# Examination of Pre-Service Teachers' Stress Levels towards Academic Expectations and Goal Commitment in Terms of Various Variables

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## Abstract

This study was carried out with the aim of examining the stress levels towards academic expectations and goal commitment of pre-service teachers (students who are not yet teaching professionally) in terms of various variables. The data were obtained from pre-service teachers (n=465) studying at a public university. In this study, two scales were used to collect data. One was the Academic Expectations Stress Inventory developed by Ang and Huan (2006) and adapted to Turkish by Akin, Abaci, and Cetin (2009). The other was the Goal Commitment Scale developed by Hollenbeck, Klein, O'Leary, and Wright (1989) in 9 items, revised in 5 items by Klein, Wesson, Hollenbeck, Wright, and DeShon (2001) and later adapted to Turkish by Senol and Turan (2019). Descriptive statistics, Independent T-test, One Way ANOVA, Pearson Correlation and Simple Linear Regression were used in the analysis of the data. As a result of the analysis, significant differences were found in the variable of the department in terms of "expectations of self" and "goal commitment" of pre-service teachers. Similarly, significant differences were found in the variable of academic grade average in terms of "expectations of self". In addition, it was observed that goal commitment levels and stress levels of "expectations of parents/teachers" of pre-service teachers were high. At the same time, it was observed that the stress level of "expectations of self" of pre-service teachers was above the middle level, but close to the high level.

## Contents

**Contribution of this paper to the literature**
The study is to determine the stress levels and target commitment levels of prospective teachers according to academic expectations. As a result, it contributes to the existing literature and examines it in terms of various variables.

## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, technological and scientific developments arising from globalization are reflected in education, therefore, expectations from education increase in this respect (Senol & Turan, 2019). Education in the world is a very important element in terms of social development. Student success is an important outcome indicator in terms of achieving the educational goal (Epstein, 2018). However, the desire of educational administrators, teachers, families, and students to achieve academic excellence can be a source of intense stress for many students. In the literature, researches on students' social and cognitive development indicate that student-teacher interaction perceptions and family relationships affect their educational performance and academic success (Sengul, Zhang, & Leroux, 2019). This situation can be the basic structure of academic stress on students. Academic stress appears to be a lifestyle crisis that occurs during the education process of students, especially during exam periods (Kadapatti & Vijayalaxmi, 2012). Academic stress in the educational environment expresses the unpleasant situations that arise due to the many demands of the student's environment (Aihie & Ohanaka, 2019). In other words, stress arises from the mismatch between supply and demand in the education mechanism. That is, if there is a difference between the expected success level and the resulting success level, there is a possibly stressful situation. At this point, whether the students consider the individuals they are in contact with or the events they experience as a source of stress is the main thing to consider (Tekin, Cilesiz, & Gede, 2019). Students who have a successful education life will also contribute to the development of society with the culture they have Borekci and Uyangor (2018). If these elements are not considered as a source of stress, individuals do not experience stress either. Stress is an important factor that will not only affect education life, but also the working life of the individual (Kalkin, 2017).

The effects of all kinds of sources that cause stress response in the organism are stressors. Stressors can appear in different ways such as social events, psychological, physiological, biological, and life events. A significant part of the stressors covers life events (Barut, 2019). DeDeyn (2008) defined stress as a physical, mental, emotional reaction, or a reaction that requires adaptation, which occurs in case of difference. The physical symptoms caused by stress, when combined with the negative perspective of the individual, lead to more negative thoughts. Mental reactions in case of excessive stress occur in the thoughts and feelings of the individual (Kennerley, 2017). Expectations for students to be academically successful have been positively associated with success and excellence. On the other hand, excessive stress can lead to many features such as distraction and failure, and it can bring negative consequences such as mental health concerns caused by pressures. DeDeyn (2008) on the other hand, defined academic stress as a situation caused by emotional and mental pressure and tension that arise due to the requirements of university life. The author expresses the academic stress as the mental, emotional pressure, and tension that the student feels towards the expectations in school life. Academic success is of special importance for university students who are at the final stage of education before entering a profession. Students are exposed to high stress for many reasons especially in the process that covers the university preparatory period in a private vocational field (Calaguas, 2011).

