

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Early Childhood Teachers Emotional Intelligence, Efficacy, Psychological Well-Being and Teacher Burnout

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Ethical Statement

The study was conducted with the permission of XXX University, XXXX, Turkey. Permission dates and protocol numbers for XXX University, XXXX, Turkey were E-76244175-752.01.01-32000.

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Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest is present in the conduction or the reporting of this study.

ABSTRACT

An abstract of 150 to 300 words.

The purpose of this study is to examine relation among early childhood teachers' emotional intelligence, their teacher efficacy and psychological well-being and impact of these concepts on their burnout. The participants consist of 342 early childhood teachers from different cities of Turkey. The participants responded to the Turkish version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educator Survey, Turkish version of Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale (TTSES), Turkish version of the Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test and the Turkish version of the Warwick-Edinburg Mental Wellbeing Scale. Data were analyzed through multiple linear regression (MLR) analysis and structural equation modeling (SEM) using sequentially. Results revealed strong association among teacher emotional intelligence, teaching efficacy and psychological well-being. Psychological well-being appeared as a mediator between teachers' emotional intelligence, teaching efficacy and burnout. We concluded that in order to decrease early childhood teachers' burnout policy makers, administrations should focus more on practices that will increase teachers' psychological well-being.

Keywords: Early childhood teachers, teaching efficacy, emotional intelligence, psychological well-being, burnout.

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INTRODUCTION

Raising teachers is a compelling process, in most countries teachers need to obtain graduate degree. Therefore, losing a teacher means wasting years of educational investment. This is an important problem which has consequences for society at a large scale, schools, teachers, and students. Teacher burnout has been emphasized as the primary reason for teacher turnover (Aloe, Amo, & Shanahan 2014; Leung, & Lee 2006). Burnout also decreased teachers' level of general and mental health, wellbeing (Guglielmi&Tatrow, 1998; Milfont, Denny, Ameratung, Robinson, & Merry, 2008; Tang, Au, Schwarzer, & Schmitz, 2001) work engagement, organizational commitment (Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006; Kahn, Schneider, Jenkins-Henkelman, & Moyle, 2006). Under these circumstances even if teachers did not quit the profession they could not perform as an effective teacher (Betoret, 2009; Egyed& Short, 2006). Thus, it became very difficult to experience professional satisfaction (Leung & Lee 2006). Therefore teachers lost their motivation for teaching (Betoret, 2009; Egyed& Short, 2006). Since teacher burnout is such an important issue for decades many studies investigated factors that are related to teacher burnout (Guglielmi&Tatrow, 1998; Betoret, 2009; Fernet, Guay, Senecal, & Austin, 2012; Hong, 2012; Merida-Lopez, &Extremuera, 2017; Lee, 2019). However, studies that investigated factors that contributed early childhood teachers' teaching burnout are still rare. Teachers are not homogenous group (Guglielmi&Tatrow, 1998), especially in Turkey conditions of early childhood teachers are different than teachers that are teaching in higher grades for example, early childhood classroom is less formal compared to elementary school grade one classroom (Kotaman, 2014). Studies revealed that elementary and secondary education teachers experienced different levels of burnout (Skaalvik&Skaalvik, 2017; Yorulmaz&Altınkurt, 2017). This maybe also true for early childhood teachers too. Therefore, we thought it is reasonable to focus on early childhood teachers' burnout syndrome. Thus, the current study enables us to propose a model that directly explains early childhood teachers' teaching burnout syndrome. Concurrently, we aimed to examine impact of early childhood teachers' emotional intelligence, teacher efficacy, psychological well-being, gender, amount of their education and on their teaching burnout.

For our study, we borrowed Maslach and Jackson's (1981) burnout conceptualization. In this model emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment are three components of burnout. Maslach and Jackson (1981) emphasized emotional exhaustion as the main factor in burnout and defined it as "feelings of being emotionally overextended and exhausted by one's work" (p. 101). In addition to emotional exhaustion they defined depersonalization as "an unfeeling and impersonal response towards recipients on one's care or service" (p. 101) and personal accomplishment as "feeling of competence and successful achievement in one's work with people (p. 101)."

