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Relationship between Emotional Labor, Perceived School Climate and Emotional Exhaustion: A Study on Public School Teachers

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Abstract

Teachers' emotional labor strategies have increased their importance in recent years. Teaching as a profession requires the high level of emotional labor which is a new area of research and it needs to be examined in terms of causes and consequences. The aim of this study is to analyze the relationship between emotional labor, perceived school climate, and emotional exhaustion. The sample included 212 primary, middle and high school teachers in Istanbul. As a survey instrument questionnaire was used to learn the respondents' perception of school climate, emotional labor strategies, and emotional exhaustion. Structural equation modeling was used to analyze if; school climate is an antecedent of emotional labor, emotional exhaustion is a consequence of emotional labor and there is a relationship between school climate and emotional exhaustion. Results indicated that Turkish school teachers' emotional exhaustion was negatively affected by the school climate. In contrast, teachers' perceptions of school climate did not have a significant effect on emotional labor strategies. On the other hand, teachers' surface acting strategies had a positive and significant effect on emotional exhaustion but teachers' deep acting behaviors had no significant effect on emotional exhaustion.

Keywords: school climate, deep acting, surface acting, emotional exhaustion

Introduction

Teaching is an emotional practice; they use their emotions while interacting with numerous children and adults every day. At the same time teaching is an emotional process in which teachers monitor and regulate their emotions to create an effective and a positive learning environment. Teachers use their emotions all the time while interacting with numerous children (Boyer, 1987; Gates, 2000). Emotions are necessary for teachers. Teachers sometimes experience positive emotions (joy, pride, hope) whereas sometimes teachers experience negative emotions (frustration, annoyance, anger). For effective instructional practices and positive teacher-student relationship emotions play an important role. It can be challenging for teachers to control emotions and express or suppress them while interacting with students (Breedon, 2015).

The emotional labor which is defined as the pressing or suppressing emotions based on job standards and norms are mostly studied in service industries but it is rarely studied in education.

Emotions also play a critical role in teachers' health and psychological well-being. There is evidence that emotional exhaustion is strongly related to negative emotions. If a teacher has an increased level of negative emotions he or she shows the higher level of burnout (Keller et al, 2014). In other words, when teachers have positive emotions they will be less emotionally exhausted. Because the emotions and managing them are so important for teachers and teaching we have to also know the predictors of emotional labor. Unfortunately, studies determining the antecedents of emotional labor are limited. Yao et al. found that the school climate was a strong predictor of emotional labor (Yao et al, 2015). School climate is also important both for the students as it affects their success and learning experiences and also for the teachers as it affects their attitudes towards students, colleagues, principals and perception of the school environment. If teachers have a positive attitude towards their schools than it will affect their feelings about their professions and because teachers and students have a very close relationship it will



have a direct effect on the achievement of students. If there is a positive teacher-student relationship then students may feel engaged in their schools and this will promote a warm school climate and a high academic success of students (Vieno, Perkins, Smith, Santinello, 2005). Furthermore in schools where school climate is negative teachers may feel emotionally exhausted and this will show its reflections on student success. Previous studies have shown that teachers' perceptions of the school climate are a predictor of burnout (Yao et al, 2015). This study is designed to examine the relationship between emotional labor, perceived school climate, and emotional exhaustion.

Literature Review

School Climate

As determined by Blau (1964) the social exchange theory includes social interactions that employees encounter within their organizations. These interactions may be the employees' relationship with his/her leader or supervisor or it may be the employees' relationship with the organization which is called as perceived organizational support (Brandes et al., 2004, p. 277). According to Settoon, et al. social exchange focuses on how organizations and leaders support and motivate employees. Moreover Settoon, et al. identifies that if an organization give an adequate and high-quality support to their employees than employees will have a high level of organizational commitment and they will use all their efforts to achieve the organizational goals (Settoon, et al, 1996, p. 219). Based on this theory, school climate can be considered as a factor that provides organizational support to the teachers. School climate is a complex construct that includes elements such as the teachers' perceptions of cooperation among colleagues, students' motivation and behavior, school's resources and innovation, and decision-making authority (Yao et al, 2015, p. 12507). According to Mitchell, Bradshaw, and Leaf (2010), school climate is defined as the shared beliefs, values, and attitudes that shape interactions among the students, teachers, and managers. Freiberg and Stein (1999) described school climate as the heart and soul of the school and the essence of the school that causes teachers and students both love the school and wants to be a part

of it (Brown, 2016, p.38). According to Norton (1984), school climate determines the school's atmosphere or the individuality. Several considerations serve to underline the importance of school climate. These considerations include the following (Norton, 1984, p. 43):

- The kind of climate sets the tone for the school's approach in reaching the identified goals and resolving problems.
- Effective communication is based on a trust-based climate and mutual respect.
- Climate serves as an important determinant of personal development attitudes.
- The climate allows generating new ideas, development, and creativity.