Individuals aim to do their best to develop their abilities positively, in order to reveal their potentials, without worrying about whether standard criteria are equal for all candidates. Thus, individuals try to minimize stressors around them. Therefore, individuals' success goals are determined by comparing them with their competitors and gaining superiority in the criteria previously determined (Arends & Kilcher, 2010). In order to be successful, it is not enough for individuals to set goals, but they also need to be commitment to this goal. Goal commitment is defined as "the individual's determination and perseverance to reach his goal" (Locke & Latham, 1990). Commitment is an essential condition for goal setting to be successful. In any context, if individuals strive towards the same goal, the individual who adopts his goal and turns it into behavior and is committed to this goal can be one step ahead of his competitors (Tugay & Aktar, 2019).

In this study, answers to the following Research Questions were sought by addressing the phenomenon of stress and goal commitment experienced by pre-service teachers during the education process:

RQ1. Are there any differences in the stress levels and goal commitment variables of pre-service teachers in terms of gender, department, and academic grade point average?

RQ2. Is there a relationship between "goal commitment scores" and "stress scores towards the academic expectations" of the pre-service teachers?

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Sample Size

In this study, a total of 295 female and 170 male pre-service teachers (students who are not yet teaching professionally) studying at Mugla Sitki Kocman University, a state university in Turkey, voluntarily participated.

### 2.2. Measurement Instruments

To measure goal commitment, the Goal Commitment Scale developed by Hollenbeck et al. (1989) in 9 items, later revised in 5 items by Senel. and Yıldız (2016) and finally adapted to Turkish by Senel. and Yıldız (2016) was used. Scale statements were measured with a 5-point Likert rating (1=Strongly disagree, 5=Strongly agree). To measure the academic expectation stress of the participants, the Academic Expectations Stress Inventory developed by Ang and Huan (2006) and later adapted to Turkish by Akin et al. (2009) was used. This scale has two sub-dimensions called expectations of parents/teachers (5 items) and expectations of self (4 items). Scale statements were measured with a 5-point Likert rating (1=Strongly disagree, 5=Strongly agree).

## 2.3. Statistical Analysis

The data obtained were analyzed using the SPSS 22.0 Windows program. The demographic and educational information of the participants were analyzed with descriptive statistics (percentage and frequency).

The reliability of "the expectations of parents/teachers" sub-dimension of the Academic Expectations Stress Inventory was found to be 0.836, for "the expectations of self" sub-dimension was found to be 0.734. The reliability of the Goal Commitment scale was found to be 0.720. These values indicate that all the scales are highly reliable.

Independent T-test was used to compare the scale scores by gender, and One Way ANOVA analysis was used to compare the department and overall academic grade averages. Pearson Correlation analysis was used to determine the relationships between the variables, and Simple Linear Regression analysis was used to determine the effect of Goal Commitment on the sub-dimensions of Academic Expectations Stress Inventory.

## 3. Findings / Results

The findings obtained from the analyses conducted within the framework of the purpose of the study are presented in tables and the values are interpreted.

**Table-1.** Frequency and percentage distributions for gender and education information of the participants.

| Variables | Categories | f | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Female | 295 | 63.4 |
| | Male | 170 | 36.6 |
| Department | Physical Education and Sports Teaching | 60 | 12.9 |
| | Computer and Teaching Tech | 50 | 10.8 |
| | Educational Sciences | 50 | 10.8 |
| | Fine Arts | 50 | 10.8 |
| | Mathematics and Science | 50 | 10.8 |
| | Special Education | 50 | 10.8 |
| | Social Sciences and Turkish | 50 | 10.8 |
| | Basic Training | 50 | 10.8 |
| | Foreign Languages | 55 | 11.8 |
| Overall academic grade point average | $1.00 - 1.99$ | 117 | 25.2 |
| | $2.00 - 2.99$ | 226 | 48.6 |
| | $3.00 - 4.00$ | 122 | 26.2 |

**Note:** $p<0.01$

Table 1 indicates that 295 (63.4%) of pre-service teachers are female and 170 (36.6%) are male. When analyzed in terms of departments, it is seen that 12.9% of participants are pre-service teachers of the Physical Education and Sports Teaching Department. In addition, 10.8% are pre-service teachers in the Computer and Teaching Tech Department, 10.8% are pre-service teachers in the Educational Sciences Department, 10.8% are pre-service teachers in the Fine Arts Department, 10.8% are pre-service teachers in the Mathematics and Science Department, 10.8% are pre-service teachers in the Special Education Department, 10.8% are pre-service teachers in the Social Sciences and Turkish Department, 10.8% are pre-service teachers in the Basic Training Department, and 11.8% are pre-service teachers in the Foreign Languages Department. According to the general academic grade point variable, the overall academic grade point average of 25.2% of pre-service teachers is between 1.00–1.99, 48.6% of them is between 2.00–2.99, and 26.2% of them is between 3.00–4.00.

