



Effects of Teacher Personalities on Emotional Exhaustion: Mediating Role of Emotional Labor

H. Nejat BASIM^a
Baskent University

Memduh BEGİNİRBAŞ^b
Turkish Military Academy

Rukiye CAN YALÇIN^c
Ministry of National Education

Abstract

One of the most indispensable and important elements of education is teachers whose personality closely affects training and education. In this context, this study examined the effects of teachers' personality traits on their emotional exhaustion in a mediating model which centers around emotional labor. Data were obtained from 798 teachers working in primary and high schools in Ankara and Eskisehir. According to the findings of hierarchical regression analysis, neuroticism and extraversion were found to significantly affect emotional exhaustion whereas other dimensions of personality were not found to be predictive of emotional exhaustion. In general, personality traits were found to predict emotional labor and all dimensions of emotional labor were found to affect emotional exhaustion. Further, findings of mediation analysis showed that surface acting was the only mediator in the relation between neuroticism and emotional exhaustion.

Key Words

Personality, The Big Five Personality, Emotional Exhaustion, Emotional Labor.

Problems at workplace affect not only personal life but also work life in a negative way and cause a general unhappiness. This kind of long term unhappiness experienced individually and called as burnout produces negative results both for employees and organizations. Thus the term "burnout" has become an important focus of behavioral investigations. Several personal and organizational factors may determine the level of burnout. In this respect, personality is thought to be one of these factors (Barrick & Mount, 2005; Judge, Woolf, & Hurst, 2009). Hence personality, indicating personal emotions and behaviors (Connor-Smith & Flashbart, 2007), significantly influences employee happiness or unhappiness in general.

Considering the fact that burnout is a general state of exhaustion especially for frontline occupations that require face to face interactions and emotional processes (Maslach & Jackson, 1981), it is in fact a serious danger for teachers. Yet, teachers, regardless of their own emotional state, are supposed to listen to students' problems, give them advice, behave warmly towards students, stay calm even in interactions with problem students or attract the attention of students to provide effective learning. All these facts may cause a general exhaustion in teachers.

In the relationship between personality and burnout, other variables such as emotional labor may have a mediating role (Judge et al., 2009). A criti-

- a** H. Nejat BASIM, Ph.D., is full professor of management. His research interests include burnout, organizational citizenship behavior, job satisfaction, organizational justice, organizational commitment and resilience. *Correspondence:* Baskent University, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Bağlıca Campus, 06810 Ankara, Turkey. Email: nbasim@baskent.edu.tr Phone: +90 312 246 6666/1682.
- b** Memduh BEGİNİRBAŞ, Ph.D. Contact: Turkish Military Academy, Department of Management, Ankara, Turkey. Email: mbegenirbas@kho.edu.tr
- c** Rukiye CAN YALÇIN, Ph.D. Contact: Polis Amca Primary School, İnönü Avenue, Malatya, Turkey. Email: rukiyecan@yahoo.com

cal component in various occupations that require interpersonal contact; emotional labor is the act of expressing anticipated emotions during service interactions (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). Emotional labor is not only affected by personality but it affects the level of burnout itself (Hochschild, 1983; Sutton & Wheatly, 2003; Wharton, 1999).

On the basis of these approaches, effects of teachers' personality on their burnout and the mediating role of emotional labor in this relationship were examined in the current study. Variables of personality and emotional labor were investigated along with all their sub-dimensions. However, only the emotional exhaustion of burnout dimension was explored since it is thought to be the core component and the most obvious symptom of burnout (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Although there are a great number of studies on different occupations demonstrating the relations between personality and emotional exhaustion (Kokkinos, 2007; Lopez, Bolano, & Narino, 2010), personality and emotional labor (Austin, Dore, & O'Donovan, 2007; Bono & Vey, 2007) and, emotional labor and burnout dimensions (Pugliesi, 1999; Zhang & Zhu, 2008), comprehensive studies examining all the variables together seem to be inadequate (Kiffin-Peterson, Jordon, & Souter, 2010). Thus, it is thought that the integrated approach of this study may contribute to the literature.