In other words school, climate serves a crucial role in determining what the school is and what it might become.

Emotional Exhaustion

The verb "burn out" is defined as "to fail, wear out, or become exhausted by making excessive demands on energy, strength, or resources" (Freudenberger, 1974, p. 159). The burnout manifests itself in many different physical and behavioral signs. Physical signs are feeling of exhaustion and fatigue being unable to shake a lingering cold, suffering from frequent headaches and gastrointestinal disturbances, sleeplessness, and shortness of breath. A staff member's quickness to anger and his instantaneous irritation and frustration responses, crying easily and screaming are the examples of behavioral signs (Freudenberger, 1974, p. 160). Also, burnout is an emotional exhaustion and cynicism that occurs frequently among individuals who do 'people-work' of some kind and thought as a syndrome. Increased feelings of emotional exhaustion are a key aspect of the burnout syndrome. Another aspect of burnout is the individual's perception of other people negatively. It is the depersonalization aspect of the burnout. A third aspect of the burnout syndrome is personal accomplishment which includes a person's negative self-evaluation regarding his or her job performance (Schaufeli, Maslach & Marek, 1993, p. 17). Emotionally exhausted teachers may feel powerless or they may feel that they are being used, they are at the end of the path, and that they are physically exhausted (Ören & Türkoğlu, 2006, p.2).



Emotional Labor

Emotional labor is defined as “the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display” by Hochschild (1983, s.7) while it is also defined as “The act of displaying the appropriate emotion” by Ashforth & Humphrey (1993,p.90). Grandey(2000, p. 97)defined emotional labor as “the process of regulating both feelings and expressions for the organizational goals”. The work done by the labour in manufacturing department may require coordination between mind and arm, mind and finger, mind and shoulder, which can simply be called as physical labor. On the other hand, when the flight attendant pushes heavy meal carts through the aisles she is acting as physical labor, but she is acting as mental labor when she prepares for and actually organizes emergency landings and evacuations. While she is acting as both physical and mental labor she is also doing something which is called as emotional labor. Emotional labour requires individual to out loud or suppress his feelings, because one wants to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others (Hochschild, 2002, p. 6-7).

Emotions like emotional strain, anxiety, anger, and disappointment become emotional labor when teachers engage in efforts to modify and control negative emotions for the purpose of expressing only those emotions that are socially acceptable. In other words, emotional labor is what teachers perform when they engage in caring relationships but they have to induce, neutralize or inhibit their emotions so as to render them appropriate to situations (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006, p. 123).

According to the emotional regulation theory, the basic premise is that employees regulate their feelings and emotions in order to be accepted in the organization. Gross (1998) defines emotional regulation theory at two points. First one is an antecedent-focused strategy. In this strategy, an individual reappraises the event cognitively and tries to feel the required emotion which is acceptable for his or her job. The second one is the response-focused strategy. In this strategy, an individual suppress or hide his or her felt emotion (Hochschild,1983; Grandey, 2000).Hochschild (1983) has dealt with employees' emotional regulation strategies in two dimensions,

surface acting, and deep acting. Surface acting occurs when people change their expressed emotions. In addition, they do not attempt to change their felt emotions. In other words in surface acting, the expression on one's face or the posture of one's body feels "put on." (Hochschild, 1983,p.36). The bank teller's smile when dealing with an angry customer is surface level acting behavior (Breedon, 2015, p. 6). On the other hand, in deep level acting an individual does not suppress his or her emotions (Hochschild, 1983) and he or she consciously modify feelings in order to express the desired emotion (Grandey, 2000, p.96).For example, a salesperson can may see a difficult sale as a daunting threat to his job, but instead if he becomes aware of his negative reaction to the sale and view it as a challenge he can learn how to improve his current sales techniques (Breedon, 2015, p. 7)From the point of teachers and teaching context there are at least three reasons to apply emotional labor to teaching. Firstly as Winograd (2003) mentioned teaching provides three criteria for emotional labor which is suggested by Hochschild (1983). These criteria are(Yin & Lee, 2012,p.58);

- Teaching requires face-to-face contact between teachers and others, especially their students
- Teaching requires teachers to produce some emotional state (e.g., joy or fear, excitement or anxiety)

in their students or other people around them

- There is a degree of external control over teachers' emotional labor in the classroom or school settings, which usually comes in the form of cultural expectations or professional norms.