**Table-2.** Descriptive Statistics of the Academic Expectations Stress Inventory and Goal Commitment Scores.

| Scale | N | X | Sd |
|---|---|---|---|
| Expectations of parents/teachers (AESI) | 465 | 4.26 | .745 |
| Expectations of self (AESI) | 465 | 3.89 | .846 |
| Goal Commitment | 465 | 4.38 | .730 |

**Note:** AESI = Academic Expectations Stress Inventory

Table 2 shows that pre-service teachers' stress level towards expectations of parents/teacher is at a high level, the stress level of expectations of self is above the medium level but close to the high level, and their goal commitment levels are high.

**Table-3.** Comparison of Academic Expectations Stress Inventory and Goal Commitment Scale Scores in Terms of Gender Variable.

| Scale | Gender | N | X | Sd | t | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Expectations of parents/teachers (AESI) | Female | 295 | 4.28 | .686 | .043 | .384 |
| | Male | 170 | 4.22 | .837 | | |
| Expectations of self (AESI) | Female | 295 | 3.95 | .789 | .019 | .051 |
| | Male | 170 | 3.79 | .930 | | |
| Goal Commitment | Female | 295 | 4.39 | .694 | .172 | .787 |
| | Male | 170 | 4.37 | .791 | | |

**Note:** AESI = Academic Expectations Stress Inventory

According to the gender variable, Table 3 shows that there are no statistically significant differences in the stress levels of expectations of parents/teachers, stress levels of expectations of self, and goal commitment levels (p>0.05).

**Table-4.** Comparison of Academic Expectations Stress Inventory and Goal Commitment Scale Scores in Terms of Department Variable.

| Scale | Department | N | X | Sd | F | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Expectations of parents/teachers (AESI) | Physical Education and Sports Teaching | 60 | 4.48 | .671 | 1.714 | .093 |
| | Computer and Teaching Tech | 50 | 4.40 | .648 | | |
| | Educational Sciences | 50 | 4.15 | .921 | | |
| | Fine Arts | 50 | 4.15 | .802 | | |
| | Mathematics and Science | 50 | 4.26 | .752 | | |
| | Special Education | 50 | 4.23 | .613 | | |
| | Social Sciences and Turkish | 50 | 4.10 | .731 | | |
| | Basic Training | 50 | 4.15 | .804 | | |
| | Foreign Languages | 55 | 4.35 | .687 | | |
| Expectations of self (AESI) | Physical Education and Sports Teaching | 60 | 4.09 | .805 | 2.554 | .010* |
| | Computer and Teaching Tech | 50 | 4.10 | .751 | | |
| | Educational Sciences | 50 | 3.80 | .905 | | |
| | Fine Arts | 50 | 3.51 | 1.101 | | |
| | Mathematics and Science | 50 | 3.76 | .985 | | |
| | Special Education | 50 | 4.03 | .622 | | |
| | Social Sciences and Turkish | 50 | 3.91 | .737 | | |
| | Basic Training | 50 | 3.91 | .728 | | |
| | Foreign Languages | 55 | 3.87 | .787 | | |
| Goal Commitment | Physical Education and Sports Teaching | 60 | 4.69 | .648 | 3.124 | .002** |
| | Computer and Teaching Tech | 50 | 4.39 | .650 | | |
| | Educational Sciences | 50 | 4.35 | .730 | | |
| | Fine Arts | 50 | 4.16 | .764 | | |
| | Mathematics and Science | 50 | 4.21 | .984 | | |
| | Special Education | 50 | 4.55 | .503 | | |
| | Social Sciences and Turkish | 50 | 4.32 | .873 | | |
| | Basic Training | 50 | 4.22 | .679 | | |
| | Foreign Languages | 55 | 4.47 | .517 | | |

