemesine ve detaylı olarak inceleyebilmek adına nitel yaklaşım benimsenmiştir. Çalışmada irdelenen araştırma sorular şunlardır:

1. Deneyimli İngilizce öğretim görevlileri tükenmişliği nasıl tanımlamaktadır?
2. Bu öğretim görevlilerinin hangi yaşantı ve deneyimleri, kendilerini tükenmişlik olgusuyla ilişkilendirmelerine yol açmaktadır?
3. Tükenmişliğin bu kişilerde ortaya çıkış nedenleri ve ilerleyişi nasıldır?

2. YÖNTEM

Creswell (2013)'e göre, nitel yöntem, özellikle araştırmada, konuyu derinlemesine keşfedebilmek, katılımcıların öykülerini paylaşmalarını sağlayabilmek ve derin insan düşünce ve davranışlarını keşfedebilmek için tercih edilmektedir. Nitel araştırmaların "yerel olarak konumlanma" ve " katılımcı odaklılık" (Richards, 2009, p.149) doğası göz önüne alındığında, bu çalışmada tükenmişlik fenomenini inceleyebilmek için nitel araştırma yöntemi tercih edilmiştir. Araştırma deseni olarak, insanların bir fenomen ya da kavram ile ilgili deneyimlerini ve algılarını kendi deneyimledikleri şekilde anlamayı hedefleyen (Smith, 2018) fenomenoloji tercih edilmiştir. Amaç, farklı belirli bir fenomen ile ilgili olarak, farklı bireylerin yasanmış deneyimlerinden çıkarılan ortak anlamı betimlemektir (Creswell, 2013). Başka bir deyişle, araştırmacılar katılımcıların tükenmişlik deneyimlerindeki ortak paydaya odaklanmaktadır.

Bireylerin yaşantılarının özünü anlamaya ve bu yaşantıların ortak yönlerini ortaya koymaya imkân tanıyan ve bu nitel çalışmanın araştırma yöntemi olarak belirlenmiş olan fenomenoloji deseni bağlamında, üç deneyimli öğretim görevlisi ile yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Fenomenolojik çalışmalardaki araştırmacının incelenen ortak olguyu deneyimlemiş bireylerle çalışması esasına bağlı olarak bu çalışmanın katılımcıları ölçüt örneklem yöntemi ile belirlenmiştir. Katılımcı seçiminde şu ölçütler esas alınmıştır: en az 20 yıl deneyim sahibi olmak, tükenmişlik deneyimi yaşıyor olmak ve çalışmaya katılmaya gönüllü olmak. Görüşmelerde, katılımcıların tükenmişliğe ilişkin kendi tanımları, bu duygunun ortaya çıkmasına neden olan koşullar ve başa çıkma stratejileri gibi konular ele alınmıştır. Yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler, araştırmacılara temel sorular yöneltirken katılımcıların kendi deneyimlerini serbestçe ifade

etmelerine olanak sağlamıştır. Görüşmelerden ses kaydı olarak toplanan veriler metine dönüştürülmüş, analiz edilmiş ve fenomenoloji çalışmalarının gerektirdiği şekilde kategorize edilerek dört ana temaya ulaşılmıştır: Takdir edilmeme ya da değer verilmeme hissi; yönetime ilişkin sorunlar; meslektaş ve öğrencilerin tutumları; ve katılımcıların kişilik özellikleri.

3. BULGULAR, TARTIŞMA VE SONUÇ

Araştırma bulguları, öğretim görevlilerinde tükenmişliği tetikleyen başlıca etmenlerin takdir eksikliği, etkisiz idari uygulamalar ve hem meslektaşlar hem de öğrencilerle yaşanan olumsuz etkileşimler olduğunu göstermektedir. Katılımcılar, özellikle yöneticiler tarafından emeklerinin görünür kılınmamasının ve başarılarının takdir edilmemesinin motivasyonları üzerinde olumsuz etkisi olduğunu belirtmişlerdir. Ayrıca, idari süreçlerde yaşanan belirsizlikler, bürokratik yükler ve sürekli değişen uygulamaların planlama yapmakta zorluklara neden olduğu ve duygusal yükü artırdığı ifade edilmiştir. Meslektaşlararası iletişim ve iş birliği eksikliği, rekabetçi veya mesafeli tutumlar ve öğrencilerle yaşanan sorunlar da katılımcıların tükenmişlik hissini etkileyen kişilerarası dinamikler arasında yer almıştır.

