



## The Impact of Self-affirmation on Teacher Leadership: An Experimental Design

### Öz-olumlamanın, Öğretmen Liderliğine Etkisi: Deneysel Bir Çalışma

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**ABSTRACT:** Teacher leadership has recently gained significant attention in the literature since there is enough evidence that it leads to effective student outcomes. Therefore, many scholars study the antecedents of teacher leadership. This study investigates the impact of self-affirmation on teacher leadership beliefs through an experimental design. Self-affirmation, a well-established construct in psychological science, refers to participants' affirming their self-transcendent (e.g., empathy, justice, honesty) or self-enhancement (e.g., power, status, wealth) values through a writing exercise. In the experiment (n=221), participants were randomly assigned to one of three groups: a self-transcendent value-affirmation group (STVA), a self-enhancement value-affirmation group (SEVA), or a control group. Participants in three groups wrote about their self-transcendent values, self-enhancement values, or their meals and completed the teacher leadership belief scale. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) demonstrated that the STVA group had significantly higher scores on teacher leadership belief scales compared to the SEVA and the control group. This finding suggests that affirming self-transcendent values can lead teachers to adopt leadership beliefs, which in turn is likely to affect their leadership behaviours. School leaders can incorporate self-affirmation exercises into professional development programmes to facilitate teacher leadership.

**Keywords:** Teacher leadership, self-affirmation, experiment, school leadership.

**ÖZ:** Öğretmen liderliği, öğrenci sonuçlarını olumlu etkilemektedir. Bu nedenle, birçok sosyal bilimci ve eğitim bilimci öğretmen liderliğini kolaylaştıran etkenleri araştırmaktadır. Bu çalışma, öğretmen liderliği inançları üzerinde öz-olumlamanın etkisini deneysel bir desene incelemeyi amaçlar. Psikoloji biliminde iyi bilinen bir kavram olan öz-olumlamanın, katılımcıların kendi özgeçmiş değerlerini (örneğin, empati, adalet, dürüstlük) veya özgülendirme değerlerini (örneğin, güç, statü, zenginlik) bir yazma egzersizi yoluyla onaylamasını ifade eder. Bu eksersiz eğitim bilimlerinde nadiren kullanılmaktadır. Deneyde (n=221), katılımcı rastgele üç gruba ayrılmıştır: özgeçmiş değer onaylama grubu (ÖD), özgülendirme değer onaylama grubu (ÖGD) veya kontrol grubu. İlk grup özgeçmiş değerlerini; ikinci grup özgülendirme değerlerini, üçüncü grup son iki haftada yediklerini yazdılar ve daha sonra üç grup da öğretmen liderliği inanç ölçeğini doldurdu. ANOVA analizi, ÖD grubunun, ÖGD ve kontrol grubuna kıyasla öğretmen liderliği inanç ölçeğinde önemli ölçüde daha yüksek puanlara sahip olduğunu gösterdi. Bu bulgu, özgeçmiş değerlerini onaylamanın öğretmenleri liderlik inançlarını benimsemeye yönlendirebileceğini ve bunun da liderlik davranışlarını etkileyebileceğini göstermektedir. Okul liderleri, öğretmen liderliğini kolaylaştırmak için profesyonel gelişim programlarına özsaygı egzersizlerini dahil edebilirler.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Öğretmen liderliği, öz-olumlama, deney, okul liderliği.

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There is enough convincing evidence in the literature that school leadership has a significant impact on students' learning (Bush et al., 2018; Darling-Hammond et al., 2022; Leithwood, 2021; Leithwood et al., 2020; Liebowitz & Porter, 2019; Robinson & Gray, 2019). Therefore, leadership is important to any school improvement initiative (Bolat, 2013). However, most studies on school leadership focused on the principal (Hallinger et al., 2017). The conventional concept of school leadership, based on principal leadership, has recently been challenged (Pan & Chen, 2021). The sources of school leadership have been broadened, and school leadership is now treated as an overarching construct that incorporates different sources of leadership, including teachers (Hallinger & Heck, 2010).