**Note:** AESI = Academic Expectations Stress Inventory; **p<0.01; *p<0.05

Table 4 indicates that there is no statistically significant difference in the stress levels of expectations of parent/teacher according to the departments of pre-service teachers (p>0.05). On the other hand, it is seen that there are statistically significant differences in the stress levels of the expectations of self, and goal commitment levels of pre-service teachers (p<0.05). Post-Hoc Tukey test was applied to determine from which groups the significant differences originated. According to these test results, in the "expectations of self" variable, the stress levels of pre-service teachers in Physical Education and Sports Teaching, Computer and Teaching Tech, and Special Education Departments were found to be significantly higher than those in the Fine Arts Department (p<0.05). According to the Post-Hoc Tukey test results of the "goal commitment" variable, it was observed that the goal commitment levels of pre-service teachers in the Physical Education and Sports Teaching Department were significantly higher than those in the Fine Arts, Mathematics and Science, and Basic Training Departments (p<0.05).

**Table-5.** Comparison of Academic Expectations Stress Inventory and Goal Commitment Scale Scores in Terms of Overall Academic Grade Averages Variable.

| Scale | Grade | N | X | Sd | F | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Expectations of parents/teachers (AESI) | 1.00 − 1.99 | 117 | 4.16 | .857 | 1.356 | .259 |
| | 2.00 − 2.99 | 226 | 4.29 | .718 | | |
| | 3.00 − 4.00 | 122 | 4.30 | .671 | | |
| Expectations of self (AESI) | 1.00 − 1.99 | 117 | 3.68 | .997 | 5.143 | .006** |
| | 2.00 − 2.99 | 226 | 3.96 | .782 | | |
| | 3.00 − 4.00 | 122 | 3.96 | .771 | | |
| Goal Commitment | 1.00 − 1.99 | 117 | 4.28 | .772 | 1.688 | .186 |
| | 2.00 − 2.99 | 226 | 4.41 | .749 | | |
| | 3.00 − 4.00 | 122 | 4.44 | .642 | | |

**Note:** AESI = Academic Expectations Stress Inventory; **p<0.01

According to the academic grade point average of the pre-service teachers, Table 5 shows that there is no statistically significant difference in the stress levels of the expectations of parents/teachers and goal commitment (p>0.05). However, there is a statistically significant difference in stress levels of the "expectations of self" variable (p<0.05). According to the Post-Hoc Tukey test results applied to determine which groups originated from significant differences, in the "expectations of self" variable, the pre-service teachers who had a grade average of "2.00–2.99" and "3.00–4.00" were significantly higher than those with a "1.00–1.99" grade average (p<0.05).

**Table-6.** Correlation Results of the Variables.

| Variables | | Expectations of parents/teachers | Expectations of self | Goal Commitment |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Expectations of parents/teachers | r | 1 | | |
| | p | | | |
| | N | 465 | | |
| Expectations of self | r | .592** | 1 | |
| | p | .000 | | |
| | N | 465 | | |
| Goal Commitment | r | .431** | .332** | 1 |
| | p | .000 | .000 | |
| | N | 465 | 465 | |

**Note:** p<0.01

Table 6 indicates that there is a positive and moderately significant relationship between pre-service teachers' goal commitment levels and expectations of parent/teacher stress levels (r=.431; p<0.05). In addition, there is a positive and low level of a significant relationship between goal commitment levels and stress levels of expectations of self (r=.332; p<0.05).

**Table-7.** Regression Analysis Results of the Effect of the Goal Commitment on "Expectations of Parents/Teachers" Sub-Dimension of the Academic Expectations Stress Inventory.

| Variable | B | Std. Error | β | t | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Constant | 2.332 | .190 | – | 12.275 | .000 |
| Goal Commitment | .440 | .043 | .431 | 10.279 | .000 |
| R=.431; R²=.186; F(1.464)=105.66; p=.000 | | | | | |

**Note:** p<0.01.

Table 7 shows that pre-teachers' goal commitment has an explanatory effect of 18.6% (R²=.186) on the stress level towards the expectations of parents/teachers, and this effect is statistically significant.

