

Exploring the Relationship between School Principals' Burnout Situation and Life Satisfaction¹

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Abstract The purpose of this study is to explore school administrations' burnout situation and life satisfaction levels and the relationship between burnout and life satisfaction. The study was designed with the screening model. The research sample consists of 92 school principals and vice principals. Research data was collected with "Maslach Burnout Scale" and "Life Satisfaction Scale". In analyzing the data SPSS 16.0 software was used and "Multiple Regression Analysis" and descriptive statistics were conducted in order to explore the relationship between school principals' and vice principals' burnout and life satisfaction levels. According to the analyses results, school principals gained scores below average in the emotional burnout and depersonalization dimensions and gained scores above average in the personal success dimension. This result indicates that burnout is at a low level. In addition, "life satisfaction" levels of school principals and vice principals are above average. This result indicates that school administrations' life satisfaction levels are at a high level.

Keywords Education Institutions, Burnout Situation, Life Satisfaction, School Principals

1. Introduction

For years life satisfaction has interested scientists and has been the focus of many studies. When the related literature is concerned, the concept of life satisfaction was first used by Neugarten et al. in 1961 [1]. Although many definitions of life satisfaction have been made, it won't be wrong to say that this concept embraces people's lives with all its dimensions. With this respect, life satisfaction is defined as, the harmony between the individual's life standards and his goals; positive feelings of the individual's life dominating over the negative feelings [2,3,4,5,6,7]. According to another statement, life satisfaction is determined based on the harmony between the individual's expectations and the present quality of life. In

other words, life satisfaction will increase in line with the extent to which the individual attains life goals, failure will cause life dissatisfaction [8,9]. Life satisfaction generally refers to individuals' opinions about their settings [10]. Life satisfaction means that individuals evaluate their life based on their own criterion. Gaining life satisfaction after these evaluations will enable the individual to experience positive feelings more and negative feelings less and as a result will make him or her happier. Various study results show that there are negative relationships between life satisfaction and depression [11,12,13,14,15,16] hopelessness and anxiety [17] and this indicates the importance of the satisfaction individuals experience once they evaluate their lives.

Leading a happy life is generally a crucial desire of people. In the literature of Psychology, happiness is related to subjective well-being [18]. However, studies indicate that the nature of happiness and life satisfaction are completely different terms. While evaluating happiness is more affective, evaluating life satisfaction is more a cognitive process. Similarly, the determinants of happiness are not the same of those of life satisfaction. Thus, subjective well-being is preferred to refer to cognitive and affective dimensions more accurately [19].

Life satisfaction, which is defined as a psychological state resulting from individuals' opinions about life, expectations form life and the extent to which these expectations are met is related to many variables [20,21]. Variables such as age, gender, e-education and income constitute the content of demographic factors. Demographic variables are observed to explain 10% of subjective well-being [22]. According to another study, there is a positive relationship between life satisfaction and having life goals and value [23]. Emotional stability and extraversion have a positive relationship with life satisfaction and are regarded as important predictors of life satisfaction [24,25]. A study conducted on instructors indicates that emotional stability is one of the determinants of life satisfaction [26]. Other studies suggest that joy and curiosity [27] are determinants of life satisfaction. Income level is suggested as another determinant of life satisfaction.

Socio-economic level [28] and perceived financial state [29] are observed to be related to life satisfaction. Study findings underline that income has a higher influence on life satisfaction within groups with low level of income and that income has a lower influence on life satisfaction within groups with high level of [30].

Frisch [31,32] describes 16 factors which affect a person's life satisfaction. These are: (1) health, (2) self-esteem, (3) goals and values, (4) money, (5) work, (6) play, (7) learning, (8) creativity, (9) helping, (10) love, (11) friends, (12) children, (13) relatives, (14) home, (15) neighborhood, and (16) community. Meeting the needs, goals and desires of these fields promote life satisfaction of an individual. It is evident that life satisfaction refers to the individual being physically and mentally happy and peaceful in his work and personal life. It is obvious that life satisfaction is the state of the individual being physically and mentally happy and content both in his work and private life and also being able to enjoy life.