Teacher leadership is a crucial part of the international discourse on school leadership and school improvement. Therefore, various initiatives aim to promote teacher leadership in educational settings. In line with these initiatives, this study aims to make a valuable contribution by providing experimental evidence that self-affirmation could be a crucial antecedent for teacher leadership. Self-affirmation is the practice of affirming oneself by reminding one's values or positive qualities (Sherman & Cohen, 2006). Teacher leadership refers to teachers exercising leadership while teaching in the classroom (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Since self-affirmation enables people to focus on their values and leadership is a value-laden activity (Brown & Treviño, 2009; Shamir et al., 1993), it could be hypothesized that self-affirmation is very likely to lead to teachers' leadership enactment. For instance, in his model of teacher-led school improvement, Frost (2011) engages teachers in finding their visions and values, which guides them towards leadership behaviors. By investigating the relationship between self-affirmation and teacher leadership beliefs, this research emphasizes the potential of self-affirmation exercises in fostering teacher leadership in educational settings.

## **Conceptual Framework**

### **Teacher Leadership**

Teacher leadership has been attracting more attention recently in the academic world (Lowery-Moore et al., 2016; Martínez & Tadeu, 2018) because it is now viewed as a key factor in determining the quality of schools (Wang & Ho, 2020). Recent studies have also demonstrated that teacher leadership impacts student learning (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Ingersoll et al., 2018; Shen et al., 2020). However, the definition of teacher leadership lacks consensus within the field (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Nguyen et al. (2020) found seventeen different definitions in their review. However, when examining all these definitions, it becomes apparent that Wenner and Campbell's (2017) succinct definition of teacher leadership resonates with other definitions. They argue that teacher leadership is about teachers assuming leadership roles beyond their classrooms while simultaneously fulfilling their classroom responsibilities. This definition reflects the essence of teacher leadership.

These leadership roles include a diverse array of leadership activities, such as leading change, communicating with colleagues (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009), leading professional development, participating in school-wide decisions (Wang & Xia, 2022), supporting professional learning (Wenner & Campbell, 2017), conducting one-on-one coaching sessions with colleagues (Margolis & Huggins, 2012), co-teaching (Margolis,

2012), assisting other teachers in classrooms, engaging their colleagues in classroom-based inquiry (Valli et al., 2006), involvement in educational policy (Can, 2009; Carpenter & Sherretz, 2012) or parent involvement (York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

These teacher leadership roles could be performed both formally and informally (Hunzicker, 2013; Meirink et al., 2020). In formal leadership roles, teachers are assigned specific positions and are expected to exercise leadership within those roles. These positions may include department head, team leader, curriculum developer, mentor, coach, and others (Neumerski, 2012; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Within this formal conception of teacher leadership, teachers carry out the principal's role in a quasi-administrative role (Smylie et al., 2002). Early teacher leadership initiatives often reflected this formal conception of teacher leadership.

The current understanding of teacher leadership is shifting from formal positions to a more informal, integrated approach (Carrion & García-Carrión, 2015; Frost, 2012; Hunzicker, 2017; Poekert, 2012). In this current understanding, leadership does not equate with position, authority, roles, structure, or people at the top of the organization. Leadership is more about teachers' agency and their decision to initiate change (Frost & Durrant, 2002). Leadership emerges through interaction with other people, tools, and the environment (Spillane, 2006; Gronn, 2002). In this informal view of teacher leadership, which could be called non-positional teacher leadership (Frost, 2019), the challenge is not to identify and select teacher leaders, but to create a context where all teachers can exercise leadership (Frost, 2006; Lambert, 2003). This view, however, raises important challenges: How can we enable every teacher to exercise leadership? What antecedents facilitate the emergence of teacher leadership? How can we foster these antecedents to promote informal teacher leadership?