Katılımcıların betimlediği tükenmişlik belirtileri, mevcut alanyazın ile örtüşmektedir. Yorgunluk, enerjisizlik, sosyal geri çekilme ve mesleki yetersizlik hissi en fazla dile getirilen belirtilerdir. Ancak bu öğretim elemanlarının duygusal tükenmişliklerini daha çok örgütsel ve kişilerarası sorunlara atfetmeleri dikkat çekicidir. Bu durum, EAP öğretmenliğinin yalnızca bireysel çaba ve pedagojik yetkinlikten ibaret olmadığını; aynı zamanda kurumsal destek, mesleki saygınlık ve iş birliği ortamı gibi unsurların da iş doyumu ve mesleki iyilik hâlini belirlediğini göstermektedir.

Öğretmenlerin meslekleriyle ilişkileri karmaşık bir tablo sunmaktadır. Katılımcılar bir yandan üniversitelerine karşı aidiyet ve bağlılık hissettiklerini, öğrencilerine katkıda bulunmaktan ve akademik yaşamın bir parçası olmaktan gurur duyduklarını ifade etmişlerdir. Diğer yandan ise işlerine yönelik bağlılıklarının zaman içinde aşındığını ve mesleklerine ilişkin idealist beklentilerinin azaldığını belirtmişlerdir. Bu tezatlık tükenmişliğin yalnızca bireysel bir sorun olmadığını; sistemik, kültürel ve kurumsal boyutları da bulunan bir olgu olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır.

Çalışma, bu bulgular ışığında sistematik zorlukların ele alınması ve daha destekleyici bir akademik ortamın teşvik edilmesi gerekliliğini vurgulamaktadır. Aİ öğretmenlerinin deneyimlerinin, Türkiye'deki yükseköğretim kurumlarında genel olarak akademik personelin yaşadığı sorunlarla benzerlik göstermesi, bu konunun sadece belirli bir alanla sınırlı kalmadığını göstermektedir. Katılımcıların anlatıları, bireysel dayanıklılık veya kişisel başa çıkma stratejilerinin tek başına yeterli olmayabileceğini; kurumsal düzeyde politika ve uygulamaların iyileştirilmesinin şart olduğunu düşündürmektedir. Daha adil iş yükü dağılımı, şeffaf ve etkili idari süreçler, meslektaşlar arası iş birliğini ve sosyal desteği artıran yapılar ile öğretmenlerin başarılarını görünür kılan takdir mekanizmaları gibi adımlar, tükenmişlik hissini azaltmada önemli rol oynayabilir.

Sonuç olarak, bu araştırma, üniversitede Aİ alanında çalışan İngilizce öğretim görevlilerinin tükenmişlik deneyimlerini onların kendi ifadeleriyle ortaya koyarak, bireysel deneyimler ve daha geniş kurumsal dinamiklerin etkileşiminin anlaşılmasının önemine dikkat çekmektedir. Bulgular, yükseköğretim kurumlarında olumlu bir iş kültürünün teşvik edilmesinin hem iş tatminini hem de akademik personelin genel iyi oluş halini artırabileceğini ortaya koymaktadır. Böyle bir yaklaşım, yalnızca bireysel öğretim görevlilerinin değil, genel olarak kurumun da verimliliğini ve kalite standartlarını yükseltecektir. Bu bağlamda, tükenmişlik olgusuna karşı geliştirilecek stratejilerin sadece bireysel düzeyde değil, örgütsel ve sistemsel düzeyde de ele alınması, sürdürülebilir bir akademik çalışma ortamı yaratmanın anahtarı olarak görülmelidir.

ARAŞTIRMANIN ETİK İZNİ

Bu çalışmada "Yükseköğretim Kurumları Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etiği Yönergesi" kapsamında uyulması gerektiği belirtilen tüm kurallara uyulmuştur. Yönergenin ikinci bölümü olan "Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etiğine Aykırı Eylemler" başlığı altında belirtilen eylemlerden hiçbiri gerçekleştirilmemiştir.

Etik kurul izin bilgileri

Etik değerlendirmeyi yapan kurul adı: Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu

Etik değerlendirme kararının tarihi: 21.01.2025

Etik değerlendirme belgesi protokol numarası: 0086-ODTUİAEK-2025

ARAŞTIRMACILARIN KATKI ORANI

1. yazarın araştırmaya katkı oranı %60; 2. yazarın araştırmaya katkı oranı %40'tır.

Yazar 1: Araştırmanın tasarlanması, veri toplama araçlarının geliştrilmesi, verilerin toplanması, analizi ve raporlaşması, bulguların ve sonucun yazılması.

Yazar 2: Yöntemin belirlenmesi, veri analiz ve yorumlanma süreçlerinde danışmanlık, makalenin tüm kısımlarının düzenlenmesi.

ÇATIŞMA BEYANI (CONFLICT OF INTEREST)

Herhangi bir kurum veya kuruluşla bir çıkar çatışması yoktur.