

# The Quality of School Life and Burnout as Predictors of Subjective Well-Being among Teachers

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## Abstract

The main purpose of this study is to determine the rate of how teachers' subjective well-being is predicted by their perceptions about the quality of school life and burnout levels. The participants of the study consisted of 161 teachers (93 females, 68 males) who were working in elementary schools in Adana central districts. The Positive-Negative Affect Scale (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988), Life Satisfaction Inventory (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985), Quality of School Life Scale (Sari, 2007), and Teacher Burnout Scale (Seidman, & Zager, 1986) were used as data collection tools. To analyze the gathered data, stepwise regression analysis was performed.

Results of stepwise regression analysis showed that teachers' subjective well-being levels were predicted significantly by the Quality of School Life Scale sub-factors, namely "status" and "curriculum" and burnout scale sub-factor, namely "coping work-related stress." Teachers' life satisfaction levels were predicted significantly by the variables of "status", "coping work-related stress" and "school administrator" which is a sub factor of the Quality of School Life Scale. Also, teachers' positive affect was predicted by the variables of "status", "positive affects towards school" and "teachers," and teachers' negative affect was predicted by the variables of "coping work-related stress", "status," and "curriculum." Other subscales of the Quality of School Life and Teacher Burnout Scales have no significant contribution in the estimation. Results also indicated that the contribution of predictors could be accounted as 39% for subjective well-being; 23% for life satisfaction; 23% for positive affect, and 37% for negative affect. In the direction of these general findings, it was suggested that, in-service education programs about interpersonal relations and coping strategies with stress should be applied for teachers and administrators. Besides that, the quality of life in schools should be increased. On the basis of limited similar studies in the literature, it was suggested that the number of both descriptive and predictive studies should be increased on the topic.

## Key Words

Subjective Well-Being, Positive and Negative Affect, Life Satisfaction Quality of School Life, Teachers' Burnout.

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Teachers play a valuable role in helping students' growing process (Evers, Tomic, & Brouwers, 2004). The work of teaching comprises a complex mix of various factors that include teaching; learning new information and skills; keeping abreast of technological innovations; and dealing with students, parents, and the community. These are demanding roles and there are growing concerns about teachers' well-being and burnout levels (Pillay, Goddard, & Wilss, 2005). Thus, as the main actors of the school, the teachers' subjective well-being should be given importance.

The concept of subjective well-being consists of several aspects such as positive affect, negative affect, and life satisfaction. Myers and Diener (1995) proposed that subjective well-being reflects "a preponderance of positive thoughts and feelings about one's life" and defined subjective well-being as "the relative presence of positive affect, absence of negative affect, and satisfaction with life" (p. 11). Subjective well-being is interested in why individuals evaluate their lives in positive ways (Diener, 1984). Subjective well-being is a field that comprises positive characteristics and measurements. Also, it concentrates on lengthwise affects more than temporary emotional states (Yetim, 2001). Subjective well-being has two general components: Emotional and cognitive. The emotional component consists of positive and negative affects whereas the cognitive component is related with the individual's life satisfaction (Diener, & Larsen, 1993; Diener, & Suh, 1997; Pavot, Diener, Colvin, & Sandvik, 1991; Schimmack, Radhakrishnan, Oishi, Dzokoto, & Ahadi, 2002).

Positive affect dimension reflects a person's positive mood states, including enthusiastic, active, and alert moods. In contrast, negative affect dimension reflects the extent to which a person's aversive mood states, including anger, contempt, disgust, guilt, fear, and nervousness (Watson, 1988; Watson, & Pennebaker, 1989). Life satisfaction as an indicator of subjective well-being can be described as the individual's cognitive assessment of one's life in such a way that it includes everything (job, marriage, health, and etc.) (Diener, & Diener, 1995; Pavot et al., 1991). Life satisfaction contains cognitive judgments (Greenspoon, & Saklofske, 1998) and it has a supplementary characteristic to the affective dimension (Braynt, & Veroff, 1982).