Teachers, Burnout and EI

Teaching is an emotional and stressful profession (Borg, & Riding, 1991; Brudnik, 2009) because teachers must manage constant interactions with people such as parents, administrators, students, and society at large who have expectancies from teachers (Kotaman, 2016a). In addition to this, importance of the contributions of early childhood teachers for young children's socio-emotional development (Denham, Bassett, and Zinsser 2012; Heller et al. 2012) might have increased emotional load for early childhood teachers. Since emotional exhaustion is the main factor of burnout plethora of studies investigated and found association between emotional intelligence and teacher burnout (Agusto-Landa, Lopez-Zafra, Berrios-Matos, & Pulido-Martos, 2012; Brackett, Palomera, Mojsa-Kaja, Reyes, & Salovey, P. 2010;

Chan, 2006; Ju, Lan, Li, Feng, & You, 2015; Merida-Lopez, & Extremera, 2017).

For example, Merida-Lopez, and Extremera, (2017) have investigated relationship between primary and secondary teachers' emotional skills and their burnout levels. They have found negative association between dimensions of EI and dimensions of burnout. In another study that Augusto-Landa et al. (2012) conducted with 251 primary teachers in Spain revealed that emotional skills such as emotional clarity, emotional repair, positive effect played remedial role on the burnout components. Therefore, we believe that it is important to investigate the role of emotional intelligence skills in accordance with psychological well-being and teacher efficacy on early childhood teachers' teaching burnout.

Mayes, Caruso and Salovey (2000) emphasized perception of own emotions, understanding emotions and regulating emotions as three dimensions of emotional intelligence. In this we recruited this conceptualization. We defined EI as individuals' ability to be able to understand their own feelings, regulation their emotions and understanding others' emotions (Salovey and Mayer 1997; Mayes, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004). Separate studies revealed association between emotional intelligence and psychological well-being and teacher efficacy (Ju et. al. 2015; Vesely, Saklofske, & Leschied, 2013; Fiorili, Albanese, Gabola, & Pepe, 2017). Therefore, we thought that examining these factors together would provide us fuller picture of early childhood teachers' burnout.

Psychological Well Being

Psychological well-being is a more recent concept compared to emotional intelligence, teacher efficacy and burnout. Psychological well-being can be defined as personal state of mind in which a person holds optimistic and hopeful future perspective which provide enough motivation to create purposeful and meaningful life away from destructive general stress, depression and professional emotional exhaustions (Cansoy, Parlar, & Türkoğlu, 2020; Jeon, Buettner & Grant, 2018). Definition provides hints on association between psychological well-being and emotional intelligence. For example, Kamboj and Garg (2021) found that teachers with high emotional skills had better psychological well-being compared to their colleagues with lower emotional skills. Therefore, we thought that interaction between emotional intelligence skills of teachers with their psychological well-being might have impacts on their burnout.

Several studies investigated relationship between teachers' and university teachers' psychological well-being and their burnout (Kaur, & Singh, 2014; Soner, & Yılmaz, 2020; Martel & Santana 2021). For example, Soner and Yılmaz (2020) examined relationship between psychological well-being and special education teachers' burnout. They have found that dimensions of psychological well-being were negatively associated with emotional exhaustion and depersonalization whereas positive associated with personal accomplishments. In a recent study that Martel and Santana (2021) conducted with 304 university teachers revealed mediating role of psychological well-being between emotional intelligence and burnout. They did not find direct association between emotional intelligence and burnout. However, they presented the positive association between emotional intelligence and psychological well-being. Their findings also yielded negative relation between burnout and psychological well-being. Finally, they reported the mediating role of psychological well-being for among teachers' emotional intelligence, burnout, and efficacy. Emotional intelligence might have worked through psychological well-being; therefore, we thought adding psychological well-being to the model would enhance our understanding of early childhood teachers' burnout syndrome.

Beside emotional intelligence skills, several studies revealed association between teachers' psychological well-being and their teaching efficacy (Cansoy, Parlar, & Türkoğlu 2020; Jeon, Buettner & Grant 2018; Martel & Santana 2021). For example, Jeon, Buettner and Grant (2018) showed that teachers with higher teaching efficacy than their colleagues experienced less destructive stress, depression, and thus higher psychological well-being.