Conceptual Framework

Emotional Exhaustion: Burnout can be defined as the loss of power and energy because of failure, attrition and overload, or the depletion of individual's internal resources as a result of irretrievable demands (Freudenberger, 1974). Though it appears as a result of work stress (Şeşen, Çetin, & Basim, 2011), burnout is not an indicator but the result of unmanaged work stress (Altun, 2002).

According to the widely cited approach today, burnout is a syndrome, appears mostly in front-line workers and is manifested in three dimensions such as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Emotional exhaustion refers to the feeling of being overloaded at work (Schaufeli & Greenglass, 2001) and it is the key aspect of burnout syndrome (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). On the other hand, depersonalization refers to dehumanized and impersonal view of others (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). The third aspect of burnout, reduced personal accomplishment, suggests a loss of self-efficacy (Schaufeli & Greenglass, 2001) and

negative self-evaluation (Maslach & Jackson, 1981).

In addition to the three dimensions of burnout, there are many studies focusing on the relationship between the emotional exhaustion and other variables (Abraham, 1998; Brotheridge & Lee, 1998; Kiffin-Peterson et al., 2010; Morris & Feldman, 1997). In this respect, when people express that they are experiencing burnout; they, in fact, are experiencing emotional exhaustion (Leiter & Maslach, 1988; Maslach et al., 2001). On the other hand, since emotional exhaustion is considered as a crucial state, it must be monitored in order to identify and prevent burnout at early stages (Önder & Basim, 2008). Thus, only emotional exhaustion aspect of burnout was investigated in this research.

There are several personal and organizational factors of emotional exhaustion. The studies on individual factors of emotional exhaustion mainly focused on three points such as demographic variables (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Maslach & Leiter, 2001; Torun, 1997); personality (Cano-Garcia, Padilla-Munoz, & Carasco-Ortiz, 2005; Kokkinos, 2007; Lopez et al., 2010; Mount, Barrick, Scullen, & Rounds, 2005) and social support (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Torun, 1997). These variables cause individual differences and they sometimes lead to emotional exhaustion while they, in some cases, mitigate the negative results of emotional exhaustion. Thus, it is assumed to be important for the employees and organizations that individual variables and factors, causing specific emotional exhaustion, should be analyzed carefully and then the necessary precautions should be taken. Especially teachers, intensely experiencing face-to-face relations, are the potential victims of emotional exhaustion (Azeem & Nazir, 2008; Schwab & Iwanichi, 1982), and thus it is essential to analyze the effects of their personality on emotional exhaustion.

Personality and Emotional Exhaustion: It is difficult to define personality because of its comprehensive structure that affects an individual's thoughts, feelings, discourses and behaviors (Özgülven, 1992). Studies on personality focus on individual aspects of personality (Camgöz, 2009; Zel, 2001); its consistency and continuity (Mount et al., 2005); its dynamic structure (Binbaşıoğlu, 1983) and its power to direct behaviors (Camgöz, 2009; Mount et al., 2005).

Studies that research the characteristics representing the structure of personality are based on factor analysis (Cattell, 1956; Eysenck, 1951). In this respect the five-factor structure is the most commonly used model in literature (Barrick & Mount, 2003; Schneider, 2007; Tobin, Graziano, Vanman,

& Tassinary, 2000). Five-factor model, consisting of the analysis of the words that individuals use to describe themselves and others, is a structure emerged as a result of long years of research (McCrae & John, 1995, 1997). It has also been applied in different cultures with several evaluation techniques and it has proved to be reliable (Goldberg, 1990; McCrae & John, 1992).

The model explains personality with five universal dimensions (Barrick & Mount, 1991, 2003; Costa & MacCrae, 1995; Costa, McCrae, & Dye, 1991; Graziano, Jensen-Campell, & Hair, 1996; Judge & Bono, 2000; King, George, & Hebl, 2005; McCrae & Costa, 1991; Somer & Goldberg, 1999) as neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. On the other hand, there are several studies indicating the effects of personality on emotional exhaustion (Cano-Garcia et al., 2005; Judge et al., 2009; Kiffin-Peterson et al., 2010; Kokkinos, 2007; Lopez et al., 2010).