Recent review studies have focused on the antecedent of teacher leadership (Ding & Thien, 2022; Nguyen et al., 2020; Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Schott et al. (2020) identified antecedents at three levels: teacher, school level, and supra-school level. Teacher antecedents refer to the teacher as an actor and his/her personal characteristics, such as knowledge, skills, motivation, dispositions, age, and experience (Hunzicker, 2017). Two important antecedents at the teacher level are self-esteem and values (Hunzicker, 2017; Smulyan, 2016). In the context of transformational school leadership, Sun et al. (2017) found that leaders' self-efficacy and values were important predictors of transformational school leadership practices. Therefore, promoting teachers' self-esteem and cultivating their values can be an effective strategy to empower teachers to exercise leadership. One promising yet surprisingly unexplored approach to achieving this goal is through self-affirmation exercises. By engaging teachers in self-affirmation exercises, school leaders can potentially enhance teachers' self-esteem and help them reinforce their core values, supporting their leadership endeavors.

### **Self-Affirmation**

Self-affirmation theory, originally proposed by Steele (1988), is based on the idea that people are motivated to maintain self-integrity, worth of the self, and an image of themselves as moral, capable, and adaptive (Aronson et al., 1999; Cohen & Sherman, 2014; Steele, 1988). When self-integrity is threatened, as in the case of setbacks and disappointment in life, people immediately try to restore their self-integrity (Sherman & Cohen, 2006) and maintain their conception of themselves as good, virtuous, and

efficacious (Cohen et al., 2007). People adopt various strategies to manage the threat to their self-integrity. They might be engaged in defensive adaptations (Taylor & Brown, 1988), downward social comparisons (Taylor & Lobel, 1989), or gossiping negatively about others (Wert & Salovey, 2004). These strategies may help reduce the threat, but they all come with a cost. All these defensive behaviors threaten the integrity of the relationship with others (Cohen et al., 2007). Therefore, one healthy and effective way to restore self-integrity is through affirming the self, such as reflecting on positive aspects of the self, recalling past experiences when one has lived up to personal ideals, or reminding oneself of important values (Sherman & Cohen, 2006). In fact, consciously or unconsciously, we all engage in self-affirmation acts in our daily lives to demonstrate our adequacy (Cohen & Sherman, 2014). For instance, if someone is rejected or fails, they may remind themselves of their positive social ties or past successes and feel better about themselves.

Researchers utilize different exercises in their research to induce self-affirmation in people (see Gümüş, 2022; McQueen & Klein, 2006 for a review). In some studies, participants are presented with a list of values, are instructed to rank them, and then choose the most important one (e.g., Steele & Liu, 1983). In one study, participants were instructed to describe past occasions on which they exhibited kindness to others (e.g., Reed & Aspinwall, 1998). In others, participants were given positive personality feedback (e.g., Cohen et al., 2000). However, the most widely utilized and extensively researched experimental manipulation involves asking individuals to write about their core personal values (McQueen & Klein, 2006). This practice of writing about core values serves as a means of self-affirmation, contributing to enhanced self-perception.

Self-affirmation has demonstrated effectiveness in multiple studies. For example, when participants were affirmed, they were less defensiveness towards evidence linking smoking to health issues (Harris et al., 2007; Sherman et al., 2000). A recent meta-analysis has shown that self-affirmation reduces defensiveness towards threatening health information (Sweeney & Moyer, 2015). Affirmed participants were also more inclined to acknowledge the misdeeds of their own groups (Čehajić-Clancy, 2011), show less stereotypical behaviors towards outgroup members (Fein & Spencer, 1997), exhibit reduced bias against other teams (Sherman & Kim, 2005), waste less food and vegetables even after one week (Graham-Rowe et al., 2019), consume less alcohol even after the experiment (Armitage et al., 2011; Ehret & Sherman, 2018), and be more accepting of the effects of alcohol on breast cancer and anti-smoking information (Harris & Napper, 2005). Moreover, affirmed individuals tend to take more responsibility for their teams' defeats (Sherman & Kim, 2005) and exhibit greater openness towards counter-attitudinal arguments (Cohen et al., 2007). In addition, self-affirmation boosts self-control and persistence (Schmeichel & Vohs, 2009) and reduces stress (Creswell et al., 2005). Although self-affirmation has been explored in limited school settings, recent meta-analyses have shown that it positively impacts students' grades, particularly for minority students (Liu et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2018).