Leonard (2002) defined the quality of school life as "a synthesis of positive experiences, negative experiences, and other feelings related to specific school life domains" (p. 55). Epstein and McPartland (1976; cited

in Mok, & Flynn, 2002), stated that quality of school life is a concept which is affected by formal and informal aspects of the school, by social or task-related experiences and by relationships with peers and figures of authority. In this respect, it can be said that, there are many factors which have important influences on teachers' perceptions of quality of school life such as students, school administration style and administrators, colleagues, general culture of the school, and so on which shape the environment of the school. In the literature, there are many researchers who agree on the statement of "the environment has important effects on the perceptions and consequently on the behaviors of individuals" (Snyder, 1990; Xiaofu, & Qiwen, 2007). Staw (1975; cited in Rafferty, 2003) suggested that "climate perceptions represent the apprehension of meaningful order in a perceiver's world and that perceived meaningfulness based on cues in that world is the basis for behavior" (p. 51). Therefore, it cannot be thought that the level of subjective well-being which comprises positive ideas and feelings about life could be separated from the perceptions about the work environment which has a big part in people's lives.

Teacher burnout was one of the variables which was taken into consideration in this study. Burnout is described as a tripartite syndrome that includes feelings of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of personal accomplishment that is a response to chronic stress in jobs where individuals work with people (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996; cited in Kokkinos, 2007). According to Yong and Yue (2007), teachers' stress and burnout affect the schools' study climate, lower morale, prevent the attainment of educational objectives, and increase the probability of teachers leaving their posts. Work stress and burnout have negative effects on the individual and the organization. The conflict between the teachers' expectations and reality is the main reason for work stress and burnout (Yong, & Yue, 2007). Long-term stress and anxiety inevitably deplete teachers' enthusiasm, lower their physical fitness, affect their mental health, and result in work burnout (Schaufeli, Maslach, & Markek, 1993; cited in Yong, & Yue, 2007).

The investigation of the literature shows that there are some studies about burnout among teachers (e.g., Avcıoğlu, Deniz, & Kahraman, 2005; Cemaloğlu, & Erdemoğlu Şahin, 2007; Evers et al., 2004; Haughey, & Murphy, 1983; Kırılmaz, Çelen, & Sarp, 2003; Peker, 2002; Pilla et al., 2005). In addition, studies have also investigated the quality

of school life among students (e.g., Karatzias, Papadioti-Athanasidou, Power, & Swanson, 2001; Majeed, Fraser, & Aldridge, 2002; Mok, & Flynn, 2002; Sari, & Cenkseven, 2008). However, there are very few studies in which quality of school life was investigated among teachers (Sari, 2007; Xiaofu, & Qiwen, 2007). Also, no literature was found in which the relationships between teachers' subjective well-being, quality of school life, and their burnout levels were investigated. Therefore, in the present study, the main purpose is to determine how teachers' subjective well-being is predicted by their perceptions about quality of school life and burnout levels.

## Method

### Participants

The participants of this study included 93 females (58%) and 68 males (42%), a total of 161 teachers who were working in elementary schools in Adana central districts, Turkey. 37 teachers (23%) had 0-5 years of experience; 52 teachers (32%) had 6-10 years of experience; 27 teachers (17%) had 11-15 years of experience; 18 teachers (11%) had 16-20 years of experience and 23 teachers (14%) had 21 and more of experience.

### Data Collection Instruments

***The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS):*** This scale measures individuals' satisfaction with their lives. The SWLS uses a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7), yielding a possible score range of 5 (low life satisfaction) to 35 (high life satisfaction; Diener et al., 1985). It was adapted into Turkish by Köker (1991) and Yetim (1991). The scale's internal consistency was high ( $\alpha = .87$ ) and two week test-retest reliability was  $r = .85$  (Köker, 1991). In the present study, the SWLS Cronbach Alpha coefficient was .89.

