

The Development and Implementation of a Scale to Assess the Causes of Conflict in the Classroom for University Students

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Abstract

This study was undertaken to develop a “scale for causes of conflict in the classroom” that will assess and identify the causes of classroom conflicts in university students. Construct validity of the scale was tested by exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses and it was determined that the scale consisted of 8 factors. In the Scale for Causes of Conflict in the Classroom, the first factor consisted of 9 items, the second factor consisted of 8 items, third factor consisted of 7 items, fourth, fifth and sixth factors consisted of 4 items each, and seventh and eight factors consisted of 3 items each. After examining the item structures that the identified factors consisted, the following factors were selected: appreciation of the student by the teacher, teaching-learning environment skills of the teacher, student behavior, communicative skills of the teacher, personal characteristics of the student, fair treatment by the teacher, biased behavior by the teacher and teachers’ obeying the classroom rules. Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient values for each factor and the whole scale were found to be ,91; ,90; ,84; ,87; ,82; ,85; ,77; ,63 and ,95, respectively. After the scale was developed, 350 students from the department of education were administered the scale and the causes of conflict were determined according to student views by taking means and standard deviations into consideration. In order to identify the effect of individual variables, t-test, one-way analysis of variance and Scheffe tests were used. Analysis showed that the variables of *gender* and *department attended by students* resulted in significant differences in student perceptions whereas the variable of *classroom* did not affect the perceptions of students.

Key Words

Conflict, Causes of Conflict, University, Development of Scales.

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Conflict, which is a concept that is experienced in the interaction of an individual with the society, can affect the relationships of the individual in a positive or negative manner. Although the concept is perceived as negative at first, it is also accepted and seen as an organizational or personal development tool (Gray & Stark, 1984). The concept is one of the basic topics of various sciences such as education, management, psychology, and economy. There are many different definitions of the concept in the literature. According to many of these definitions, conflict is a disagreement and disaccord between two or more persons or groups due to several reasons and it surfaces when the needs, impulses, and wishes of individuals do not correspond with the others (Asunakutlu, & Safran, 2004; Can, 2005; Erdoğan, 1996; Taştan, 2005). Conflict in man-made organizations is a natural result of both managerial and social life. The fact that there are differences in organizations and that these differences are not regarded with understanding, tolerance, and respect create conflict (Peker, & Aytürk, 2002) and these types of situations cause regular activities in the organization to stop or get out of hand (Eren, 2001). There have been various studies in the field of management that aim to identify the causes of conflict. According to the results of these studies, the reasons of conflict have been identified as relationships at work, limited resources, vagueness in issues such as authority and responsibility, dependence on others, discrimination, reaching common decisions, new specializations, communication system, the size of organization, the type of management, individual aims and status, differences in values, rewarding systems, change, and ambiguity (Aydın, 1984; Gümüşeli, 1994; Seval, 2006; Şimşek, 1999; Huczynski & Bunchanan, 1990 cited in Yıldırım, 2003).

Educational organizations are among social organizations in which the most intense human relationships are experienced. The individual characteristics of educational personnel and students, differences in values, beliefs and attitudes, crowded classrooms, the inadequacy of the education and training process, misjudgments related to the communicative process, insufficient resources and aids, sharing limited resources etc. in these organizations among many other reasons cause conflict at schools and in classrooms. Observations and studies up to date have shown that conflict is seen in many schools and classrooms. According to Johnson and Johnson (1997), Schrupf, Crawford, and Bodine (1997), Glasser (1993), Kreidler (1984 cited in Türnüklü, 2002) and Türnüklü (2002),

the causes of conflict for students in the classroom are the basic necessities that cannot be met (e.g., life, love, respect, freedom, entertainment etc), limited resources (e.g., time, classroom and school resources and aids etc), different values (e.g., social and cultural differences and values), competitive and intolerant classroom environment, poor communication, and conflict resolution skills.

In classrooms where teaching is of low quality and expectation of the teacher is low, students get bored and display unwanted behaviors (Ataman, 2000). In order to turn the classroom environment into a safe one, the causes of conflict need to be detected and for this reason the teachers should be well informed about human characteristics and behavior (Güleç & Alkış, 2004). Conflict process that is experienced in faculties of education where the teachers of the future are taught carries a very important weight because the teacher candidates of today are the professional teachers of tomorrow. It will be much easier for a teacher to take the necessary precautions in the classroom if she/he knows and understands the importance of conflict from his/her school years.

The study targeted to develop a scale that would help identify the causes of student conflict in classrooms of universities where classroom conflicts are experienced. Following the development and the application of the scale in this context, the causes of student conflicts in the faculty of education were identified and later analyzed to show whether these causes were affected by individual differences.