Secondly teaching as a job requires emotional practice and includes emotional transmission between teachers and students. That's why teachers have to manage and regulate their emotions to create a better relationship. Thirdly the ethics of care which is an element of professional norms of teaching is important. This element means that a caring teacher has to show positive emotions to students and his/her profession. and improve his or her professional capability (Yin & Lee, 2012,p.58). In order to manage their feelings effectively and perform emotional labor teachers use some specific strategies. Surface acting and deep acting strategies



are the strategies that are most frequently discussed in emotional labor research (Grandey, 2003; Hochschild, 1983; Wharton, 2009). Workers who engage in both surface and deep acting express emotions that do not come naturally. When an individual release unfelt emotions or hides felt emotions for displaying the appropriate emotions required by their work it means he or she engages a surface acting strategy. In contrast, when an individual tries to modify his or her felt emotions it means he or she engages a deep acting strategy (Yin et al., 2013). For example, although a teacher feels differently to the successful and a lazy student but smiles in the same manner to both of them this is a surface acting strategy. In contrast, if the teacher smiles to the lazy student and at the same time tries to change his or her inner feelings towards the student than the teacher uses deep acting strategies.

Hypothesis Development

Effects of school climate on emotional labor

According to Social Exchange Theory employees feel obliged to repay the organization when they take support from their organizations (Blau, 1964). Positive school climate provides teachers to perform deep acting and teachers change their inner feelings to display rules of the school. Opposed to this negative school climate provides teachers to perform surface acting without changing their inner feelings (Yao et al, 2015).

Depending on the preceding discussion, the following hypotheses were developed:

Hypothesis 1: School climate is negatively related to surface acting among teachers.

Hypothesis 2: School climate is positively related to deep acting among teachers.

Effects of school climate on emotional exhaustion

Environmental stressors such as the relationship of the teachers with students, colleagues, principals and the organizational working circumstances may cause burnout of teachers (Evers, Tomic, & Brouwers, 2004). Due to these stressors, teachers feel emotionally exhausted, have negative attitudes toward students and a negative professional efficacy (Schonfeld, 2001). These negative responses are associated with a decline in teaching quality, less flexibility in response to various student needs and teacher-student interactions (Grayson & Alvarez,

2008). Due to the workload, poor career structure and low salaries, the teaching occupation may become increasingly stressful as a whole (Schonfeld, 2001).

Depending on the preceding discussion, the following hypothesis was developed:

Hypothesis 3: School climate is negatively related to emotional exhaustion among teachers.

Effects of emotional labor on emotional exhaustion

Based on the emotion regulation theory individuals organize their feelings in a few points in the emotional process (Grandey A. A., 2000). If we apply this theory to the work setting, the business environment or a specific business activity can cause the employee to react emotionally (e.g., anger, sadness, anxiety), and behave inappropriately (e.g., verbal attack, crying, complaining).

Because of this inappropriate reaction emotional labor regulates his or her response. This regulation includes surface acting (modifying expression by imitating or enhancing facial and bodily signs of emotion) and deep acting (reappraising the event) (Grandey A. A., 2000). Emotional regulation may lead to negative consequences (eg. emotional exhaustion), depending on the emotional labor strategy used (e.g., surface acting and deep acting) (Allen, Diefendorff, & Ma, 2014). In a study analyzing the relationship between emotional labor and emotional exhaustion, it was found that the effects of surface-level acting were stronger than deep-level acting on emotional exhaustion. Also, this study suggested that focusing on reducing surface-level acting frequency might be more successful at decreasing emotional exhaustion (Breedon, 2015).

Moreover, there are various studies on the teachers especially about emotional labor and emotional exhaustion. In these studies, the increase in surface acting results in emotional exhaustion while there is a negative relationship between deep acting and emotional exhaustion (Zhang & Zhu, 2008).