Self-affirmation is effective in maintaining and restoring self-integrity for several reasons. Firstly, self-affirmation broadens people's perspectives, and they view threatening information and events from a larger standpoint (Sherman, 2013; Sherman & Hartson, 2011). This broadened perspective helps diminish the perceived magnitude of the threat. Secondly, when affirmed, individuals usually shift their focus from the "threatening" aspect of the event to its "informational" value, which enables them to

move beyond ego protection (Sherman & Cohen, 2006). Thirdly, when people are affirmed, they are reminded of their broader self-worth beyond the threat (Sherman, 2013). This reminder leads to an uncoupling of the self and threat, ultimately reducing threat's impact on the self (Sherman & Hartson, 2011; Sherman, 2013). They are reminded that life is balanced despite adversity (Cohen & Sherman 2014). Fourthly and most importantly, self-affirmation creates a sense of connection to something larger than one's ego, enabling individuals to transcend their narrow self-interests and broaden their perspective beyond the immediate self (Burson et al., 2012; Crocker et al., 2008; Sherman, 2013). This last point directly suggests that self-affirmation could be an effective tool that can enable teachers to exercise leadership since leadership transcends narrow self-interest and ego protection while actively contributing to a broader vision beyond oneself. In the school context, teachers need to go beyond their classrooms and focus on the development of the whole school rather than just focusing on their students. In short, self-affirmation, as a well-established concept in psychological science, has the immense potential to be used as an effective tool to enable teachers to adopt leadership beliefs.

### **Conceptual and Methodological Significance of the Study**

The current study aims to test the impact of self-affirmation on teacher leadership beliefs, using an experimental design. The study has unique potential to contribute to the existing literature for several reasons. Firstly, it is significant due to its experimental design. A while ago Colquitt (2008) and recently Podsakoff & Podsakoff (2019) have called for increased utilization of experiments in leadership research. However, the percentage of published research papers employing experimental designs was low. The most recent publication on the use of experimental design indicated that only 11.5% of published studies in leadership literature during 2015–2018 employed experimental design (Podsakoff & Podsakoff, 2019). Experiments can provide evidence of causality (Antonakis et al., 2010), and this study aims to contribute to the literature by employing an experimental design. Secondly, most studies on self-affirmation have been conducted in the field of psychology, to the best of my knowledge, this study is the first to investigate the effect of self-affirmation in the context of (educational) leadership literature. Thirdly, in the last three decades, psychological researchers have tested the effect of self-affirmation in the context of self-threatening events and information (Sherman, 2013). It is surprising that this phenomenon has never been tested in the context of leadership. While self-affirmation has been employed to help people go from negative functioning to normal functioning, limited research has examined its impact on transitioning individuals from normal functioning to positive functioning (e.g., leadership). The aim of the present research is to investigate the impact of self-affirmation on leadership in general, with a specific focus on teacher leadership. To the best of my knowledge, this study represents the first attempt to examine the effect of self-affirmation on leadership not only in the field of (educational) leadership literature but also within the field of psychology.