***The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS):*** The PANAS consists of 10 positive affects (POS-AFF) and 10 negative affects (NEG-AFF). Participants are asked to rate items on a scale from 1 to 5, based on the strength of emotion where 1 = "very slightly or not at all," and 5 = "extremely." Initial studies in the development of the PANAS showed that the scales are stable at appropriate levels over a two-month time period, highly internally consistent and largely uncorrelated (Watson et al., 1988). The scale was adapted into Turkish by Gençöz (2000).

The scale's internal consistency was .83 for positive affect, .86 for negative affect and, test-retest reliability was  $r = .40$  (positive affect) and  $r = .54$  (negative affect). For the present study, the reliability of the Cronbach Alpha coefficients of the PANAS dimensions were .84 and .82 respectively.

**The Quality of School Life Scale (QSLs):** The QSLs developed by Sari (2007) measures the level of quality of school life and consists of 50 items. The QSLs is a 5-point Likert scale, items ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The scale consists of six subscales (i.e., Administrator, Teachers, Affects towards school, Student-student relationships, Status, and Curriculum). These six dimensions explain 53.21% of the total variance. The Cronbach Alpha coefficients of internal consistency of these dimensions were calculated as .93 for the Administrator subscale, .90 for the Teachers and Affects towards school subscales, .80 for the Student-student relationship subscale; .74 for the Status subscale, and .52 for the Curriculum subscale. The Cronbach alpha coefficient of internal consistency of the whole scale was calculated as .94. For the present study, the reliability of the Cronbach Alpha coefficients of the QSLs dimensions were .91, .89, .92, .78, .72 and .54 respectively.

**The Teacher Burnout Scale:** This scale was developed by Seidman and Zager (1986) and determines the level of burnout of teachers. It was adapted into Turkish by Tümkaya (1996). The scale composed of 20 Likert type items grouped into four subscales (i.e., Perceived administrative support, Coping with job-related stress, Career satisfaction, and Attitudes towards students). These four subscales explain 44.5% of the total variance. The Cronbach alpha coefficients of internal consistency were between .66 and .76. Teachers state their opinions about items on a six-point scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6). The scores taken from the Teacher Burnout Scale cannot be calculated totally from the scale as a whole, rather the scores are calculated separately by scales. The high scores taken from the scale mean that the burnout level of the teacher is high while the low scores mean that the burnout level is low. For the present study, the reliability of the Cronbach alpha coefficients of the Teacher Burnout Scale dimensions were .74, .82, .80 and .71 respectively.

## Data Analysis

Stepwise regression analysis was used with the data (Tabachnick, & Fidell, 2001). The SWB is a composite variable that was computed to account for the tripartite concept of SWB. The SWB variable was calculated according to the formula:  $SWB = SWLS + POSAFF - NEGPAFF$  (Vittersø, 2001). The indicator variables were transformed into z-scores before the SWB variable was calculated.

## Results

### Subjective Well-Being

Stepwise regression analysis was performed in order to find the most predictive dimensions of the quality of school life and burnout scales for subjective well-being. The stepwise regression analysis results indicated that the “*Status*”, “*Coping with job-related stress*” and “*Curriculum*” subscales’ scores have significant contribution and, the other variables did not have to subjective well-being. The results revealed that “*Status*” was the best predictor of subjective well-being and it accounts for 26% total variance [ $F_{reg(1,156)} = 55.53, p < .001$ ]. The second predictor was “*Coping with job-related stress*” and it accounts for 10% total variance [ $F_{reg(2,156)} = 44.08, p < .001$ ]. Both predictors account for 36% of the total variance [ $F_{change(1,154)} = 24.28, p < .001$ ]. Finally, the third predictor was “*Curriculum*” and it accounts for 3 % of total variance [ $F_{reg(3,156)} = 32.63, p < .001$ ]. All of the predictors account for 39% of the total variance [ $F_{change(1,153)} = 6.56, p < .05$ ].