Method

Generation of item pools, content validity, pre-testing process, and validity-reliability studies were employed in the development of the scale (Balcı, 1995; Erkuş, Sanlı, Bağlı & Güven, 2000; Karasar, 2000). Literature reviews were undertaken in generating the item pool and a voluntary group of 200 students were surveyed by an open-ended question related to the causes of classroom conflict. Similar and common items in student answers were grouped together and an 81-item draft form was created. The form prepared to test the reliability and validity of the scale (Büyüköztürk, 2008; Erkuş, 2003) was assessed by specialists in educational sciences. As a result of the feedback, these 81 items were decreased to 68 items in order to get the scale ready for pre-test. Pre-testing was done by 439 teacher candidates. Factor analysis was un-

dertaken in order to assess the construct validity of the scale, to identify the main factors and see how each factor explained each of the variables. Kaiser-Meyer Olkin (KMO) coefficient and Barlett sphericity test was administered to determine the availability of the data for factor analysis and to evaluate the adequacy of the sampling that was used in the study (Altunışık, Coşkun, Bayraktaroğlu, & Yıldırım, 2005; Kalaycı, 2008). Exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis approach was used (Büyüköztürk, 2008). Varimax technique was employed as a vertical rotation method for factor rotation. Item load values were determined as 0.40 or higher and attention was given to make sure they did not fall below 0.40 in the analysis (Kalaycı, 2008; Tavşancıl, 2006). Cronbach alpha coefficient, Guttman's bottom-line and 6 reliability coefficient values between lambda 1 and lambda 6 were calculated to determine the internal consistency of the scale, i.e. the item homogeneity (Kalaycı, 2008). The item discrimination powers of the scale and item/sub-group correlation coefficient were also calculated.

Factor analysis and results in 'Scale for Causes of Conflict in the Classroom

As a result of the analysis KMO value was found to be .94 and Barlett test result was 10436,477. KMO value is close to 1 and relatively higher and Barlett test result was meaningful ($p < 0.05$) which showed that the data acquired were appropriate for factor analysis and the sample size was sufficient. Later, factor analysis was carried out for the 68 items of the scale. All the items related to the factor "personal characteristics of the teacher" which were prepared in the development phase of the scale were removed due to similar loading in the other factors (items 47, 48, 49, 50, 51 and 52).

The factor analysis showed that the scale consisted of 8 factors and 42 items. The first factor comprised of 9 items; second, 8 items; third, 7 items; fourth, fifth and sixth, 4 items each; seventh and eighth, 3 items each. After the item content and structure was examined, the identified factors were named "appreciation of the student by the teacher", "teaching-learning environment skills of the teacher", "student behavior", "communicative skills of the teacher", "personal characteristics of the student", "fair treatment by the teacher", "biased behavior by the teacher" and "teachers' obeying the classroom rules". The 8 factors of the scale explain 63.77% of the total variance which is in the acceptable range.

Cronbach alpha coefficient values for internal validity for each factor and the whole scale were found to be .91; .90; .84; .87; .82; .85; .77; .63 and .95, respectively. The correlation coefficient obtained from total item and remaining item correlations were found to be higher than 0.29 and all the items were found to be statistically significant. The discrimination power of the items, 27%, was found to be statistically significant for all test items placed between bottom and top group means ($p < .05$)

According to these findings, the scale has a high level of reliability and sufficient internal consistency. So, we can conclude that 'Scale for Causes of Conflict in the Classroom' has efficient validity in determining the causes of conflict in the classroom.

Application of the scale and results

The scale was administered to the students in the faculty of education. The administration of the scale helped determine the causes of classroom conflict and the effect of different variables on student perception. Percentage, frequency, means, standard deviation, t-test, one-way variance analysis, and Scheffe test were used in data analysis. The scale was administered to 350 students who attend third and fourth years in AİBÜ-Classroom, Turkish and Science Teaching Departments of Faculty of Education. The results of the data are as follows:

a) Ranking of causes of classroom conflict: According to student perceptions, the first three reasons for classroom conflict are individual characteristics, communication problems, and unwanted behaviors. Almost all the studies undertaken about causes of conflict list reasons related to communication problems and lack of communication as the main reasons (Akkirman, 1998; Aydın, 1984; Demirbolat, 1997; Dökmen, 1988; Elma, & Demir, 2003; Ertürk, 2000; Kara, 1995; Karip, 2000; Korkmaz, 1994; Mirzeoğlu, 2005; Owens, 1995 cited in Gedikli & Balcı, 2005; Sütü, 2007). Communication is followed by biased behavior, feeling uncared for, the attitude of the administration, not following through tasks, individual differences, limited resources, management strategies (Akkirman, 1998; Dökmen, 1988; Gümüşeli, 1994; Kapuzsuzoğlu, 2004; Kara, 1995; Kısaç, 2002; Korkmaz, 1994; Mirzeoğlu, 2005; Sütü, 2007) and others. These findings are parallel to the results of this study.

b) The causes of conflict according to student perceptions: The perceptions of students who attended all the three departments in the study indicated

that they agreed the factors “teaching-learning environment skills of the teacher”, “communicative skills of the teacher”, “fair treatment by the teacher” and “teachers’ obeying the classroom rules” are important.

c) The causes of conflict according to personal characteristics: Although student perceptions showed a meaningful difference 0.05 in *gender variable* for all factors ($p < 0.05$), *variable related to classroom attended by the students* did not show a meaningful difference 0.05 in any of the factors studied ($p > 0.05$). In all the factors, means of female perceptions were found to be higher than that of male perceptions.

Rehber (2007) in his study showed that male students display more aggressive behaviors in conflict situations compared to female students and that female students care for feelings more than the male students. Student perceptions show a meaningful difference .05 in the factors “teaching-learning environment skills of the teacher”, “student behavior” and “personal characteristics of the student” according to the *variable department attended by the students* ($p < 0.05$).

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