Investigating Pre–service Taechers' Beliefs about Classroom Discipline

Soner POLAT[a]
Kocaeli University

Sibel KAYA[b]
Kocaeli University

Murat AKDAĞ[c]
Gaziosmanpasa University

Abstract

The purpose of this descriptive study was to investigate pre-service teachers' beliefs about classroom discipline interms of different variables. The sample of the study was 731 2nd, 3rd, and 4th year pre-service teachers from seven different programs at Kocaeli University Faculty of Education in the 2010-2011 academic year. The participants were administered the Beliefs about Discipline Inventory which yields three separate discipline model scores: relationship-listening, confronting-contracting, and rules and consequences. Scores were compared based on gender, program, years in the program and having taken Classroom Management and Student Teaching courses. The findings showed that the most preferred discipline model was the confronting-contracting with moderate levels of teacher control and the least preferred discipline model was the rules and consequences with high levels of teacher control. Pre-service teachers who completed the Student Teaching course had significantly higher scores on the rules and consequences model compared to their counterparts. Similarly, males received significantly higher rules and consequences scores compared to females. In terms of different programs, participants from the early childhood education program received significantly higher scores on the least authoritarian model of relationship-listening compared to the pre-service teachers in the other programs.

Key Words

Classroom Discipline, Discipline Models, Classroom Management, Wolfgang's Discipline Models.

The word "discipline" originates from the Latin "disciplina" and French "discipline". In Turkish, it has several meanings, such as order, method, to educate, and to motivate (Büyük Larousse, 1986). The Turkish Language Association (Türk Dil Kurumu [TDK], 2011) defines the term as the measures taken for individuals to obey social rules. According to Tutum (1979) discipline is to provide the conditions necessary for expected behavior. In education, discipline means modeling the expected behaviors for students and eliminating the unwanted behaviors (Aydın, 1998), and also using reward and punishment when needed (Başaran 1982). The goal of educational discipline is to provide a safe learning environment (Eisenbraun, 2007).

Teacher education programs are intended to provide pre-service teachers with necessary theoretical and practical knowledge and skills to use

a **Soner POLAT, Ph.D.,** is an associate professor in Educational Management and Inspection program. His research interests include organizational trust, organizational justice, organizational citizenship behavior, intercultural education and diversity management. Correspondence: Kocaeli University Faculty of Education Kocaeli 41380, Turkey. E-mail: spolat@kocaeli.edu.tr Phone: +90 262 303 2448 Fax: +90 262 303 2403.

b Sibel KAYA, Ph.D., is an assistant professor at the Department of Elementary Education. Contact: Assist. Prof. Sibel KAYA, Kocaeli University, Faculty of Education Department of Elementary Education, 41380 Kocaeli, Turkey. E-mail: sibel.kaya@kocaeli.edu.tr

c Murat Akdağ is a research assistant at the Department of Elementary Education. Contact: Murat AKDAĞ, Gaziosmanpaşa University, Faculty of Education Department of Elementary Education, Tokat, Turkey. E-mail: murat.akdag@gop.edu.tr

in classrooms (Meuwissen, 2005). Therefore there are several pedagogical courses offered by these programs (Yükseköğretim Kurulu [YÖK], 2007). Among these courses, Classroom Management and Student Teaching are expected to directly influence pre-service teachers' discipline beliefs.

Research shows that teachers struggle with classroom management issues in their first couple of years in the profession (Fuller, 1969; Huberman, 1992; Pigge & Marso, 1997; Sabar 2004; Smith, 2000; Watzke, 2003) Classroom management can be problematic even for experienced teachers due to rapid cultural changes (Okutan, 2005). Charles (1992) indicates that teachers tend to leave the profession in the first three years due to discipline problems.

Pre-service teachers often state that they feel poorly prepared in the area of classroom management (Clement, 2002; Jones, 1996; Kagan, 1992; Meister & Melnick, 2003; Pilarski, 1994) and there is a mismatch between the education they received in the program and real classroom settings (Clement; Flores, 2006; Jones; Kagan; Pilarski; Stoughton, 2007; Whitney, Golez, Nagel, & Nieto, 2002). Pre-service teachers tend to hold idealistic and naive beliefs about the classroom environment (File & Gullo, 2002; Pajares, 1992; Rimm-Kaufman, Storm, Sawyer, Pianta, & LaParo, 2006, Witcher, Onwuegbuzie, & Minor, 2001). However, these views might be challanged by the real classroom situations (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Flores; Stoughton). Research shows that the socio-cultural structure of schools are very influential for teacher beliefs and development (Flores; McKinney, Sexton, & Meyerson, 1999; van den Berg, 2002; Williams, Prestage, & Bedward, 2001). It is argued that teachers' educational beliefs are the amalgam of their family values (Kennedy, 1995; Wolfgang, 2001) and educational experiences (Calderhead & Robson, 1991; Nespor, 1987; Rimm-Kaufman et al.). Some studies showed that pre-service teachers become more authoritarian and less idealistic at the end of their student teaching experience (File & Gullo; Flores; Huffman, Holifield, & Holifield, 2003; Pigge & Marso, 1997); whereas, others found that their beliefs remain unchanged after the completion of teacher education programs (Kagan; O'Loughlin, 1991; Tatto, 1996). These mixed results indicate that further exploration of pre-service teachers' discipline beliefs is needed.