### Life Satisfaction

Stepwise regression analysis results show that the “*Status*”, “*Coping with job-related stress*” and “*Administrator*” subscales scores contributed significantly and the other variables did not to life satisfaction. The results revealed that “*Status*” was the best predictor of life satisfaction and it accounts for 16% of total variance [ $F_{reg(1,156)} = 29.72, p < .001$ ]. The second predictor was “*Coping with job-related stress*” and it accounts for 5 % of the total variance [ $F_{reg(2,156)} = 20.35, p < .001$ ]. Both predictors account for 21% of the total variance [ $F_{change(1,154)} = 9.38, p < .01$ ]. The third predictor was “*Administrator*” and it accounts for 2% of total variance [ $F_{reg(3,156)} = 15.46, p < .001$ ]. All of the predictive variables account for 23% of the total variance [ $F_{change(1,153)} = 4.69, p < .05$ ].

## Positive Affect

According to stepwise regression analysis results, the “Status”, “Affects towards school” and “Teachers” subscales’ scores have significant contributions and, the other variables did not have to positive affect. The results revealed that “Status” was the best predictor of positive affect and it accounts for 15% of the total variance [ $F_{\text{reg (1,156)}} = 26.56, p < .001$ ]. The second predictor was “Affects towards school” and it accounts for 4% of the total variance [ $F_{\text{reg (2,156)}} = 17.31, p < .001$ ]. Both predictors account for 18% of the total variance [ $F_{\text{change (1,154)}} = 7.03, p < .01$ ]. The third predictor was “Teachers” and it accounts for 5% of the total variance [ $F_{\text{reg (3,156)}} = 15.18, p < .001$ ]. All of the predictive variables account for 23% of the total variance [ $F_{\text{change (1,153)}} = 9.09, p < .01$ ].

## Negative Affect

Stepwise regression analysis results show that the “Coping with job-related stress”, “Status” and “Curriculum” subscales scores contributed significantly to negative affect. The results revealed that “Coping with job-related stress” was the best predictor of negative affect and it accounts for 26% of the total variance [ $F_{\text{reg (1,156)}} = 53.17, p < .001$ ]. The second predictor was “Status” and it accounts for 6% of the total variance [ $F_{\text{reg (2,156)}} = 36.21, p < .001$ ]. Both predictors account for 32% of the total variance [ $F_{\text{change (1,154)}} = 14.59, p < .01$ ]. The last predictor was “Curriculum” and it accounts for 5% of the total variance [ $F_{\text{reg (3,156)}} = 15.46, p < .001$ ]. All of the predictive variables account for 37% of the total variance [ $F_{\text{change (1,153)}} = 4.69, p < .05$ ].

## Discussion

As the results of stepwise regression analysis, the dimension of “Status” of the Quality of School Life Scale was a significant predictor of subjective well-being, life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect. Status is related to individuals’ feelings of self-worth and importance accorded by significant others within the school (Mok, & Flynn, 2002). People want to know and be known in the society and they want to feel that they are a member of this society (Pagano, 1991). Therefore, it is a normal feeling that teachers want to have a magnified place in the school where they spend a big part of their times and want to feel themselves worthy by their colleagues, administrators, and students.

According to results, the dimension of "Curriculum" of the Quality of School Life Scale was a significant predictor of both subjective well-being and negative affects. Curriculum implemented at the school (lessons, subjects, teaching strategies, materials, assessment techniques, time schedules, etc.) has important influences on teachers' and students' perceptions of the quality of school life. However, the administrator is the primary responsible person for implementing the curriculum at school, as an implementer and developer the curriculum at the class level; the teacher has more responsibility than the administrator (Ornstein, & Hunkins, 1998). Because of that, teachers' views have a big importance. Cheung and Wong (2002) stated that all teachers have some beliefs about how curriculum should be organized. According to Flores (2005), teachers are very important part of the structural reform attempts in the educational systems. In Turkish educational system, however, the curriculum was prepared through broad participation (Vural, 2005), it is impossible for all teachers to be a participant of the curriculum development process. Therefore, most teachers are in a situation of that, they are only the implementers of the curriculum which was developed without their views' being considered and without having any chance to change it. Teachers' perceived self-autonomy at workplace may reflect to their general lives. Constraints on autonomy such as perceived lack of control and sense of powerlessness are related to tension, frustration, and anxiety among teachers (Pearson, & Moomaw, 2005). It can be said that all of these findings are current for teachers who participated to this study. The finding of the scores taken from curriculum dimension has a positive correlation with subjective well-being and a negative correlation with negative affect is supported to this conclusion.