When the related literature is concerned, the concept of burnout was first used by Freudenberger [33]. The concept burnout is defined as; the state of being exhausted due to failure, fatigue, loss of energy, loss of strength and unfulfilled desires [34,35,36]. In addition, burnout can be defined also as the individual psychologically losing his desire for work as a response to excessive stress and dissatisfaction [37]. In recent years burnout has become a serious problem in many professional fields and has now come to the agenda. Theories and studies underline that burnout has many dimensions [38]. When the literature of burnout since 1993 is considered; burnout is a psychological response to a stressful working experience and that tension about ones work results from the stress that occurs form work life [39]. Burnout can occur due to an unjust rewarding, lack of rewarding or a perception of an unjust distribution of work force [40,41].

Maslach states that the burnout syndrome does not occur suddenly but rather as being mentally and physically exhausted due to overwork and stress. Burnout can also be defined as the reactions of uneasiness that people who deal with hard work and the problematic [42,43]. Various studies have suggested that burnout is experienced more widely in occupations that require face-to-face interpersonal relationships and that this is due to the fact that workers undertake more responsibility towards individuals rather than objects [44]. While the working environment and structure play a crucial role in burnout, so do personal characteristics. The fact that burnout and depression are two different terms should be taken into consideration. In addition, individuals who are prone to depression also have a high risk of experiencing burnout [45].

Among the implications of burnout are; tendency to quit work, breakdown in quality of service, lack of harmony, tendency to become distant from family members, low work performance, job dissatisfaction and increase in work accidents [46,47,48,49]. Lack of productivity and low quality of yield arises when workers experiencing burnout

continue their profession. One other drawback is that the anxiety and stress that workers experiencing burnout create can display a threat for other workers as well [50].

Many findings have been put forward about burnout in various studies. Some of these can be summarized as:

- 1) Burnout is a negative psychological state which occurs in a long period of time,
- 2) Burnout is a work related term which the individual realizes after a long while of time,
- 3) Burnout is a multi-dimensional syndrome which occurs through symptoms such as incompetency, low motivation and stress.
- 4) Burnout is a global and widespread term and has similar symptoms in many countries [51]

School principals are in the risk group of people who may experience burnout at workplace as their roles and problems at school have been increasing for a long time. Experiencing burnout inevitably causes decrease in life satisfaction levels of school principals. As Jackson & Marriott, [52]; Demirtas & Ozer [53]; Balyer [54] state in their researches the job and the role of the principals continues to expand in terms of expected duties. As a result a principal may experience role conflict when there are a lot of different role expectations from teachers, students and community members. When compared to the past, the principal's task, which formerly included only being an academic leader, now, includes being mediator, facilitator, counsellor, leader, guide and even comforter [55, 56, 57].

Recent studies on burnout and life satisfaction in educational institutions have focused mainly on teachers. Because school principals are primarily responsible for school success, it is crucial for principals to achieve satisfaction both in their private and work lives. This study is significant because it has put forward several suggestions for school principals to gain mentally and physically healthy and happy work and family lives. Another significance of this study is there are not any researches in Turkish culture which examines principals' burnout and life satisfaction status together. For example, Poyraz and Surucuoglu's [58] study entitled "Burnout in Primary and High School Administrators" examines only school administrators' burnout status and the life satisfaction was not examined. In this context the purpose of this study is to determine school principals' burnout situations and life satisfaction levels and to examine the relationship between burnout and life satisfaction. With this respect, the problem statement of this study is, what is school principals' burnout situations and life satisfaction levels? And also, are there any relationships between school principals' burnout and life satisfaction levels?