Discipline Models

Numerous discipline models are proposed for classroom management, such as, Skinner Model of Discipline, Redl and Wattenberg Model, Canter's Assertive Discipline Model, Kounin' Group Management Model, Ginot Model, Dreikurs and Nelson's Social Discipline Model, Psycho-dynamic Model, Glasser's Control Theory, Berne's Social Development Model, Thomas Gordon Model (Celep, 2000; Erdoğan, 2002; Sarıtaş, 2000; Tertemiz, 2000). Although mentioned in the literature among various discipline models (Aksoy, 2001; Okut, 2011), among various discipline models, Wofgang Discipline Model (Wolfgang, 1999, 2001) was not adequately investigated in the Turkish culture.

Wolfgang (1999; 2001) describes three discipline models preferred by teachers for classroom management. From the least authoritarian to the most, they are: (i) *relationship-listening*, (ii) *confronting-contracting*, (iii) *rules and consequences*. Previous research has demonstrated that teachers vary in their preference of these three models. Some studies found that teachers equally prefer the assertive model of *rules and consequences* and the social model of *confronting-contracting* (Onwuegbuzie, Witcher, Filer, Collins, & Moore, 2003; Witcher et al., 2008). Others indicated that most teachers lean toward the *rules and consequences* model (Kaya, Lundeen, & Wolfgang, 2010; Lourdusamy, Divaharan, Huan, & Wong, 2001; Schiffler, 2003). The common finding in these studies was that the *relationship-listening* model was the least preferred discipline model.

There are no studies in the literature investigating the Turkish pre-service or in-service teachers' discipline orientations by using Wolfgang Discipline Models. Therefore, this study aims to contribute to the literature by conducting this study on a diferent culture. In discipline processes, culture (Cheng, 2000) and social structure (Neff & Helwing, 2002) play an important role. Therefore, discipline beliefs may vary from one culture to another. With this notion in mind, the research questions of this study were:

1. What is the most and least preferred discipline model by pre-service teachers in Turkey?

2. Are there any differences in pre-service teachers' scores for each discipline model based on the Classroom Management course?

3. Are there any differences in pre-service teachers' scores for each discipline model based on the Student Teaching course?

4. Are there any differences in pre-service teachers' scores for each discipline model based on gender?

5. Are there any differences in pre-service teachers' scores for each discipline model based on program?

6. Are there any differences in pre-service teachers' scores for each discipline model based on years in the program?

Method

Sample

The purposeful sampling method was used in this study. This method aims to find the most appropriate sample regarding the research questions (Sencer, 1989). Based on the completion of Classroom Management and Student Teaching courses, a total of 731 2nd, 3rd, and 4th year students from seven different programs at Kocaeli University School of Education in the 2010-2011 academic year were sampled for this study. Seventy three percent of the participants were female and %27 were male with the average age of 21. Of the participants, 181 of them were 2nd year, 272 of them were 3rd year, and 278 of them were 4th year students. Among these students, 490 of them had taken the Classroom Management and 102 of them had taken the Student Teaching courses.

Instrument

In order to investigate pre-service teachers' beliefs on classroom discipline, the Beliefs about Discipline Inventory developed by Glickman and Tamashiro (cited in Wolfgang & Glickman, 1986) was used in this study. The inventory has three subscales: *relationship-listening, confronting-contracting,* and *rules and consequences* (Wolfgang, 1999, 2001). Glickman and Tamashiro (1980) developed the instrument with curriculum specialists, and education professors and field-tested it with 124 teachers. The item discrimination ranged between 29-71%, which indicates good item discrimination. In recent studies (see Kaya et al., 2010; Witcher et al., 2008) the reliability coefficients for the subscales of this instrument were found between 0.72 and 0.84. After the permission was granted, the instrument was translated into Turkish and examined by the language specialists. In the current study, the reliability coefficient was 0.73 for the *relationship-listening*, 0.76 for the *confronting-contracting*, and 0.86 for the *rules and consequences* subscale.

In the inventory the participants are presented with 12 dichotomous choices between two statements representing one of three discipline models: (*i*) relationship-listening; (*ii*) confronting-contracting; and (*iii*) rules and consequences. The participants are asked to choose between two competing philosophical value statements. Subscale scores for each of the three discipline models were obtained by tallying response scores in three sets of pairwise comparison. There are four items and eight responses under each subscale. Therefore, scores on each subscale range from zero to eight. The subscale with the highest score indicates the preferred discipline model represented.

Data Analysis

For data analysis, SPSS 15 was used. Descriptive statistics were computed in order to find out the most and least preferred discipline models. To test the differences in subscale scores based on gender, program, years in the program and Classroom Management and Student Teaching courses, Mutivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was used. This analysis technique is used when the effects of independent variables on multiple dependent variables are examined. Rather than testing the effects on each dependent variable separately, MANOVA executes the tests simultaneously which reduces the Type I error rate (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996). The interaction effects of independent variables on the discipline model scores were also examined.