Reese (2004) stated that around the world, the increasing numbers of teachers report serious work-related stress. In this study, one of the dimensions of the Teacher's Burnout Scale, "coping with job-related stress" was a significant predictor of both subjective well-being and its components; those are the positive affect and the negative affect. Teachers who have trouble in coping with stressors at the workplace also have low levels of subjective well-being and life satisfaction and high level of negative affects. Research show that there is close relationship between positive events in our lives and positive affect and, there is a close relationship between negative and stressful events and negative affect (Warr, Barter, & Brownbridge, 1983; Reich, & Zatura, 1981). Si-



milarly, Cenkseven (2004) found that coping with stressful life events is an important predictor of subjective well-being. In terms of these findings, it can be said that teachers' abilities in coping effectively with bad and stressful events at the workplace may lead them to have higher level of subjective well-being.

The other result of the study was that the dimension of "Administrator" of the Quality of School Life Scale was a significant predictor of life satisfaction. According to Çelik (2002) school climate which can be defined as a set of features which differentiates the good school and the bad school has a big importance on the effectiveness of the school and on the job satisfaction of teachers. The person who should develop the school climate and culture is the administrator. Thus, if the administrator is a good leader it can be said that the school climate will be satisfactory for teachers and this satisfaction may reflect on their general life satisfaction.

The dimension of "Affects toward school" of the Quality of School Life Scale was a significant predictor of positive affect. This sub-scale consists of general affects of the teachers towards their school. Emotions are at the heart of teaching. Good teaching is charged with positive emotion (Hargreaves, 1998). In addition, the effects of emotions can be long-term (Van Veen, & Slegers, 2006). The affects which an individual has about the environment being in largely depend on the qualities of the environment itself. Studies related to work environment show that the work environment that has favorable conditions has positive effects on both loyalty to the organization and work satisfaction. In addition, there is a negative correlation between work environment that has negative characteristics and negative affect towards the work and teacher stress (Mauno, Kinnunen & Ruokolainen, 2006).

The last finding of the research was that the dimension of "Teachers" of the Quality of School Life Scale was a significant predictor of positive affect. This dimension comprises perceptions of teachers about interpersonal relationships among teachers and teachers' professional adequacy. It may be said that the person who has a work environment in which he can communicate clearly with others, is satisfied and takes pleasure from pitch in with them and, feels that his development increasingly goes on in this social context may lean towards the life generally. As cited by Hitlan, Clifton and DeSoto (2006), research show that in terms of its psychological impact, perceived exclusion is related to

increased social anxiety (Baumeister, & Tice, 1990), depression (Coie, Terry, Lenox, Lockman, & Hyman, 1995), loneliness (Jones, 1990), anger (Twenge, Baumeister, Tice, & Strucke, 2001), hurt feelings (Leary, Springer, Negal, Ansell, & Evans, 1998), and lower psychological health (Schneider, Hitlan, & Radhakrishnan, 2000) .

In general, results show that teachers' subjective well-being was predicted by the "Status", "Administrator", "Affects towards school", "Teachers," and "Curriculum" sub-scales of the Quality of School Life Scale and it was predicted by the "Coping with job-related stress" sub-scale of the Teacher Burnout Scale. It can be said that these variables are closely related to interpersonal relationships. Therefore, in the direction of these general findings, it is suggested that in-service educational programs about interpersonal relations and coping strategies with stress should be developed and administered for teachers and administrators. Besides that, the quality of life in schools should be increased. Also, on the basis of limited similar studies in the literature it is suggested that the number of both descriptive and predictive studies should be increased on the topic.

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