


English Language Teachers' Occupational Stress Level and its Effects on their Self-efficacy in Teaching and Learning Environment

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between foreign language teachers' occupational stress and its effects on their self-efficacy teaching and learning environment. This study includes 48 participants including English language teachers who have different characteristics such as age, gender, marital status, and year of experiences, working at different foundation universities in a city of Turkey. The data of this study was collected via Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale and the self-reported questionnaire. The findings of data were analyzed by SPSS statistics program and descriptive survey study. It was found that teachers' occupational stress affect their self-efficacy in teaching and learning environment. Understanding the relations between teachers' self-efficacy and occupational stress is essential to view the challenges as opportunities for development. The findings emphasize the need of taking proactive measures to lower stress and provide a positive and qualified teaching and learning environment at the individual and organizational levels. A high level of self-efficacy may be developed and maintained by instructors who effectively navigate these challenges, which will ultimately enhance the training they give students as well as the instructors themselves.

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INTRODUCTION

The noble job of teaching is extremely important in determining how societies will develop in the future. However, the demands of the job frequently lead to high levels of occupational stress among educators, which can negatively affect their sense of self-efficacy. This article investigates the complexity between the occupational stress experienced by English language instructors and how it affects their sense of self-efficacy in the classroom. Within the realm of education, occupational stress pertains to the mental, bodily, and emotional exhaustion resulting from the numerous demands and issues associated with being a teacher. The phenomenon in question is complex and multifaceted, encompassing a range of stressors such as overwhelming workloads, administrative obligations, student behavior problems, and societal expectations.

OCCUPATIONAL STRESS

In today's modern world people have uploaded works because of the life conditions. They try to do all of them in a limited time and they have difficulty in dealing with all of the problems they encounter. Especially teachers are affected so much from this situation. It makes stress for them in their job. Teachers' experience of unpleasant negative emotions stemming from components of their work as teachers that are caused by a perception of threat in handling the demands imposed upon them is defined as occupational stress by Kyriacou (2011).

Teachers who are displeased with their work tend to have reluctant attitude to their job and reflect it negatively to their students' motivation via emotional contagion (Hatfield, Cacioppo, and Rapson, 1993). By doing these unfortunately, they can not supply their students' needs about their autonomy and competences in their learning process (Ryan and Deci, 2000; Klusmann, Kunter, Trautwein, Lüdtke, and Baumert, 2008). Occupational stress among teachers is a multifaceted phenomenon influenced by a myriad of factors. The study of Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman (1984) on stress and coping theory provides a foundational framework for comprehending how teachers perceive and respond to stressors. According to Lazarus and Folkman, stress arises from the appraisal of a situation as exceeding one's resources to cope effectively. In the context of teaching, stressors may include heavy workload, student misbehavior, administrative pressures, and the ever-evolving educational landscape.

Teachers in language learning and teaching classes have big tensions during teaching process which requires patience, positive attitude, repeating again and again, guiding, observing, doing tests, checking answers, evaluating the students, and like these. Considering all these, it is understood that teaching can be stressful. Cedoline (1982) says that high level of stress can lead to distress and physical pain. Today, teaching at schools is considered as one of the 'high stress' occupations. Teachers are regarded as the people who bear the very high-level stress caused by their daily activities and today's schooling system (Hepburn and Brown, 2001). There are many harmful effects of stress on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers such as not feeling the job satisfaction in a good way and negative effect on teachers' performance and effectiveness (Jepson & Forrest, 2006). When instructors are not under professional stress, they will be more at ease in the classroom, which will favorably impact the learning and teaching process for parents, students, and teachers alike. Teachers that are less stressed not only have the ability to educate more effectively in the classroom, but they also foster a more qualified and engaging learning environment. (Arora, 2013).