### **Methodology**

An experimental design was adopted for this study since it is only possible to provide causality between two constructs through an experimental design (Campbell & Stanley, 2015). The sample of the study consisted of 221 teachers who work at different



levels at various state and private schools across different regions in Turkey. A link was shared on social media accounts, and data were collected through that online link. A convenience sampling strategy was adopted since it was practical and participants were easy to reach (Taherdoost, 2016). Participants were informed about the study, and participation was voluntary. After excluding 33 participants due to incorrect responses to the control question, excessive missing data, or completion time under one minute, the final sample size was 221. The sample size for the study was determined a priori using G\*Power (Faul et al., 2009) to achieve a power of 0.80 and an alpha error probability of .05, with a target medium-sized effect size of 0.3. Based on a power analysis, a minimum sample size of 111 (37 in each group) participants was required. The actual sample size ( $n=221$ ) used in the study exceeded this minimum requirement.

200 participants (91.7%) were female, while 18 participants (8.3%) were male (3 participants did not provide demographic information). In terms of teaching level, 33 participants (15.1%) were from preschool, 64 participants (29.4%) were from primary school, 52 participants (28.4%) were from middle school, and 59 participants (27.1%) were from high school. The average age of the participants was 36.8 years (range=22–62,  $SD = 6.81$ ), and they had an average of 12.9 years of teaching experience (range=1–42,  $SD = 7.39$ ).

### **Procedures and Measures**

Prior to the experiment, participants completed a one-item self-esteem scale adapted from Robins et al. (2001). The scale assessed participants' self-esteem with the question, "I have high self-esteem," using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (definitely does not describe me) to 7 (definitely describes me). This single-item measure has demonstrated validity and reliability in previous research (Robins et al., 2001). The self-esteem scale was utilized to assess randomization checks because previous research has shown that self-esteem affects affirmational processes (Steele et al., 1993). Those with high self-esteem already have affirmational resources (Sherman & Cohen, 2006). They are more able to counter threats than those who do not have high self-esteem (Schimel et al., 2004). In other words, they already live their lives more affirmed (Jordan et al., 2003). Since self-esteem has the potential to affect the results of the experiment, it was crucial to ensure that groups were equal in terms of their level of self-esteem.

After the completion of the self-esteem scale, participants were randomly assigned to one of three groups: the self-transcendent value-affirmation condition (STVA;  $n = 87$ ), the self-enhancement value-affirmation condition (SEVA;  $n = 67$ ), or the control group ( $n = 67$ ). In the STVA group, participants were presented with a list of 21 self-transcendent values, including values such as empathy, trust, and humility, adapted from Burson et al. (2012) and The Values in Action (VIA) Strengths Scale by Peterson and Seligman (2004). They were asked to select the most important one and write a short essay explaining why that value is significant to them. These two manipulations are standard procedures commonly employed in self-affirmation studies (McQueen & Klein, 2006).

The SEVA group received a list of 7 self-enhancement values (e.g., prestige, success, wealth). These value-affirmation manipulations were also adapted from Burson et al. (2012) and have shown efficacy in previous research. Two types of self-affirmation were tested, following Burson et al. (2012) since they argue that self-

transcendent value-affirmation provides a better buffer than self-enhancement value-affirmation. This distinction is based on Schwartz's (1994) conceptualization. Values that emphasize harmonious connections with others are categorized as 'self-transcendent.' In contrast, values that refer to enhancing one's status in a social hierarchy for recognition and acknowledgment are categorized as 'self-enhancement' (Schwartz, 1994). Participants in the control group wrote about the food and drinks they consumed in the last two weeks, following a task adapted from Cohen et al. (2000).

After the manipulations, participants completed a one-item self-esteem scale again. Finally, participants completed the six-item subscale of the Teacher Leadership Belief Scale (Bolat & Antalyalı, 2023). This subscale, with a high level of validity and reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.92), assessed teachers' belief about teacher leadership-the extent to which teachers see six leadership behaviors as part of their professional identity. Sample items included "I engage in pedagogical conversations with my colleagues to contribute to their development" and "I offer advice and suggestions to my colleagues." Responses were provided on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (definitely disagree) to 5 (definitely agree). Their responses on this scale served as the dependent variable.