H1: Teachers' personality traits have significant effects on their emotional exhaustion.

Personality, Emotional Exhaustion, and Emotional Labor

Personality and Emotional Labor: Emotional labor mainly defined as an emotional regulation in order to display appropriate emotions at work (Isenbarger & Zembyles, 2006), is crucial for organizational success. While regulating or displaying the required emotions at work, employees experience emotional labor (Çukur, 2009). According to emotional labor studies, individuals control and manage their emotions in order to meet the social norms and expectations (Hochschild, 1983, 1990, 1993).

An important component in various occupational groups in education, health and service sectors (Hochschild, 1983; Sutton & Wheatley, 2003; Wharton, 1999) emotional labor is believed to be crucial for teachers who continually try to direct the emotions and cognitive responses of students towards education.

Emotional labor is the management of feelings to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display for a wage (Hochschild, 1983). According to a more comprehensive approach, emotional labor is the process of regulating feelings and expressions in order to achieve organizational goals (Grandey, 2000). The main factor of emotional labor is the display rules and if these display rules are internalized, emotional

regulation can be a natural process for employees (Sutton, 2004); otherwise it can result in emotional exhaustion because of suppression of the self.

Managing emotions may be accomplished by three basic methods: surface acting, deep acting and expression of naturally felt emotions (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Hochschild, 1979; Morris & Feldman, 1996; Wouters, 1989). Surface acting refers to the process of modifications in employee's expressions such as smiling despite negative feelings. Deep acting refers to actual efforts to change employee's feelings to display required emotions (Hochschild, 1983). However, in some cases, employees may display required emotions because they genuinely feel them and it is called as expression of naturally felt emotions (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Morris & Feldman, 1996).

On the other hand personality is thought to be an important determinant in the display of emotions both at work life and personal life (Özgen, 2010). There are several studies indicating the significant effect of personality dimensions on emotional labor (Barrick & Mount, 2005; Kiffin-Peterson et al., 2010; Tews & Glomb, 2004). In this respect, that extroverted people were found to easily adopt both surface acting and deep acting (Tews & Glomb, 2004). It was also seen that neurotic employees commonly adopt surface acting (Diefendorff, Croyle, & Gosserand, 2005; Kiffin-Peterson et al., 2010).

H2: Personality traits of teachers significantly affect their emotional labor strategies.

Emotional Labor and Emotional Exhaustion: In the context of emotional labor, emotional exhaustion appears when employees cannot manage their own emotions and those of their customers (Copp, 1998). Significant relationships between the dimensions of emotional labor and burnout were explored in several studies on various occupations (Brotheridge & Lee, 1998; Grandey, 1999; Hargreaves, 2000b; Hochschild, 1983; Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006; Kahn, 1993; Kruml & Geddes, 2000; Morris & Feldman, 1996; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1989; Wharton, 1993; Zhang & Zhu, 2008).

Various studies exist especially on emotional labor and emotional exhaustion on teachers (Hargreaves, 2000a; Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006; Sutton & Wheatley, 2003; Wharton, 1993; Zhang & Zhu, 2008). In these studies it was found that surface acting, because of emotional conflict, results in emotional exhaustion (Troman, 2000; Zhang & Zhu, 2008).

H3: There is a significant relationship between teachers' emotional labor strategies and emotional exhaustion.

Mediating Role of Emotional Exhaustion: As expressed in previous parts, both personality and emotional labor are important determinants of emotional exhaustion. Morris and Feldman (1996) found similar results in their study and presented a model including the antecedents and consequences of emotional labor. In their model, personality was one of the antecedents while emotional exhaustion was among the consequences of emotional labor. On the other hand, another study (Kiffin-Peterson et al., 2010) revealed the significant effect of personality on emotional exhaustion and partial mediating effect of emotional labor in this relationship. In this context, it is thought that personality traits are significant factors on emotional labor strategies and as a result; affect the emotional exhaustion of teachers. However, because of limited number studies in literature, the mediating role of emotional labor in the relationship between those variables is not clear. In this respect, we try to answer the following question “Is there a mediating role of emotional labor in the relationship between personality and burnout?”