SELF-EFFICACY

The notion of self-efficacy, which was first presented by psychologist Albert Bandura, is essential to understand human psychology and teaching profession (Bandura, 1977). Bandura's social cognitive theory points that self-efficacy, defined as one's belief in their ability to perform specific tasks, plays a crucial role in determining behavior and psychological well-being (Bandura, 1977). It speaks to a person's confidence in their capacity to carry out duties, reach objectives, and get over obstacles in

particular fields. Within the educational context, teacher self-efficacy refers to the assurance and conviction that educators possess regarding their ability to positively impact student learning outcomes. Essential elements of teacher self-efficacy are classroom management, instructional tactics, student engagement, and problem-solving skills. In the context of teaching, self-efficacy reflects a teacher's confidence in their instructional capabilities and their belief in the potential positive impact on students.

Even though teaching is stressful, educators employ a range of coping mechanisms to get through trying times. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) distinguished between two primary coping strategies: emotion-focused coping, which entails managing emotional reactions to stress, and problem-focused coping, which is confronting the stressor head-on. Scholars such as Masten (2001) have underlined the importance of resilience in reducing the negative impact of work-related stress on self-efficacy. Teachers that are resilient exhibit flexibility and tenacity in the face of difficulties, which supports the preservation or even growth of their self-efficacy.

AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between foreign language teachers' occupational stress and its effects on their self-efficacy in teaching and learning environment. In this study, there are two research questions as below:

The first research question is related to self-efficacy of EFL teachers.

1. Are there any significant relationships between self efficacy of EFL teachers and teacher characteristics?

The second research question is related to stress of EFL teachers.

2. To what extent do the stress factors affect EFL teachers in teaching and learning environment?

In the light of the research questions the findings were examined and evaluated by paying attention to the related studies and research.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The importance of the study lies in its exploration of the intricate interplay between foreign language teachers' occupational stress and their self-efficacy within the teaching and learning environment. There are some reasons why this research is significant such as giving information on educational practices, enhancing teacher development, improving student outcomes, promoting organizational well-being, guiding policy and practice and contributing to research in the field of education. In summary, this study holds significance for various stakeholders in education, from teachers and students to policymakers and researchers. By understanding and addressing the complex interplay between occupational stress and self-efficacy, educators can work towards creating supportive environments that foster both teacher and student success.

LITERATURE REVIEW

EFL teachers have some difficulties in psychological resilience while experiencing their teaching life due to the occupational stress. The influences can change according to teachers' characters, personal views, psychological attitudes and also contextual factors. The level of stress of teachers can change according to their characters, ages, marital status, gender, physical atmosphere of their working places, tenancy, teaching experiences, curriculum, administration, economical problems, and salaries. Travers (2001) mentions that undesirable and unpredictable conditions may influence the performance of the teachers to do their job properly. Unpleasant work and social environment of the schools and their physical conditions such as class size, fresh air of the classes, noise levels, are also effective in teachers' teaching performances. When they like the conditions and feel good, they

perform better in teaching process. Travers (2001) emphasizes that incorrect basal elements have a direct impact on education, impose restrictions, and produce tension by citing the works of other experts working on a related topic. These fundamental elements comprise “poor physical working conditions, class sizes, noise levels, unpleasant work environment, and inadequate school buildings and equipment” (p. 138).

RELATED STUDIES

The significance of the problem becomes clear when the studies on teachers' occupational stress are examined (Boyle, Borg, Falzon, & Baglioni 1995; Pithers & Soden, 1998; Kyriacou, 2000, 2011; Forlin, 2001; Travers, 2001; Putter, 2003). Because teachers who are happy in their work are better instructors. However, as stress levels rise and instructors experience negative emotions, they may develop physical or mental health issues that lead to discontent and inefficiency in their profession.

In the research of Borg and Riding (1991), almost 34% of Maltese teachers had high level of occupational stress in their work life which causes feeling bad. Kyriacou (2000) states that teaching stress can affect the teachers and they can feel as stressful as working at the police station, prison office, traffic control places, hospitals like doctors and nurses. In the process, stress can affect badly the masses day by day. Coates and Thoresan (1976) state that many years ago Kaplan estimated that stress can affect about 200,000 teachers in the US and then five million students.