In summary above mentioned studies revealed that directly or indirectly teacher efficacy, emotional intelligence and psychological well-being had impact on teacher burnout. Among these studies only Martel & Santana (2021) targeted all of these variables related to teacher burnout. Their sample was university staff that were teaching at a university. As it was mentioned earlier early childhood teachers working conditions are different from other teachers who are working in higher levels of education. Therefore, we believe that investigating early childhood teachers' burnout phenomenon with these variables will provide us better understanding about the phenomenon. Thus, information that we derived from this study might have helped to design interventions which aims to remedy teacher burnout. This is especially important for Turkish teachers because of the high unemployment rate (<http://www.tuik.gov.tr/PreHaberBultenleri.do?id=24630>) and economic and social pressures such as teachers' being burden and shame for their families if they quit teaching (Aksu, Demir, Daloğlu, Yıldırım and Kiraz 2010) teachers rarely quit their job in Turkey even when they are burnout (www.hurriyet.com.tr/bu-yil-207-ogretmen-istifa-etti-40580635). Therefore, problems related to teachers such as burn out have to be solved within the system. To design such solutions, we required more information. We believe that such a detailed examination will facilitate the intervention efforts which aim to reduce teacher burnout.

Since studies have reported years of teaching experience (Huberman, 1993; Fisher, 2011), teachers' level of education (Yorulmaz, & Altınkurt, 2017) and gender (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017) as predictive factor for teacher burnout we examined these variables too. The purpose of the study is to examine impact of early childhood teachers' efficacy, emotional intelligence, psychological well-being, years of experience, level of education and gender on their burnout and come with a model that exhibits roles of each variable for teacher burnout. Thus, we aim to reach a model that explains as much variance as possible for teacher burnout. Accordingly, we aim to answer following research questions:

1. Are teacher efficacy emotional intelligence and psychological well-being related to each other?
2. Do teacher efficacy emotional intelligence and psychological well-being have impact separate and/or combine impact on early childhood teachers' burnout?

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted with the permission of XXX University, XXXX, Turkey. Permission dates and protocol numbers for XXX University, XXXX, Turkey were E-76244175-752.01.01-32000.

Participants

Originally 353 questionnaires returned to investigators. However, among 353 questionnaires 11 had missing data therefore, they were discarded from the data set. Finally, data set of the study consisted of 342 questionnaires. Of the 342 teachers, 322 were female (94%) and 20 were male (6%). The ages of the teachers ranged from 21 to 55, with a

mean age of 30.67 (SD= 6.90).

Table 1 Demographic comparison

	Min	Max	Mean	Std.
Year of Education	16	22	16.06	1.23
Year of Professional Education	1	13	4.11	1.07
Seniority	1	32	6.54	6.25

Instruments

Teacher Burnout

Teacher burnout was measured with the Turkish version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educator Survey. The scale was adapted into Turkish by Girgin and Baysal (2005). The questionnaire includes 22 items divided into three subscales: emotional exhaustion (EE; nine items, e.g., "I feel emotionally drained from my work"), personal accomplishment (PA; eight items, e.g., "I have accomplished many worthwhile things in this job) and depersonalization (D; five items, e.g., "I feel I treat some students as if they are impersonal objects"). Participants were asked to evaluate each item in terms of the frequency of their feelings, ranging from 0 (Never) to 4 (Always). High scores on emotional exhaustion and depersonalization and low scores on personal accomplishment subscales are indicative of burnout. Participants could receive a minimum score of 0 and a maximum score of 88 on the total scale. The psychometric properties of the Turkish adaptation of the scale have been reported by Girgin and Baysal (2005), who indicated that the Turkish form was a valid and reliable scale. Kotaman (2016a) recruited the scale for his study and he reported the Cronbach's alpha coefficients of EE, PA and D 0.93, 0.84, and 0.75, respectively. For the current study Cronbach's alpha coefficients of EE, PA and D were 0.77, 0.85, and 0.75, respectively. These Cronbach's coefficients are considered indicative of sound reliability for education (Isaac & Michael 1995).

Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale

Teachers' teaching efficacy was measured with the Turkish version of Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale (TTSES). The scale was adapted into Turkish by Çapa, Çakıroğlu and Sarıkaya (2005). The scale contains 24 items and three sub scales, these are: student engagement (SE), instructional strategies (IS) and classroom management (CM). Cronbach alpha coefficients for SE, IS and CM were 0.93, 0.94 and 0.92 respectively.

Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test

Teachers' emotional intelligence was measured with the Turkish version of the Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test. The test was adapted into Turkish by Tatar, Tok, Saltukoğlu (2011). The test contains 41 items divided into three subscales: perceiving emotions (PE), utilization of emotions (UE), evaluation of emotions (EE), total. Cronbach alpha coefficients for PE, UE, EE and total were 0.61, 0.24, 0.77, 0.82 respectively. Thirteen items are not included in sub scales however they are included in whole test score; therefore, the test provides four different types of scores. Except utilization of emotions sub scale these Cronbach's coefficient is considered acceptable reliability for education (Issac&

 Michael 1995)

Warwick-Edinburg Mental Wellbeing Scale

Teachers' psychological well-being was measured with the Turkish version of the Warwick-Edinburg Mental Wellbeing Scale. The scale was adapted into Turkish by Keldal (2015). The scale contained 14 items and it does not have any sub scales. Participants could respond each item between 1 (I do not agree at all) and 5 (I strongly agree). Lowest and highest scores can be obtained from the scale are 14 and 70 respectively. High scores indicate positive psychological well-being. For the current study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.86. This Cronbach's coefficient is considered indicative of sound reliability for education (Isaac & Michael 1995).