Results

Descriptive statistics showed that, the most preferred discipline model was the *confronting-contracting* ($\bar{x} = 5.28$) and the least preferred discipline model was the *rules and consequences* ($\bar{x} = 2.83$). According to the MANOVA results, there were no significant differences among pre-service teachers' scores on the three subscales of the Beliefs about Discipline Inventory based on the Classroom Management course. However, there were significant differences based on the Student Teaching course. The students who completed the Student Teaching course received significantly higher *rules and consequences* scores and significantly lower *confronting-contracting* scores compared to the students who have not completed this course.

In terms of the gender effect, males received significantly higher scores on the *rules and*

consequences model and significantly lower scores on the *confronting-contracting* model compared to females. A significant interaction effect of gender and Student Teaching course was found on the *rules and consequences* scores. Males who completed the Student Teaching course had significantly higher *rules and consequences* scores compared to their female counterparts.

In order to examine the differences in discipline model scores based on programs and years in the program MANOVA was conducted and post-hoc Scheffe test was used. Results showed that pre-service teachers in the early childhood program received significantly higher *relationship-listening* scores and significantly lower *rules and consequences* scores compared to their counterparts in other programs. Similarly, students in the guidance and counseling program scored significantly lower on the most authoritarian model of *rules and consequences* compared to the students in mathematics and elementary education. Furthermore, elementary pre-service teachers' *confronting-contarcting* scores were significantly lower and their *rules and consequences* scores were significantly higher than those of English pre-service teachers.

Finally, based on the years spent in the program, 3rd year students scored significantly lower on the *relationship-listening* subscale; whereas, they scored significantly higher on the *rules and consequences* subscale compared to other students.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of this study showed that the most preferred discipline model by pre-service teachers is the *confronting-contracting* and the least preferred model was the *rules and consequences* model. In another study with Turkish physical education teachers Korkmaz, Korkmaz, and Özkaya (2007) reported similar findings. These findings are slightly different from the findings of the studies conducted with American and Asian populations. Social structure, school factors, and educational policies influence teachers' classroom management beliefs (Turan, 2004). Teachers in different cultures might prefer different classroom management strategies (Lewis, Romi, Katz, & Qui, 2008). Thus, the findings of this study might be due to the cultural differences.

This study showed that having taken the Classroom Management course has made no difference in pre-service teachers' discipline beliefs. The student

teaching experience, on the other hand, increased pre-service teachers' *rules and consequences* scores, which indicates they have become more controlling and authoritarian at the end of the student teaching experience. According to Van den Berg (2002) classrooms are complex environments with many variables. With the responsibility of providing an effective instruction, maintaining the classrooms, meeting the needs of students, parents, and school management, teachers often experience stressful conditions. Such conditions can give rise to a decreased sense of autonomy for teachers. Therefore, teachers in the current study might have preferred a more authoritarian discipline model of *rules and consequences* as a result of difficult conditions in real classrooms.

In terms of the gender factor, it was found that males prefer the *rules and consequences* model more frequently and the *confronting-contracting* model less frequently compared to females. Few studies that examined the gender effect on discipline beliefs, (Hopf & Hatzichristou, 1999; Meece, 1987) showed that male teachers tend to be more behaviorist and controlling in classroom management issues. The findings of the current study support those of the former studies. Hopf and Hatzichristou argue that female teachers might be less controlling and less authoritarian due to their maternal instincts.

The analysis based on participants' program showed that early childhood pre-service teachers endorsed the humanistic discipline model of *relationship-listening* more frequently compared to their counterparts in the other programs. Similarly, early childhood and guidance and counseling pre-service teachers preferred the behaviorist model of *rules and consequences* less frequently compared to other programs. Yalçınkaya and Tonbul (2002) state that teachers with different specializations might prefer different educational views and approaches. This differentiation might be due to the general characteristics of the programs or the courses that are offered by each program. Finally, the current study showed that, in general the 3rd year students prefer more authoritarian discipline models compared to the 2nd and 4th year students. While it is difficult to interpret this finding, it might be due to the courses that are taken or overall experiences in the 3rd year of teacher education programs.

While there are several discipline models proposed by various theorists, there is not a single approach or a "correct model" to discipline students (Wolfgang, 1999). The type of discipline model used by teachers may depend on their personality,

years of experience in the classroom, or the grade level they teach (Wolfgang, 1999). For example, for beginning teachers, the establishment of classroom rules and rituals and survival in the classroom without discipline problems are crucial, whereas maturing teachers tend to be more concerned about what is best for the student (Wolfgang, 2001). It is recommended that student teachers are provided with the variety of discipline styles available so that they can interact effectively with students and manage their own discipline problems.

Being the first study that investigates Turkish pre-service teachers' discipline orientations described by Wolfgang, this study has some limitations. First, data was collected from only one university in Turkey; conducting a similar study in other universities is recommended. Second, the findings were based on the quantitative data; more insight could be provided through qualitative data, such as interviews and observations. Finally, through longitudinal studies with pre- and post-testing model, the influence of various factors (i.e. student teaching experience) on the same population might be investigated.

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