Method

Research Design

Correlational research design which aims to present casual relations without intervening variables (Büyüköztürk, Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz, & Demirel, 2008) was used in the present study. Research was carried out with a data collected from a group of participants. In this context Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) with Structural Equation Modeling was presented followed by correlations. Hypothesis and mediating effects were tested with hierarchical regression analysis.

Participants

The participants in this research consisted of 798 teachers from 44 schools in Ankara and Eskisehir selected in accordance with the convenience sampling. Questionnaires were administered to the participants by researchers in 44 schools which were proposed by Provincial Directorates for National Education in both cities. 25 of these schools were in Ankara while 19 were in Eskisehir. Since the purpose of the present study was to explore casual relations of several variables, teachers in these schools met the requirements. 1048 questionnaires were distributed and 832 of them were returned. 34 questionnaires were invalid and left out of the analyzes. As a re-

sult, a total of 798 valid responses were used in the research. 423 (53%) of the participants were female and 375 (42%) were male. The sample included 590 (74%) married and 208 (26%) single participants; 415 (52%) participants were employed at primary schools whereas 383 (48%) worked at high schools.

Measures

The Big Five Inventory: The Big Five Inventory (Benet-Martinez & John, 1998) was employed to assess the five dimensions of personality. The Inventory consists of 44 items and has 5 subscales. Turkish adaptation of the measure was carried out by Sümer, Lajunen and Özkan, (2005) as a part of a study (Schmitt, Allik, McCrae, & Benet-Martinez, 2007) in Turkey on persons' self-identification profiles and patterns in 56 countries. In this study Cronbach's alpha coefficients were found to be 0,79 for neuroticism (8 items), 0,77 for extraversion (8 items), 0,76 for openness to experience (10 items), 0,70 for agreeableness (9 items) and 0,78 for conscientiousness (9 items) (Schmit et al.). In other studies with the same scale, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were found to be between 0,60 and 0,73 (Basım & Şeşen, 2006) and between 0,75 and 0,81 (Tabak, Basım, Tatar, & Çetin, 2010). Since; the personality variable was analyzed as a sub-dimension; we conducted a first-level five-factor CFA with AMOS (6.0). As a result, goodness of fit index was found as $\Delta\chi^2=266.218$, $df=75$, $\Delta\chi^2/df=3.55$, $RMSEA=0.057$, $CFI=0.91$, $GFI=0.96$, $AGFI=0.93$. These results imply that the inventory fitted the data. Cronbach's alpha coefficients was 0,65 for neuroticism, 0,71 for extraversion, 0,65 for openness to experiences, 0,62 for agreeableness and 0,68 for conscientiousness. Each item was answered via a five-point Likert scale (1= Strongly disagree, 5= Strongly agree).

Emotional Exhaustion Scale: Emotional exhaustion subscale of Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1981) was employed to assess the level of emotional exhaustion of teachers. Turkish translation of MBI was carried out by Ergin (1992) and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was found to be 0,83 for emotional exhaustion. In another study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was found to be 0,82 (Sucuoğlu & Kuloğlu, 1996). In order to reveal the validity of the scale, we conducted one factor CFA and examined the factor loadings of the items and their statistical significance. Factor loadings of items ranged from 0,60 to 0,85. However, one item that had a lower factor loading was removed and CFA was repeated. Emotional exhaustion scale was tested by unrelated model and goodness of fit index was found to be; $\Delta\chi^2=22.171$, $df=13$, $\Delta\chi^2/df=1.705$, $RMSEA=0.030$,

CFI=0.99, GFI=0.99, AGFI=0.98. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0,87 for the scale. The scale included 9 items and each item was answered via a 5 point Likert scale (1= Strongly disagree, 5= Strongly agree).