Data Collection

In Turkey all teachers are registered to Ministry of National Education (MONE). In every city there is an office of MONE and in that office there is a database which contains teachers' information. We contacted with the MONE office of the city and asked them to disseminate online version of questionnaires to the teachers. Through their database it is possible to send questionnaire every teacher working in the city. Thus, the questionnaires were disseminated to all the teachers in Şanlıurfa. Beside online application, investigators also disseminate questionnaires in central training sessions that were provided for teacher by MONE too. In these trainings we asked those teachers who had not responded to our questionnaires to participate the study. Those who accepted to participate in the study responded to questionnaire privately and handed to investigators.

RESULTS

In order to answer the research questions, multiple linear regression (MLR) analysis and structural equation modelling (SEM) were used sequentially. Both are a statistical technique that can be used to analyse the relationship between a single dependent (criterion) variable and several independent (predictor) variables (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988; Evans, 1991). Simple distinction could be explained as MLR is an observed-variable model and does not admit variable error, whereas SEM is a latent-variable model and represents error explicitly (Schumacker and Lomax, 2004). Therefore, the effects of teacher efficacy (TE), teacher psychological wellbeing (PW), and teacher emotional intelligence (EI) on teacher burnout (BRO) were analysed (I) with MLE to find the relationship and (II) with SEM to develop a path model with direct and indirect effects with causal mechanisms.

Multiple regression analysis

We tested the interactions among multiple variables in our hypothesis with the all independent variables step by step [$BRO = B_{00} + B_{01}(TE) + B_{02}(PW) + B_{03}(DTS) + e$]. The results of multiple regression models as indicated in Table 1 supported that ($\beta_{00} = 43.05$, $\beta_{01} = -0.028$, $\beta_{02} = -0.285$, $\beta_{03} = 0.198$, $p = .003$), that teacher efficacy, psychological wellbeing and emotional intelligence is negatively associated with teacher burnout. In addition, the results supported ($\beta_{13} = -0.234$, $p = .000$), that psychological wellbeing is negatively associated with teacher burnout alone directly. Also, teacher emotional intelligence is positively associated with psychological wellbeing ($\beta_{14} = .161$, $p = .000$), and teacher efficacy is

positively associated with psychological wellbeing ($\beta_{15} = .376, p = .000$). Since the explained variance in the latest two equations (R square $\beta_{14} = .273$, R square $\beta_{15} = .291$), we further investigate with the proposed structural model in Figure 1 with the mediation of psychological wellbeing on teacher burnout.

SEM Analysis

Following, the SEM analysis was conducted by constructing a measurement model and a structural model. The measurement model analyzes relationships among the set of observed variables and predetermined number of latent variables. Reliability was tested using construct reliability and item reliability. Having ensured that the scale is reliable, the next step was to check construct validity. Then the measurement model was evaluated and finalized before the structural model was evaluated. As shown in Table 2, the reliability coefficients of the measures have been acceptable for Cronbach's alphas ranging between 0.83 and 0.90. As such, no variables were dropped from the model.

Table 2. Reliability of measures

Measures	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha reliability
Teacher efficacy	24	0.88
Psychological wellbeing	21	0.84
Emotional intelligence	41	0.72
Teacher burnout	14	0.76

Measurement Model

The multivariate normality assumption was not violated; therefore, the maximum likelihood method of estimation was used (Schumacker & Lomax, 2004). The goodness-of-fit measures were used to assess the overall model fit. As shown in Table 3, the overall fit indices for the proposed/base model were acceptable, with $\chi^2 / df = 11.174$, $RMSEA = 0.179$, $CFI = 0.890$, $TLI = 0.865$.

Table 3. Goodness of fit indices for proposed model

Measurement model	Chi square χ^2	Df	χ^2 / df	RMSEA	CFI	TLI
Model	469.320	42	11.174	0.179	0.890	0.865

All the fit indices for the initial CFA model in Table 4 indicated an acceptable fit (Bone et al., 1989; Hair et al., 1998; Joreskog & Sorbom, 1993).