2. Methodology

The study was designed with the screening model. In this study, how the burnout and life satisfaction levels of school

principals affect each other was discussed in its past and present state. The study sample consisted of 92 school principals and vice-principals. Study data were collected with the "Maslach Burnout Inventory" and "Life Satisfaction Scale" which was developed by Diener [59]. The Cronbach-Alpha internal consistency co-efficient of "Maslach Burnout Inventory" for this study was 0.89. The "Life Satisfaction Scale" which was developed by Diener and translated into Turkish by Gumus [60] and conducted on a sample of Turks consists of 5 items. According to the analyses, the Cronbach-Alpha internal consistency co-efficient for the "Life Satisfaction Scale" was 0.86. The data were analyzed with the SPSS 16.0 software, and together with descriptive statistics the "Multiple Regression Analysis" was conducted in order to determine the relationship between burnout situations and life satisfaction levels of school principals and vice-principals.

The study is limited to the data collection instruments ("Maslach Burnout Inventory" and "Life Satisfaction Scale"), the small number of the participants (n=92), and the chosen sample of the research. Collecting data from school principals is a challenging job as the school principals do not have much time or they do not show willingness to participate into the research.

3. Findings

Distribution of the participants according to demographical variables is given in Table 1.

It is evident on Table 1 that the majority of school principals and vice-principals who participated in the study (85.87%) are male. According to educational status, it is evident that 9.78% of the participants are receiving post-graduate education and the rest (90.22%) of the participants are continuing to university. The majority (47.83%) of the principals and vice-principals of the study have 11-20 years of professional seniority. The psychometric features of the survey are given on Table 2.

Table 1. Distribution of the Participants According to Demographical Variables

Demographical Variables	N	%
Gender		
Female	13	14.13
Male	79	85.87
Educational Status		
Bachelor's Degree	83	90.22
Post-Graduate	9	9.78
Professional Seniority		
1-10 years	19	20.65
11-20 years	44	47.83
21 years and over	29	31.52
Total	92	100.00

The survey dimensions of the study had validity co-efficient ranging from 0.72 and 0.81 and these co-efficient indicate that the surveys have high levels of validity.

The school principals and vice-principals gained 2.397 ± 0.501 points from the "emotional exhaustion" dimension; 2.321 ± 0.598 points from the "depersonalization" dimension and 2.358 ± 0.452 points from the "personal accomplishment" dimension. That the emotional exhaustion and depersonalization dimensions remained below the average and personal accomplishment dimension remained above the average indicate that burnout levels in these dimensions are low. According to the scores of all three dimensions, it is evident that school principals and vice-principals have the highest burnout levels at the emotional exhaustion dimension. These scores indicate that school principals and vice-principals have moderate level of burnout situations. School principals and vice-principals gained 3.110 ± 0.761 points from the Life Satisfaction Scale. These scores indicate that school principals and vice-principals who participated in the study have life satisfaction levels that are above the average.

Table 2. Psychometric Features of the Study Survey

Surveys	N	Score Interval	Average	Standard Deviation	Cronbach Alfa
Maslach Burnout Inventory					
Emotional Exhaustion	9	1-5	2.397	0.501	0.78
Depersonalization	5	1-5	2.321	0.598	0.75
Personal Accomplishment	8	1-5	2.358	0.452	0.72
Life Satisfaction Scale					
Life Satisfaction	5	1-5	3.110	0.761	0.81

Table 3. The relationships between the participants’ burnout levels and life satisfaction levels.

Scales	Dimensions	Average	ss	1	2	3	4
Burnout	Emotional Exhaustion	2.397	0.501	1			
	Depersonalization	2.321	0.598	0.501**	1		
	Personal Accomplishment	2.358	0.458	-0.290*	-0.328**	1	
Life Satisfaction	Life Satisfaction	3.110	0.761	-0.206	-0.109	0.502**	1

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01

The relationship between school principals’ and vice-principals’ burnout levels and life satisfaction levels were analyzed with the Pearson Correlation Analysis and results are given on Table 3.