Emotional Labor Scale: Emotional labor was measured with the 14 item emotional labor strategies developed by Diefendorff, Croyle, and Gossierand (2005). Based on previous measures (Grandey, 2003; Kruml & Geddes, 2000), the scale was designed to measure three types of emotional labor strategies; surface acting, deep acting and expression of naturally felt emotions. The scale was translated and adapted to Turkish by the writers of this study in accordance with a method described by Brislin, Lonner, and Thorndike, (1973). Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was applied on the data collected from the pilot sample and also from the sample of the present study with Turkish adaptation. Validity of the scale was measured through CFA. After testing four models, the first level three factor model produced a more acceptable model fit ($\Delta\chi^2=233.047$, $df=54$, $\Delta\chi^2/df=4.316$, $RMSEA=0.064$, $CFI=0.96$, $GFI=0.96$, $AGFI=0.93$). Cronbach's alpha coefficients were 0,84 for surface acting, 0,90 for deep acting and 0,83 for expression of naturally felt emotions. In the scale, surface acting was measured by 6 items, deep acting was measured by 4 items and expression of naturally felt emotions was measured by 3 items. Each item was answered via five-point Likert scale (1=Never; 5=Always).

Results

In the first step, we tested the correlation analysis between variables. The results showed statistically significant relations between personality dimensions (except for openness to experience) and emotional exhaustion. The relation between emotional exhaustion and neuroticism was positive while the other relations were negative. Also, surface acting had significant relations with neuroticism ($r=0,117$, $p<0,01$) and openness to experience ($r=0,071$, $p<0,05$). Deep acting was also significantly related to openness to experience ($r=0,108$, $p<0,01$) and conscientiousness ($r=0,078$, $p<0,05$). Expression of naturally felt emotions also had significant relations with personality dimensions except for neuroticism. While emotional exhaustion had significant relations with surface acting ($r=0,107$, $p<0,01$); its relation with deep acting ($r=-0,119$, $p<0,01$) and expression of naturally felt emotions ($r=-0,227$, $p<0,01$) was negatively significant.

Hierarchical regression analysis was performed to test the hypothesis. In order to explore the effects of

personality dimensions on emotional exhaustion, we first performed hierarchical regression analysis. After controlling the demographic variables, neuroticism ($\beta=0,271$, $p<0,01$) and extraversion ($\beta=-0,091$, $p<0,05$) were found to significantly affect emotional exhaustion. Thus, Hypothesis-1, which claimed that personality dimensions significantly predicted emotional exhaustion, was partially supported.

Second, we performed the hierarchical regression analysis to reveal whether personality significantly predicts emotional labor. Personality dimensions had significant effects on all emotional labor dimensions. In this respect, surface acting was significantly predicted by neuroticism ($\beta=0,106$, $p<0,01$); and deep acting was significantly predicted by openness to experience ($\beta=0,099$, $p<0,05$). On the other hand, openness to experience ($\beta=0,111$, $p<0,01$) and agreeableness ($\beta=0,111$, $p<0,01$) significantly predicted expression of naturally felt emotions. Thus, the results partially supported the Hypothesis-2 which claimed that personality significantly predicted emotional labor.

On the other hand, emotional labor also significantly predicted emotional exhaustion. Surface acting ($\beta=0,080$, $p<0,05$) significantly affected emotional exhaustion. Deep acting ($\beta=-0,123$, $p<0,01$) and expression of naturally felt emotions ($\beta=-0,184$, $p<0,01$) had negative effects on emotional exhaustion. These results supported Hypothesis-3 which claimed that emotional labor significantly predicted emotional exhaustion

In order to reveal whether emotional labor is mediating the relationship between personality and emotional exhaustion, previous hierarchical regression analyses were examined together. As presented above, personality significantly predicted emotional exhaustion; emotional labor significantly predicted emotional exhaustion and personality significantly predicted emotional labor. However, the regression coefficients of neuroticism and openness to experience on emotional exhaustion decreased after emotional labor was included in the model. Similarly, while personality directly predicted the 11,2% of total variance of emotional exhaustion, this percentage decreased to 9,7 after the emotional labor was included in the model. This decrease demonstrated that emotional labor had a partial mediating effect between personality and emotional exhaustion. In order to understand whether this effect was significant, Sobel test was performed and it was found that surface acting ($z=-2.11$, $p<0,05$) had a mediating role in the relationship between neuroticism and emotional

exhaustion. Thus, the answer to the research question showed that “emotional labor had a partial mediating role in the relationship between personality and emotional exhaustion.”