Teachers may experience burnout due to work-related stress. In 2016, Sadeghi and Khezrlou conducted a study involving forty English as a foreign language (EFL) instructors in Iran. The results demonstrated that organizational concerns such teaching expectations, lesson goals, course hours, and school evaluation problems, in addition to the curriculum, are the main sources of occupational stress for English instructors.

Sadeghi and Khezrlou (2016) conducted a study involving 40 instructors working in Iran to determine the level of burnout among Iranian EFL teachers and the correlation between burnout and environmental and personal variables. Their results showed that elements connected to the curriculum and organizational structure exacerbate the occupational stress experienced by English language instructors. They argue that the disparities and imbalances between course objectives and educational requirements, as well as between course resources, class schedules, and assessment procedures, cause stress for instructors at work.

The study conducted by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) revealed a high correlation between poor self-efficacy and occupational stress among teachers. Ongoing stress can be detrimental to teachers' self-confidence in their ability to manage challenges in the classroom, which can affect their instructional strategies and overall effectiveness.

Teachers' work stress and low self-efficacy are strongly correlated, according to research by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001). Teachers' confidence in their capacity to handle difficulties in the classroom can be undermined by ongoing stress, which can have an influence on their teaching methods and general efficacy.

Forlin (2001), upon analyzing the results of seventy-two research published between 1980 and 1993, found twenty-four common possible sources of stress for teachers. The results showed that stressors were categorized into three main groups: administrative, classroom-based, and personal.

Teachers' heightened stress levels are a result of both situational and dispositional elements, as Kyriacou (2001) has shown. Situational elements involve external pressures within the educational system, whereas dispositional factors are tied to individual qualities and coping mechanisms. These components form the complex structure of the instructor concurrently.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

This study includes 48 participants including English language teachers who have different characteristics such as age, gender, marital status, and year of experiences, working at different foundation universities in a city of Turkey. The mean age of people aged between 22 and 54 is 37.67 and the standard deviation is ± 6.49 .

DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

In this study, two types of data collection tools were used. One of them is Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). There are short and long forms of self efficacy questionnaire and the short one was used. It includes some dimensions such as *efficacy in student engagement* (items 2, 3, 4, 11), *efficacy in instructional strategies* (items 5, 9, 10, 12), *efficacy in classroom management* (items 1, 6, 7, 8). The short form results for the scale's reliability were as follows: mean 7.1, SD .98, and alpha .90. In the study conducted by Tschannen-Moran, M., and Woolfolk Hoy, A. (2001), the reliabilities for the subscale scores of the scale were as follows: Engagement 7.3, 1.1, .87, 7.2, 1.2, .81; Instruction 7.3, 1.1, .91, 7.3, 1.2, .86; Management 6.7, 1.1, .90, 6.7, 1.2, .86. In the study done by Erdoğan (2003) for Turkish translation of the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale short form, the variables' computed construct reliability values were 0.78 for classroom management, 0.78 for student involvement, and 0.83 for the effectiveness of instructional practices. There was convergent validity for the scale.

The other tool is the self-reported questionnaire adapted from Ferguson, Frost, and Hall (2012). In the original form, it consists of 15 survey items that measure stress symptoms and 46 indicators that measure stress causes. Cronbach's alpha for the questionnaire was calculated and found to be .951 and the value was found as $p < .05$ (Ferguson, Frost, and Hall, 2012). For this study, the questionnaire was adapted according to the aim of the study in order to understand the EFL teachers' occupational stress level and its effects on their self-efficacy in teaching and learning environment. A specially designed questionnaire was employed as the data elicitation tool to look into the existence of work satisfaction, stress linked to teaching, and its associations with age, gender, and marital status. Moreover, a stress questionnaire was used and its sub dimensions such as workload, student behaviour, employment conditions, administration, depression and anxiety were examined in the study.

FINDINGS

In the light of research questions the findings are examined. The first research question is asking if there are any significant relationships between self efficacy of EFL teachers and teacher characteristics. Self efficacy of EFL teachers includes the dimensions such as student engagement, instructional strategies, classroom management. Moreover, teacher characteristics includes age, gender and marital status.

In Table 1 frequency distributions for gender, marital status and age are given.