**Table-8.** Regression Analysis Results of the Effect of Goal Commitment on "Expectations of Self" Sub-Dimension of the Academic Expectations Stress Inventory.

| Variable | B | Std. Error | β | t | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Constant | 2.207 | .226 | – | 9.776 | .000 |
| Goal Commitment | .384 | .051 | .332 | 7.561 | .000 |
| R=.332; R²=.110; F(1.464)=57.173; p=.000 | | | | | |

**Note:** p<0.01.

Table 8 indicates that pre-service teachers' goal commitment has an explanatory effect of 11.0% (R²=.110) on the stress level towards the expectations of self, and this effect is statistically significant.

## 4. Conclusion

The results of this study indicated that pre-service teachers' stress level towards "expectations of parents/teachers" was a high level, stress level towards "expectations of self" was above the mid-level but close to the high level. Similarly, the goal commitment of pre-service teachers was high level. Since university students are in the transition phase from youth to adulthood, they face various social, professional, individual duties, and responsibilities. Particularly, students' feelings of responsibility towards their families and teachers can be shown as the reason for being under stress.

In this study, according to the gender variable, no statistically significant difference was observed in the stress levels of "expectations of parents/teachers" and "expectations of self", and "goal commitment" levels of the pre-service teachers. In a study performed by Sharma and Kaur (2011) it was found the level of academic stress experienced by female students was higher than male students. Misra, Crist, and Burant (2003) in their study on 143 international student samples, investigated the reactions between the 4 structures named life stress (primary stress), academic stress factors (secondary stressor), perceived social support (stress agent), and stress factors (stress result). The results of the study indicated that there was no significant difference in academic and life stressors by gender. However, women showed higher reactions to stressors than men. Higher academic stress levels, higher life stress levels, and lower social support levels were observed. When similar studies on the subject of the research were examined, it was found that females experience higher levels of academic stress than males (Calaguas., 2013; Durak-Batigun & Atay-Kayis, 2014; Sun, Dunne, Hou, & Xu, 2013; Yildiz, Senel, & Can. S, 2016). In a study conducted by Onturk, Bingol, Goksel, and Caglayan (2018) on goal commitment, there was no significant difference in the relationship between gender variable and goal commitment.

In our study, there was no statistically significant difference in the stress levels of the "expectations of parents/teachers" according to the department's variable. However, there were statistically significant differences

in "goal commitment" and stress levels of the "expectations of self". On the other hand, it was seen that the stress level of students who were educated in Physical Education and Sports Teaching, Computer and Teaching Tech, and Special Education departments were significantly higher than the students studying in the Fine Arts department. According to the results of the goal commitment variable, it was observed that the goal commitment levels of the students studying in the Department of Physical Education and Sports Teaching were significantly higher than the students studying in the Departments of Fine Arts, Mathematics and Science, and Basic Training.

According to the academic grade point average of the pre-service teachers, there was no statistically significant difference in goal commitment and the stress levels of the expectations of parents/teachers. However, there was a statistically significant difference in stress levels of the expectations of self-variable. In the expectations of self-variable, the pre-service teachers who had a grade average of "2.00–2.99" and "3.00–4.00" were significantly higher than those with a "1.00–1.99" grade average. Conditions such as forcing himself/herself to be "the best" or doing the "best" and expecting too much from himself/herself can be reasons that increase the stress level of pre-service teachers.

In this study, there was a positive and moderately significant relationship between pre-service teachers' goal commitment levels and expectations of parent/teacher stress levels (r=.431; p<0.05). In addition, there was a positive and low level of a significant relationship between goal commitment levels and stress levels of expectations of self (r=.332; p<0.05). In addition, pre-service teachers' goal commitment had an explanatory effect of 11% (R²=.110) on the stress level towards the expectations of self, and this effect was statistically significant.

According to the results of this study, it can be said that goal commitment has a predictive effect on academic stress levels. Accordingly, it can be said that goal commitment is an effective factor on pre-service teachers and increases the level of stress towards academic expectations. According to these results, pre-service teachers should be informed about stress and informative and educational activities should be organized about ways to deal with stress.

## 5. Recommendation

In future studies, different scales of the participants can be used to investigate the stress levels of prospective teachers towards academic retention and to determine the mediator role.

## 6. Limitations

We think that not being able to determine detailed personal characteristics is one of the limitations of this study. Besides, different demographic features to be used can be added to the personal information form in order to determine the differences between the findings. Working with larger sample groups, comparing multiple branches, regions, and universities will also contribute to the literature.

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