Table 4. Measurement model results

Measures	Construct reliability	Average variance
Teacher efficacy	0.86	0.68
Psychological wellbeing	0.84	0.63
Emotional intelligence	0.74	0.77
Teacher burnout	0.76	0.73

Structural Model

As shown in Table 5, the model had a satisfactory model fit to the data ($\chi^2 / df = 11.902$, $RMSEA = 0.177$, $CFI = 0.891$, $TLI = 0.868$). Therefore, the results of the hypothesized structural model indicated a support of the path between teacher

efficacy and teacher psychological wellbeing with coefficient of 0.459, also the path between teacher emotional intelligence and teacher psychological wellbeing with coefficient of 1.083 as well. The direct path between psychological wellbeing and teacher burnout with coefficient of -0.127 still supported similar to the measurement model. The findings showed the path between psychological wellbeing and teacher burnout is direct and negative, also there are two indirect paths with the mediation of teacher psychological wellbeing on teacher burnout, that can be seen in Figure 1.

Table 5. Goodness of fit indices for proposed model

Structural model	Chi square χ^2	Df	χ^2 / df	RMSEA	CFI	TLI
Model	499.880	42	11.902	0.177	0.891	0.868

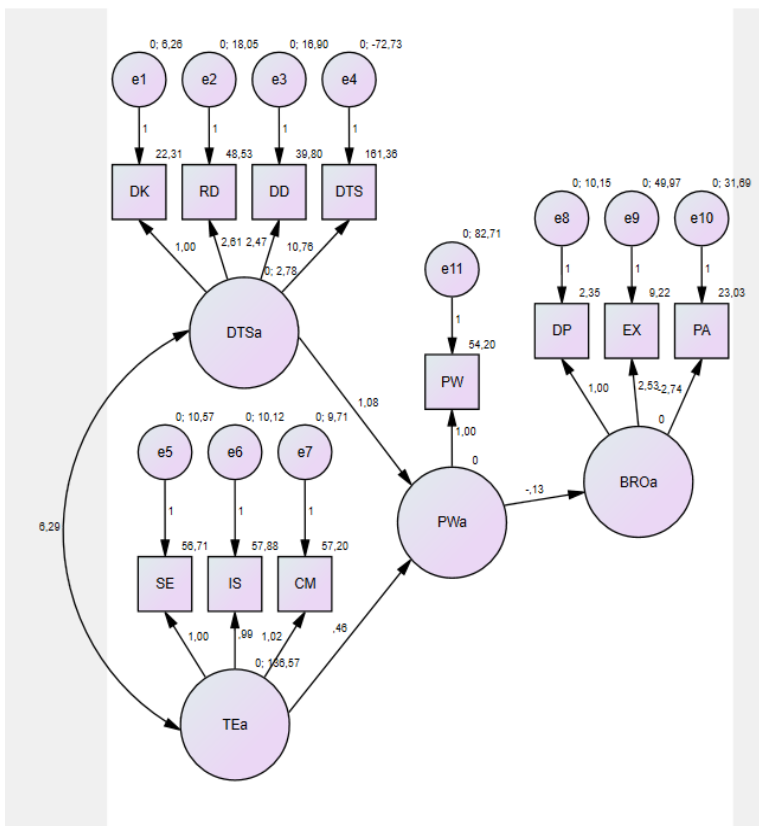


Figure 1. Proposed structural model final results.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate association among early childhood teachers' emotional intelligence, teaching efficacy beliefs and psychological well-being and beside these variables their impact of their gender, seniority, and their level of education on teacher burnout. Although in some studies gender (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2017) appeared as a factor

for teacher burnout, in the current study gender was not a significant factor for teacher burnout. Our finding was consisted with some other studies (Fiorili, et. al., 2017; Ju, Lan, Li, Feng, & You, 2015). However, while we are evaluating this finding, we have to consider the great difference between percentage of male and female teachers in early childhood education. Great majority of our sample (94%) consisted of females. Same reason might have been true for education level variable because teachers' education levels were very alike; almost all of them had 16 years of education. Our findings on seniority unveil a new fact. In the regression analysis consistent with previous studies (Huberman, 1993; Fisher, 2011) seniority appeared as a significant factor for teacher burnout, however when we entered seniority in our model with other variables it was not a significant factor for teacher burnout anymore. The model showed that main factor that affects teacher burnout was teachers' psychological well-being. Therefore, it can be said that teachers' seniority can have impact on teachers' burnout through its effect on teachers' psychological well-being.