As evident on Table 3, the Pearson Correlation Analysis indicates a positive significant relationship between “emotional exhaustion” and “depersonalization” ($r=0.501$, $p<0.01$). This shows that both of the burnout dimensions are interrelated. The “personal accomplishment” dimension has a negative significant relationship with “emotional exhaustion” ($r=-0.290$, $p<0.05$) and “depersonalization” ($r=-0.328$, $p<0.01$) dimensions. The low scores of the “personal accomplishment” dimension indicate that burnout is at low levels and that it is expected to have counter-relationships with the other two dimensions. In other words, when “personal accomplishment” increases “emotional exhaustion” and “depersonalization” decreases. The average scores gained from the “life satisfaction” dimension and the average scores gained from the “emotional exhaustion” ($r=-0.206$, $p>0.05$) and “depersonalization” ($r=-0.109$, $p>0.05$) dimensions indicate that there is a negative relationship between these dimensions; however this result was not statistically significant. A positive significant relationship was detected between the “life satisfaction” and “personal accomplishment” dimensions ($r=0.502$, $p<0.01$).

In addition, a negative relationship was detected between “emotional exhaustion” and “depersonalization” dimensions and “life satisfaction”, however, this result was statistically insignificant. A positive significant relationship was detected between the “life satisfaction” and “personal accomplishment” dimensions and these two dimensions were positively affecting each other. Finally, it is evident that the “life satisfaction” levels of school principals and vice-principals are above average. These results can be interpreted as school principals having desired levels of life satisfaction. There were negative relationships between “emotional exhaustion” and “depersonalization” dimensions and “life satisfaction” but this was found statistically insignificant. A positive significant relationship was detected between the “life satisfaction” and “personal accomplishment” dimensions. These two dimensions were positively affecting each other.

4. Conclusions

The purpose of this study, conducted through the screening model, was to determine whether or not there is a relationship between school administrators’ burnout and life satisfaction levels. The sample of the study consisted of a total of 92 school principals and vice-principals.

Study findings indicate that school principals and vice-principals experience moderate level of burnout. Participants were observed to undergo emotional burnout the most. This may be due to the fact that school principals and vice-principals have to work with many groups such as students, teachers and parents. Ardic and Polatci [61] state that burnout is more widespread in professions which require face-to-face interpersonal relationships. The reason for this is because workers undertake more responsibility towards individuals rather than objects.

When the score averages school principals and vice-principals obtained from the Life Satisfaction Scale are considered, it is evident that life satisfaction levels of the participants are above the average. This may be due to the fact that teachers are willing to be at the position of school principal or vice-principal [62]. In addition, Bingul and Hacifazlioglu [63] state that being a school administrator is regarded as a success in a teacher’s career. Thus, it can be concluded that the participants are satisfied with their present positions.

Study findings suggest that “emotional burnout” and “depersonalization” decreases as “personal accomplishment” increases. Positive significant relationships were observed between “life satisfaction” and “personal accomplishment”. These two dimensions affect each other positively. These findings are supported by the other study results within the literature. According to studies conducted by Diener and Seligman [64] and Le [65], there are positive relationships between life satisfaction and professional and personal accomplishments.

It is crucial for school principals to feel happy and peaceful in their personal lives and keep their life quality at high levels in order to be successful in their private and professional lives. With this respect, school principals’ being mentally and physically strong and healthy will positively affect both their productivity and their life satisfactions. School principals’ being happy in their work and family lives are closely related to both emotionally and cognitively

embracing their work. In other words, principals should not experience burnout syndrome and life dissatisfaction. Thus, it is vital to solve finance and facility problems, problems which school administrators encounter while managing the schools. In addition, being appreciated by the upper authorities and rewarding those who deserve awards will positively affect school principals' life satisfaction.

The findings of this specific study have some implications for school principals, educational researchers and policy makers. The fact that school principals and vice-principals experience moderate level of burnout specifically emotional burnout implies that the roles and responsibilities of principalship should be redefined in a more robust perspective by the policy makers. School principals may take up new skills or they can attend different courses which aim to make them relax and forget the job-related problems. Ministry of Education may organize such courses for school principals through life-long learning centers and they should be encouraged to participate into these courses. Implications of this study for the researchers indicate that more comprehensive researches may be conducted with larger samples. Also other factors influencing principals' burnout and life satisfaction status could be investigated by using qualitative research methods.

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