



The Relationship between Instructors' Professional Competencies and University Students' School Engagement

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Abstract

This study was conducted to explore the relationship between university students' school engagement and instructors' professional competencies. The study group consisted of 314 students from the Faculty of Art at Cankiri Karatekin University. The participants filled in the Scale for Professional Competence of Instructor (SPCI) and the Scale for School Engagement (SSE). The data were analyzed using descriptive methods, explanatory and confirmatory factor analyses (EFA/CFA), ANOVA, the Pearson correlation coefficient, and multivariate regression. Findings showed that according to the opinions of the participants, both the instructors' professional competencies and the students' school engagement were at moderate levels. They also revealed that students' views regarding instructors' professional competencies did not differ in terms of gender and grade, but there was a significant difference in terms of department. Additionally, the study demonstrated a significant correlation between instructors' professional competencies and school engagement. However, regression results indicated that sub-scales of the SPCI were not significant predictors of school engagement.

Key Words

Instructor, Professional Competencies, School Engagement, Student, University.

In recent years, the subject of students' school engagement has been debated extensively among scholars (Finn & Rock, 1997; Finn & Voelkl, 1993; Karatzias, Athanasiou, Power, & Swanson, 2001; Libbey, 2004). School engagement is generally related to students' positive feelings towards schools and their adaptation level to the school's goals (Arastaman, 2009; Finn & Voelkl, 1993). School engagement has three sub-dimensions, including behavioral, affective, and cognitive dimensions (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Jimerson, Campos, & Greif, 2003). Studies indicate that school engagement is strongly correlated with socio-economic level, dropout and self-efficacy beliefs of students (Caraway, Tucker, Reinke, &

Hall, 2003; Conchas, 2001; Janosz, Archambault, & Pagani, 2008; Sinclair, Christenson, Evelo, & Hurley, 1998). Studies have also shown that the relationship between school and the family is an important determinant of school engagement (Murray, 2009). Other researchers have revealed that family involvement and social efficacy level are also main predictors of school engagement (Simons-Morton & Crump, 2003; Woolley & Bowen, 2007). Other variables related to engagement are teachers' and peers' support of students and out-of-school activities such as homework (Brewster & Bowen, 2004; Dotterer, McHale, & Crouter, 2007; Shin, Daly, & Vera, 2007). However, there is a gap in the literature about the relationship between school

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engagement and the professional efficiency of instructors working at universities. Instructors who work at universities are expected to have certain abilities (Ertürk, 1993; Lemlech, 1995 as cited in Saylan & Uyangör, 1998). Similarly, in Turkey, some legal regulations such as Milli Eğitim Temel Kanunu (1973) define the instructors' roles in education, and instructors are expected to contribute to students' social environments (Çelikten & Can, 2003). As such, instructors should be well educated before entering service (Alkan, 1976). Kavak (1986) has noted some of the skills that instructors who work at universities should have, including field knowledge and skills in measurement and evaluation, research, instructional methods, and human relations. Additionally, classroom management abilities are also important (Yeşil, 2009). However, scholarly studies regarding instructors' professional abilities are limited (Keçeci & Taşocak, 2009; Murat, Aslantaş, & Özgan, 2006; Şen & Erişen, 2002).

Purpose

The main purpose of the present study is to examine the relationship between school engagement and university instructors' professional skills.

Method

Sampling

The present study was conducted on 381 students from the Faculty of Art at Çankırı Karatekin University during the 2012-13 academic year. A random sampling method was used in the study (Balci, 2005). 75.8% of the participants were women, while 24.2% were men. 40 students were from the department of Turkish Language and Art, 46 were from the Geography Department, 147 were from Philosophy, and the remaining 81 were from the Sociology Department. The participants were mainly from the second year (47%), and the rest were from the first, third, and fourth years (53%).

Data Collection Tools

Two scales were used in the present study to collect data. Students' school engagement was measured with the "Scale for School Engagement," which was developed by Arastaman (2006). CFA and validity studies showed that the scale used was suitable ($c^2 = 712.42$; $df = 312$; $c^2/df = 2.28$; $AGFI = .83$; $NFI = .94$; $CFI = .96$; $IFI = .96$; $RMR = .07$; $RMSEA = .06$; Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$) (Byrne & Campbell, 1999;

Kline, 2005; Meyers, Gamst, & Guarino, 2006). The second data collection tool used was the "Scale for Professional Competence of Instructors" (SPCI), which was developed by the researcher based on teacher competencies (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı [MEB], 2008). The SPCI had five sub-dimensions and 50 items. The validity and reliability studies showed that the scale was both reliable and valid.

Data Analysis

The data was first analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, including arithmetical mean, standard deviation, percentage, and one way ANOVA. Then, further statistical methods were used to explore the relational structure of the research variables. Multivariate statistical methods, including the Pearson correlation coefficient and multivariate regression analyses, were applied to the data using SPSS 20 version.

Results

The present study revealed that the participants' school engagement level was moderate. In addition, analyses showed that according to the opinions of the university students, the instructors were moderately efficient in terms of professional competencies. The ANOVA result indicated that students' school engagement was not significantly different based on their department and grade, but, significantly differed based on gender. Similarly, the ANOVA result showed that participants' views on instructors' professional competencies differed significantly in terms of department. However, there were no significant differences in terms of gender and grade. Further analyses showed that there was a significant correlation between school engagement and instructors' professional competencies. Finally, instructors' professional competencies were significant predictors of students' school engagement.

Discussion

The present study was conducted to determine the correlation between school engagement and instructors' professional competencies. Analyses showed that the students' school engagement level was moderate. This finding was parallel with the findings of previous studies (Arastaman, 2009; Çelik & Ceyhan, 2009; Çokluk-Bökeoğlu & Yılmaz, 2007; Libbey, 2004; Özdemir, 2012). In this study, instructors' professional competencies were

determined to be at a moderate level, which was a finding comparable to the findings of similar studies (Çakan, 2004; Erişen & Çeliköz, 2003; Şen & Erişen, 2002). It was also shown that participants' opinions in terms of school engagement did not differ based on gender. This finding was contradictory to previous ones (Arastaman, 2009; Özdemir, 2012; Özdemir, Sezgin, Şirin, Karip, & Erkan, 2010). Finally, the analyses indicated that there was a close relation between the research variables. However, instructors' professional competencies were not the key predictors of school engagement, a finding also supported by similar studies (Brewster & Bowen, 2004).

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