### Ethical Procedures

For this study, ethical approval was obtained from International Final University with a reference no of 100/50/REK.001 on the date of 19<sup>th</sup> of June, 2023.

### Results

A one-item self-esteem scale was utilized to assess the randomization check. An ANOVA test was employed to examine the self-esteem scores across the three groups. The findings revealed no statistically significant difference in mean self-esteem scores among the groups,  $F(2, 139) = 0.793$ ,  $p = 0.454$ , indicating successful random assignment (Table 1).

Table 1

#### One-way ANOVA

	<i>F</i>	<i>df1</i>	<i>df2</i>	<i>p</i>
Self Esteem	0.793	2	139	0.454

#### Group Descriptives

	Group	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>SE</i>
Self Esteem	Control	67	5.13	1.25	0.153
	STVA	87	5.37	1.21	0.130
	SEVA	67	5.18	1.28	0.156

A one-item self-esteem scale was used again after the experiment for manipulation check. An ANOVA test was conducted to compare the self-esteem scores across the three groups. The results showed no significant difference in self-esteem scores between the groups,  $F(2, 137) = 1.11$ ,  $p = 0.331$ . The means for experimental group 1 (STVA) and the control group were 5.40 and 5.18, respectively. Although the difference was not significant, it approached a significant level (see discussion below) (Table 2).

Table 2  
One-way ANOVA

	<i>F</i>	<i>df1</i>	<i>df2</i>	<i>p</i>
Self Esteem	1.11	2	137	0.331

*Group Descriptives*

	Group	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>SE</i>
Self Esteem	Control	67	5.13	1.25	0.153
	STVA	87	5.40	1.16	0.124
	SEVA	66	5.18	1.26	0.156

ANOVA was conducted to compare the mean teacher leadership beliefs (TLB) scores across the three groups. The results of the ANOVA indicated a statistically significant difference in the mean scores of TLB among the three groups,  $F(2,135) = 4.17$ ,  $p = 0.017$ . The mean score for the control group was 3.34 ( $SD = 0.76$ ); for the STVA group, it was 3.68 ( $SD = 0.69$ ); and for the SEVA group, it was 3.48 ( $SD = 0.87$ ). Post-hoc comparisons employing the Tukey HSD test revealed that the mean score for the STVA group ( $M = 3.68$ ,  $SD = 0.69$ ) significantly differed from that of the control group ( $M = 3.34$ ,  $SD = 0.76$ ,  $p < .05$ ). However, no significant differences were observed between the control group and the SEVA group, or between the SEVA group and the STVA group (Table 3).

Table 3  
One-way ANOVA

	<i>F</i>	<i>df1</i>	<i>df2</i>	<i>p</i>
Teacher Leadership Belief Score	4.17	2	135	0.017

*Note.* \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

*Group Descriptives*

	Group	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>SE</i>
Teacher Leadership Belief Score	Control	67	3.34	0.756	0.0923
	STVA	87	3.68	0.694	0.0744
	SEVA	66	3.48	0.871	0.1073

*Tukey Post-Hoc Test – TLB MEAN*

	0	1	2
0			
Mean difference	-	-0.337*	-0.139
<i>p-value</i>	-	0.021	0.551
1			
Mean difference	-	-	0.198
<i>p-value</i>	-	-	0.257
2			
Mean difference	-	-	-
<i>p-value</i>	-	-	-

*Note.* \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$



Consistent with predictions, self-transcendent self-affirmation (STVA) exerted an influence on teachers' beliefs in leadership ( $M=3.68$ ). In conclusion, the self-transcendent self-affirmation, not self-enhancement value-affirmation ( $M=3.48$ ), intervention yielded a significant effect on participants' beliefs in teacher leadership, with those in the STVA group reporting higher levels of teacher leadership belief compared to those in the SEVA and control groups ( $M=3.34$ ).