Discussion and Conclusion

This study was designed to examine the mediating role of emotional labor in the relationship between personality and emotional exhaustion. First, it was found that neuroticism and extraversion significantly predicted emotional exhaustion. However this relation was positive for neuroticism but negative for extraversion. Thus, it can be inferred that neurotic people who are generally nervous, stressful, unsatisfied, displeased and inadequate (Carver & Scheier, 1990) tend to feel emotional exhaustion. However, the communication power of extraverted people and their social abilities, energy and cheerfulness reduced the risk of emotional exhaustion. Our findings support other studies that focused on the significant effects of three personality dimensions –neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness- on emotional exhaustion (Judge et al., 2009; Kokkinos, 2007). Another study also revealed the significant relation between emotional exhaustion and neuroticism, and negative relation between extraversion and emotional exhaustion (Ghorpade, Lackritz, & Singh, 2007). In this context, the hypothesis on the relation between personality and emotional exhaustion was partially supported.

Second, the hypothesis that claimed personality affected emotional labor was partially supported. The findings showed significant relations between neuroticism and surface acting; openness to experience and deep acting; agreeableness and openness to experience and expression of naturally felt emotions. Neuroticism, in a broad sense, causes negative emotional balance and thus this state is thought to result in unintended emotional expression. Also, it is argued that neuroticism is a determinant for surface acting since people with neurotic characteristics are not successful at regulation of emotions (Austin et al., 2007). Our findings also support the results of another study (Kiffin-Peterson et al., 2010) that reported significant relations between neuroticism and surface acting.

On the other hand, the other hypothesis that claimed emotional labor significantly predicted emotional exhaustion was supported since the findings revealed that emotional exhaustion was significantly predicted by surface acting. Also deep acting and expression of naturally felt emotions negatively affected emotional exhaustion. Similar

results were reported in several studies (Grandey, 1999; Kruml & Geddes, 2000; Troman, 2000; Zhang & Zhu, 2008). Thus, it can be inferred that surface acting causes emotional exhaustion. Findings supported the hypothesis that claimed emotional labor significantly affected emotional exhaustion.

Furthermore, the mediating role of emotional labor in the relationship between personality and emotional exhaustion was tested in the study. In general, the results confirmed the mediating role of emotional labor. However, in the context of sub-dimensions, only the mediating role of surface acting in the relationship between neuroticism and emotional exhaustion was proved to be significant. Such a result indicates that neurotic people, adopting surface acting, experience emotional exhaustion less. This result is similar to the results of other studies (Kiffin-Peterson et al., 2010).

Since teaching demands a high level of emotional labor, that teachers are widely known to be under the risk of emotional exhaustion. Present study demonstrated that personality is a significant predictor of both emotional labor and emotional exhaustion. Thus, it is important to consider the emotional states of teachers. National educational institutions and organizations should develop motivational factors to reduce the negative impact of emotional labor according to the result of studies on the relations between personality and emotional exhaustion. In the context of human resources management, considering the personality analysis in the processes of selection and placement, education and performance evaluation can be beneficial to reduce the negative results of emotional labor and emotional exhaustion. This may contribute to the efficiency of the national education system. Thus, it is assessed that the findings of the present study on teachers can be beneficial for more effective human resources management processes. We think that this study positively contributes to the literature.

In future studies, the model of the present study with three variables can be enriched with different antecedents and consequences. For instance, the effects of different demographic variables and social support on emotional exhaustion can be investigated. Besides, comparative investigations into other business sectors (health, security) which incorporate emotional labor and the risk of emotional exhaustion may produce greater reliability on the subject.

Although the present results indicate a mediating role of emotional labor in the relationship between personality and emotional exhaustion, two possible limitations should be noted. First, the present study

consists of participants working in two different cities at primary and high school levels. Thus the sample might not be representative of the overall population of Turkish primary and high school teachers. Second, since data reflects participants' self-assessments, common method variance and social desirability limitations should be considered while evaluating the results.

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