Our first goal was to examine relationship among teacher efficacy, teachers' emotional intelligence and psychological well-being. Findings revealed strong association among these variables. Since there were studies that have shown association between teachers' emotional intelligence and their teaching efficacy beliefs (Koçoğlu, 2011; Vesely, Saklofske, & Leschied, 2013); teacher emotional intelligence and their psychological well-being (Martel, & Santana, 2021); and teachers' teaching efficacy beliefs and their psychological well-being (Cansoy, Parlar, & Türkoğlu 2020; Jeon, Buettner & Grant 2018) this finding was not surprising. The current study enhanced literature by showing three-way association among these variables for early childhood teachers. Studies revealed that people had higher emotional skills had higher levels of teacher efficacy thus higher level of teaching performance (Wu et. al., 2019; Koçoğlu, 2011). Mikolajczak, and Luminet, (2008) indicated that people with high EI displayed higher self-efficacy than people with low EI because when they confronted with a stressor, they perceived the stressor as a challenge rather than a threat. Thus, people with high EI acquired chance to experience achievement, which is a main source of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1989). This would create a positive vicious circle which feed efficacy and EI at the same time. In summary, we can conclude that when teachers had higher teaching efficacy, they can make more attempts to overcome challenges and if they have skills to manage their emotions, they could be more persistence in the face of failure, also emotional skills might have facilitated cooperation with other which would increase chance of success. Achieving your goals would positively affect your psychological well-being. On the other hand, if you emotionally cannot manage stress and shy away from challenges you will have less chance to experience achievement. Findings of Cansoy, Parlar and Türkoğlu (2020) supported our inference they found predictive effect of teacher efficacy on teachers' psychological well-being. Also, since Jeon, Buettner and Grant (2018) have found the chaotic atmosphere of the early childhood environment as a strong predictor of teachers' psychological well-being, they suggested programs that will increase early childhood teachers' emotional skills which will reduce burden of chaotic environment.

Consistent with the previous studies our findings revealed negative association between early childhood teachers' psychological well-being and their burnout (Kaur, & Singh, 2014; Soner, & Yılmaz, 2020; Martel & Santana 2021). We have found that psychological well-being worked as mediator between teachers' emotional intelligence, teachers' efficacy and burnout. Psychological well-being had direct association with all these three concepts. On the other hand, emotional intelligence and teacher efficacy interact with burnout through psychological well-being. To the authors knowledge until now only Martel and Santana (2021) indicated mediator role of psychological well-being between emotional intelligence and burnout of university faculty. Current study enhanced earlier findings by showing that psychological well-being work as mediator for teacher efficacy and for early childhood teachers too. This finding implied that teachers' emotional skills

and efficacy belief contributed to construction of optimistic and hopeful future perspective for them and thus they strived to build meaningful life.

Current study emphasized importance of psychological well-being for decreasing teachers' burnout. Therefore, policy makers and school administrator should consider how to improve psychological well-being of teachers. Findings pointed that increasing early childhood teachers' efficacy beliefs and emotional skills can contribute to their psychological well-being. Since the studies have yielded through intervention teachers' emotional skills can be enhanced (Alvez, 2007; Heller et al. 2012) in-service education to support early childhood teachers' emotional skills can be established. These educations can focus on emotional problems that early childhood teachers dealing with such as anger management, remorse, isolation, managing unrealistic expectations of parents and administration (Kotaman, 2016b). Beside emotional education support groups among early childhood teachers can be constructed thus teachers can constantly support each other's emotional, social, and professional development (Kotaman, 2016b). Since teachers' professional development have positive impact on their teaching efficacy (Sandholtz, & Ringstaff, 2014) such implications can also improve teachers' efficacy beliefs which in return can have positively contributed to their psychological well-being. These implications might have decreased early childhood teachers' burnout.

Limitations and Future Studies

There are several limitations of this study. First, variables were measured through self-report scales. Therefore, they are subject to social desirability bias. Future studies can be supported with performance tests and observational data especially on emotional intelligence and qualitative data such as interviews with teachers. Thus, triangulation which would strengthen the validity can be achieved.

Future studies can also investigate other variables that are related to psychological well-being such as living conditions, social support opportunities, and impact of Covid-19. Thus, it will be possible to find out factors that contribute to early childhood teachers' psychological well-being and in return reduction of burnout.

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