### Discussion and Conclusion

The present study examined the impact of two types of self-affirmation exercises on teachers' leadership beliefs- the extent to which teachers view leadership behaviors as part of their professional identity. The results provide experimental evidence that self-transcendent value affirmation can significantly enhance teachers' leadership beliefs. When affirmed, teachers are more likely to see leadership as part of their professional identity and endorse more leadership beliefs. This could be the first step to enabling teachers to exercise leadership in schools. It should be noted that this study is about helping teachers adopt leadership beliefs rather than actions. However, it could be the first step to effective teacher leadership development since becoming a leader is about developing a leadership stance (Smulyan, 2016) and acquiring "a leadership identity (Lieberman & Friedrich, 2010). Teachers must first view themselves as leaders in order to lead (Carver, 2016). Therefore, developing leadership beliefs is crucial for teachers to exercise leadership since beliefs and actions are often linked. Beliefs are the driving forces behind teachers' (pedagogical) decisions (Richardson et al., 1991). Teachers' beliefs matter and influence their practices (Fives & Buehl, 2012). Beliefs are also important because teachers adopt new practices when they are aligned with their beliefs (Bingham & Hall-Kenyon, 2013). This suggests that even if organizational structure and culture are supportive, teachers will choose not to exercise leadership when leading is aligned with their beliefs. Similarly, Schwartz (2017) has pointed out that a value influences behaviors when this value is activated. Therefore, activating teachers' self-transcendent values will likely lead to teacher leadership behaviors.

The study employed both self-transcendent and self-enhancement value affirmation. Self-enhancement value affirmation did not affect teachers' leadership beliefs. This result suggests that affirming self-enhancement values, which emphasize enhancing one's status in a social hierarchy (Schwartz, 2017), may not be as effective in fostering teacher leadership belief. This finding is consistent with Burson et al.'s (2012) finding that self-transcendent value-affirmation provides a better buffer than self-enhancement value-affirmation. Furthermore, there is no consensus in the literature about the relationship between these two kinds of values. While some studies find them conflicting (Spain et al., 2014), others find it compatible (Cohen & Liu, 2011). Wang et al. (2021) found that both values are compatible and contribute to teacher commitment and lower quitting intentions, although the magnitude of the effect was higher for self-transcendent values. The current study provided evidence that while self-transcendent values led to enhanced leadership beliefs, self-enhancement values did not. This finding suggests that these two types of values do not have the same effect on leadership as other teacher outcomes, such as teacher commitment and lower quitting intentions, even if they could be compatible.

The current study showed that self-transcendent value-affirmation enhanced leadership belief because leadership is, after all, about self-transcendent values. Sarros

and Santora (2001) and Singh and Krishnan (2014) found a positive relationship between self-transcendence values and transformational leadership. Similarly, Dent et al. (2005) found a relationship between self-transcendence and servant leader behavior. Self-transcendence refers to an increased connection with others and the environment (Yaden et al., 2017). Self-transcendence values focus on concern and care for others (Schwartz, 2012). Individuals who hold self-transcendence values help others more, value collective interests, and transcend narrow self-interest (Wang et al., 2021). They favor group unity and member equality (Schwartz, 2012). These are exactly the qualities that define a leader. Burns (1978), a pioneer in the leadership field, views transforming leadership as moral leadership whereby the leader goes beyond satisfying the needs and desires of followers toward end-values such as justice and equality, which are self-transcendence values. In that sense, as Carey (1992) argues, self-transcendence is intrinsic to leadership. In the school context, research shows that teachers who hold more prosocial values (i.e., self-transcendence values) are more motivated to build relationships with others and also act more friendly towards others (Wang & Hall, 2019). Furthermore, when people have self-transcendence values, they are more attentive and understanding and perform a higher moral dimension (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2007). This is directly related to leadership. In short, exercising leadership is about holding self-transcendence values, and the current study demonstrated that teachers' leadership beliefs can be developed through a self-transcendence value exercise.