Table 1. Frequency Distributions for Teachers' Characteristics

		<i>n</i>	%
Gender	Male	15	31.2
	Female	33	68.8
Marital status	Single	26	54.2
	Married	22	45.8

In Table 2, descriptive statistics for subdimensions are given. Mean values are out of 9 and the sense is getting higher while the mean is closing to 9.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for the Subdimensions of Sense of Self-Efficacy Scale

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Student engagement	6.69	1.50
Instructional strategies	7.24	1.57
Class management	7.00	1.79

The mean of student engagement is 6,7 and it's closer to 7 which represents "quite a bit". The mean of instructional strategies is 7,2 and it exceeds 7. So the mean is between "quite a bit and "a great deal". The mean of class management is 7 and it represents "quite a bit".

Table 3. Relationships Between Subdimensions of Self-Efficacy Scale

	Student engagement	Instructional strategies
Student engagement	1	
Instructional strategies	.757	1
Class management	.679	.827

In Table 3, Pearson Correlation analysis was used. According to findings, there is a high positive and significant relationship between student engagement and instructional strategies (0.76; $p < 0,05$). Student engagement and instructional strategies scores are increasing or decreasing together.

There is a positive and significant relationship (0.68; $P < 0.05$) between student engagement and classroom management. Student engagement and classroom management scores are increasing or decreasing together. Moreover, there is a high positive and significant relationship between instructional strategies and classroom management (0.83; $p < 0.05$). Instructional strategies and classroom management scores are increasing or decreasing together.

Findings related to second research question

The second research question is related to stress of EFL teachers and asks to what extent the stress factors affect EFL teachers in teaching and learning environment. The stress factors include workload, student behaviour, employment conditions, administration, depression and anxiety. In Table 4 frequency distributions for experience, grade level, position and current assignment are given.

Table 4. Frequency Distributions For Teachers' Characteristics

		n	%
Experience (years)	0-4	3	6.3
	5-9	6	12.5
	10-14	18	37.5
	15-19	16	33.3
	20-24	5	10.4
Grade level	JK/SK	1	7.1
	Grades 7 to 8	1	7.1
	Grades 6 to 12	12	85.7
Employment Position	Full time	47	95.9
	Part time	1	2.0
	Long term occasional	1	2.0
Assignment	Special education	1	2.4
	Occasional teaching	1	2.4
	University	40	95.2

In Table 5, descriptive statistics for subdimensions of teachers stress scale are given. Mean values are out of 5 and the stress is getting higher while the mean is closing to 5.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics of Stress Factors

	<i>N</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
Workload	48	1.00	4.00	2.9739	.65919
Student behaviour	48	1.00	4.44	2.9669	.77353
Employment Conditions	48	1.00	4.13	2.9782	.70413
Administration	48	1.00	4.00	3.1000	.75255
Depression	48	1.00	4.22	2.7333	.78503
Anxiety	48	1.00	4.75	2.6250	.79580

The mean workload score is 2.97 and it represents moderate stress level. The mean student behaviour score is also 2.97 and student behaviour is a moderate stress factor. The mean condition score is 2.98 and it's thought that conditions' effect was moderate on stress. The highest score is for administration with a mean of 3.1 but it's also moderate.

When depression and anxiety mean scores were evaluated, they are respectively 2.7 and 2.6 as the least scores and teachers' depression and anxiety levels are moderate since the mean values are approximately 3.

Before testing whether there were significant differences between groups according to teachers' stress scores, continuous variables were tested for normality. To test variables whether they were normally distributed or not, one sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test is used and it was seen that distributions were not normal. Then, Mann Whitney U Test and Kruskal Wallis Test are used for looking at the differences among subdimensions.

To test whether there was a significant difference between the mean ranks of males and females according to their stress levels, a Mann Whitney U Test is used.

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics of Gender and Subdimensions

	<i>Gender</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean Rank</i>	<i>Sum of Ranks</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>P</i>
Workload	Male	15	28.21	536.00	243	0.302
	Female	33	23.84	739.00		
Student behaviour	Male	15	29.84	567.00	212	0.098
	Female	33	22.84	708.00		
Employment Conditions	Male	15	27.58	524.00	255	0.428
	Female	33	24.23	751.00		
Administration	Male	15	24.11	458.00	268	0.592
	Female	33	26.35	817.00		
Depression	Male	15	29.24	555.50	223	0.155
	Female	33	23.21	719.50		
Anxiety	Male	15	26.89	511.00	268	0.593
	Female	33	24.65	764.00		

There is not a significant difference between males and females for any dimensions since all p values are greater than 0,05.

Table 8. Relationships Between Subdimensions of Stress Questionnaire Spearman Correlation

	<i>Workload</i>	<i>Student behaviour</i>	<i>Conditions</i>	<i>Administration</i>	<i>Depression</i>
Workload	1				
Student behaviour	.769**	1			
Employment	.873**	.714**	1		
Administration	.770**	.539**	.673**	1	
Depression	.625**	.462**	.557**	.416**	1
Anxiety	.700**	.595**	.615**	.403**	.762**

Student behavior and workload have a strong, positive correlation (0.77; $P < 0.05$). There is a correlation between the increase or decrease in workload and student behavior scores. Workload and employment conditions have a strong positive and significant connection (0.87; $p < 0,05$). Scores for employment conditions and workload are either rising or falling simultaneously.

Workload and administrative are positively and significantly correlated (0.77; $P < 0.05$). Similtaneous increases or decreases in workload and administration scores are visible. Workload and depression have a substantial and positive connection (0.63; $p < 0.05$). Depression and workload are either rising or falling together. Workload and anxiety have a strong positive and significant connection (0.70; $p < 0.05$). Anxiety and workload are either rising or falling concurrently.

Student behavior and conditions have a strong positive and significant association (0.71; $p < 0.05$). Conditions scores and student behavior are either rising or falling concurrently. Student behavior and administration have a favorable and substantial association (0.54; $p < 0,05$). Administration ratings and student behavior are either rising or falling together. Student behavior and depression have a positive and substantial connection (0.46; $p < 0.05$). Depression scores and student behavior are either rising or falling simultaneously.

Anxiety and student behavior have a substantial and favorable connection (0.60; $p < 0.05$). Anxiety levels and student behavior are either rising or falling concurrently. Employment conditions and administration have a substantial and favorable connection (0.67; $p < 0.05$). Together, conditions and administration scores are rising or falling.

Conditions and depression have a substantial and positive connection (0.56; $p < 0,05$). Depression scores and conditions are either rising or falling concurrently.

Conditions and anxiety have a substantial and positive connection (0.62; $p < 0.05$). Concurrently, conditions and anxiety ratings are rising or falling. Depression and administration have a substantial and positive association (0.42; $p < 0.05$). Depression and administration scores are either rising or falling concurrently. Anxiety and administration have a substantial and positive association (0,40) ($p = 0,004 < 0,05$). Concurrently, the administration and anxiety scores are rising or falling. Depression and anxiety have a strong positive and significant connection (0.76; $p < 0.05$). Scores for anxiety and depression are either rising or falling concurrently.

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In terms of the educational setting, this study explores the complex link between teachers' occupational stress and self-efficacy, providing insight into the complex processes that affect educators' prosperity and professional efficacy. Drawing upon a comprehensive analysis of existing literature and empirical findings, this discussion addresses key themes that emerge from the research. According to recent studies, teachers experience occupational stress in their workplaces. Within the institution, they deal with a variety of difficulties. The findings are in line with those of Ali et al. (2013), who discovered occupational stress in Pakistani private instructors. Their exposure, approach, and duration in the school are linked to the stress. Furthermore, a strong association was discovered between instructors' self-efficacy and occupational stress. The findings support the findings of İpek et al. (2018), Khan et al. (2012), Morris and Usher (2011), and other researchers that found a substantial correlation between teachers' self-efficacy and occupational stress. The results demonstrated that teachers' levels of self-efficacy are significantly impacted negatively by occupational stress.