This finding also highlights the importance of focusing on values that foster connections with others in the context of leadership. This finding also suggests it might be incorrect to automatically assume that teachers in formal leadership positions will exercise leadership. As Heifetz (1994) suggested, individuals in formal positions can struggle to exercise leadership since their position necessitates maintaining order, while leadership requires chaos at a tolerable rate. What matters could be teachers' values and their motivation to influence others to communicate these values.

### **Implications**

This study carries significant implications for theoretical frameworks. While the majority of studies have assessed the impact of self-affirmation in response to threats, this research investigates the unique potential of the self-affirmation exercise for teacher leadership. That is, self-affirmation not only helps people cope with threats, but also enhances their self-transcendent tendencies within their day-to-day lives. When individuals are affirmed for their normal functioning, they are more likely to exercise leadership and positively influence others' lives. This study used an experimental design and provided a causal link between affirmed values and leadership beliefs. This could also be a modest call for the increased application of experimental designs within the field of educational leadership literature.

The present study, to the best of my knowledge, is the first study that explored the impact of self-affirmation on leadership beliefs not only in the educational leadership literature, but also in psychological science. The results of this study hold important implications for school leaders. Self-affirmation exercises could be used in educational settings as an effective tool to foster teacher's leadership beliefs. School leaders can integrate self-affirmation exercises into professional development and leadership training programmes. Such interventions could create, in Sergiovanni's

(1987) term, “leadership density” in schools where all teachers are empowered to exercise leadership.

The present study has some limitations. While this study provides evidence of the immediate impact of self-affirmation on teacher leadership belief, it is unclear whether these effects persist over time. However, it should be noted that previous studies have shown that the effects of self-affirmation interventions can last for an extended period of time. For instance, Harackiewicz et al. (2014), Logel and Cohen (2012), and Miyake et al. (2010) have demonstrated that the effect of self-affirmation on academic grades and health outcomes have endured months and years after the intervention. Binning et al. (2019) found that affirmed middle school students experienced a 69% decrease in disciplinary incidents compared to students in the control condition, and affirmation was linked to higher school trust over time. Similarly, Goyer et al. (2017) found that affirmed minority students went to more selective colleges two years later. These findings suggest that brief but timely interventions could have long-term benefits when supported by institutional processes (Goyer et al., 2017). In short, self-affirmation could lead to long-term effects on teacher leadership. However, this assumption needs to be tested with longitudinal studies.

Another limitation of the study pertains to the manipulation check. Following the intervention, participants in the experimental groups experienced an increase in self-esteem levels, and the difference approached a significant level. However, it did not reach significance at the 0.5 level. There could be various reasons for this lack of significance. One possible reason could be the relatively small sample size, which affects the statistical power of the analysis. Future experiments should be conducted with a larger sample size to address this limitation. The participants might have attended closely to the manipulation but not the manipulation check (see Hauser et al., 2018 for discussion). Also, collectivist and individualistic cultures differ in terms of the valuation of the self. The self is structured differently in collectivist cultures (Sherman & Cohen, 2006). As a result, self-affirmation might have worked without affecting the self-esteem. Schmeichel and Martens (2005) have claimed that affirmation has no effects on self-esteem or positive moods. Future studies should explore alternative forms of manipulations in collectivist cultures.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the literature by demonstrating the potential of self-affirmation, specifically self-transcendent value-affirmation, to enhance teachers’ leadership beliefs. School leaders could foster teacher leadership and improve school outcomes by using self-affirmation exercises.

### **Conflicts of Interest**

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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Dr. Ozgur Bolat received his B.A. from Bogazici University School of Education, Turkey. He later received the Fulbright and TEV scholarship to study for a Master’s degree at Harvard University Graduate School of Education. Upon completion, he returned to Turkey and taught at Bogazici University for two years. Bolat received his PhD at the School of Education University of Cambridge in the UK. During his PhD studies, Bolat spent one year at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Sloan

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