The teaching profession sometimes necessitates a delicate balance between emotional fortitude and educational competence. The foundation of the educational system, teachers face a wide range of stresses, from demanding workloads and administrative demands to behavioral issues with students and social expectations. Burnout, which negatively impacts educators' general health, may result from the cumulative weight of these pressures. The impact of work-related stress on educators' self-efficacy

is readily apparent. Reduced confidence in teaching strategies, classroom management, and student participation can all increase the vicious cycle of stress causing a decline in self-efficacy and vice versa.

Understanding this complex link, we looked at methods to lower stress and raise self-efficacy, focusing on work management, productivity, mentoring, professional development, and wellness programs. The complex relationship that exists between self-efficacy and occupational stress in foreign language teachers highlights the need of having a comprehensive grasp of the variables that affect their professional prosperity and wellbeing. This essay makes sense of the complexities inherent in the teaching profession by drawing on the theories and observations of scholars such as Masten, Bandura, Lazarus, Folkman, Kyriacou, Tschannen-Moran, and Woolfolk Hoy (Bandura, 1978; Kyriacou, 2001; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Masten, 2001; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001).

It is essential to acknowledge the influence of occupational stress on self-efficacy in teaching and learning in order to cultivate a loving and supportive learning environment. The prosperity and well-being of educators must be given top priority in schools and other educational settings. To this end, resources and interventions that enable educators to manage stresses successfully must be made available. This will increase teachers' self-efficacy and, in turn, the quality of education they are able to impart. Schools may establish settings where teachers feel acknowledged, empowered, and prepared to face the difficulties of their career by promoting a good school culture that emphasizes individual support, teamwork, and a development mentality. To put these plans into action, administrators, lawmakers, and educators must work together, demonstrating a commitment to the general well-being and professional development of educators. One notable contribution of this study lies in its longitudinal approach, tracking changes in teacher self-efficacy over an extended period. This methodological decision deepens our comprehension of the dynamic nature of the link between stress and self-efficacy.

Stressors' effects on self-efficacy are dynamic and change over time due to the interaction of various stress factors and contextual variables. The implications of these findings extend beyond the academic realm, resonating with broader educational policy considerations. Moreover, strategies to alleviate workload, enhance organizational support, and foster positive interpersonal relationships can contribute to a more supportive teaching environment (Chen & Wang, 2019).

The results of this study show a strong inverse relationship between rising occupational stress levels and falling teacher self-efficacy. Over time, instructors who are dealing with these stressors become less confident in their ability to carry out their tasks in an efficient manner. In the face of occupational stress, cultivating teacher resilience emerges as a critical factor. Additionally, developing a supportive school climate and effective leadership techniques can work as a buffer against the negative impacts of stress, encouraging greater degrees of self-efficacy and professional dedication. Seeing these challenges as opportunities for growth is critical as we endeavor to expand our understanding of the connections between occupational stress in the teaching and learning environment and teachers' self-efficacy. By putting effort into their mental and emotional toughness, educators may raise the quality and effectiveness of education generally while also improving their own well-being. The goal of creating an educational system that is both supportive and powerful is to make sure that teachers can thrive and, in turn, motivate students of tomorrow.

In conclusion, this research offers significant perspectives on the intricate relationship between foreign language teachers's self-efficacy and occupational stress. The results highlight how important it is to take preventative action to reduce stress and foster a healthy learning environment at the individual and organizational levels. Instructors who successfully handle these obstacles can develop and maintain a high degree of self-efficacy, which will eventually improve both the quality of instruction they provide to students and the instructors themselves.

LIMITATIONS

It is essential to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The sample size, though diverse, may not fully capture the myriad contexts in which teachers operate. Future research could explore the influence of individual differences, such as teaching experience and subject matter expertise, on the stress-self-efficacy relationship. Additionally, investigations into the effectiveness of specific interventions and their long-term impact on teacher prosperity and well-being warrant further attention. Thus, the journey towards creating a supportive and empowering educational ecosystem is ongoing, with the goal of ensuring that teachers can thrive and, in turn, inspire the next generation of learners.

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