Accordingly, the following are hypothesized:

Hypothesis 4: Surface acting is positively related to emotional exhaustion among teachers.

Hypothesis 5: Deep acting is negatively related to emotional exhaustion among teachers.



Research hypotheses are shown in the figure below.

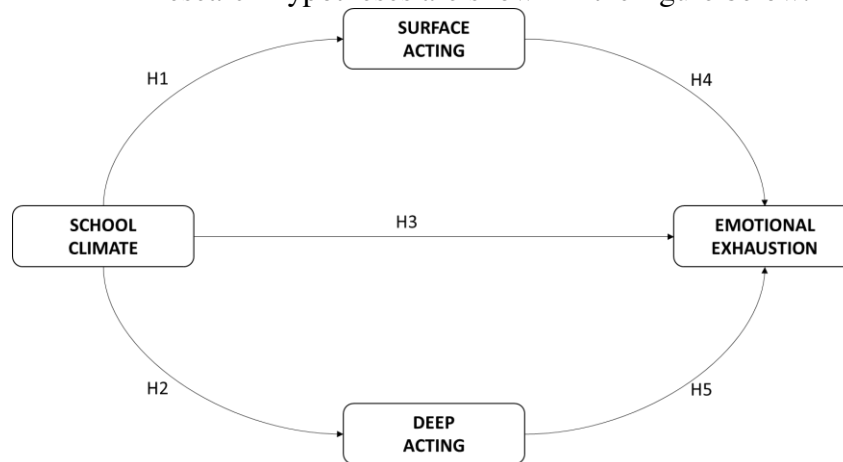


Figure 1. Research Hypothesis

Method

Participants and Procedure

The universe of the research is composed of teachers working in public schools in Istanbul. In this phase, a total of 212 public school teachers selected through simple unselected sampling have participated in the research. 71% (151) of the participants were female and 29% (61) of the participants were male. 71 of participants were teachers of primary schools, 83 of participants were teachers of middle schools and 58 of participants were teachers of high schools. Regarding years of teaching experience, 9% (20) of the participants had below 5 years of experience, 20% (42) had from six to ten years, 22% (46) had from eleven to fifteen years, 49% (104) had more than fifteen years.

Measures

School Climate

One of the scales used in the research is the school climate scale which is revised by Johnson et al. and it is used to measure the teachers' perceptions of school climate (Johnson, Stevens, & Zvoch, 2007). The scale is consisted of 21 items and included the collaboration, student relations, school resources, decision making and instructional innovation dimensions. The questionnaire was translated into Turkish and then back-translated into English independently by two researchers. Based on an exploratory factor analysis (EFA), five items were removed and three factors were extracted from the remaining 16 items. The first factor is named as

student relations, the second factor is named as usage of resources and coordination and the third factor is named as consultation. Following the EFA, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted, in which the 16 items were constrained to load on the three hypothesized factors, respectively, and the three factors loaded on an overall second-order factor, namely school climate. According to Iacobucci (2010), we used the following indices as the criteria for the model fits $X^2/sd \leq 3$, $SRMR \leq 0.10$ and $CFI \geq 0.90$. The results of CFA indicated that the model fit the data well as the comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.90; X^2/sd is 2,164 and SRMR (standardized root mean square residual) is 0,077. These are acceptable values for Structural Equation Modeling Surveys done in AMOS programme (İlhan & Çetin, 2014). In the present study, Cronbach's α coefficients for each subscale were 0.81 (Student Relations, 4 items), 0.79 (Usage of Resources and Coordination, 9 items), 0.67 (Consultation, 3 items).

Emotional Labor

Emotional labor scale was adapted by Diefendorff et al. This scale is based on the emotional labor scales developed separately by Krulm and Geddes in 2003 and by Garndey in 2000 and was developed through the development of some expressions. There are 6 questions about surface acting and 4 questions about deep acting on the scale. The adaptation of the scale to Turkish was done by Basım and Beginirbaş in 2012 (Basım &



Begenirbaş, 2012, p. 80). The scale has exhibited good validity and reliability in a previous study (Yin, Lee, & Zhang, 2013). After structural equation modeling it is determined that comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.978; X²/sd (Chi-square/sd) is 1,929 and SRMR (standardized root mean square residual) is 0,0583. Cronbach’s α coefficients for surface acting is 0,91 and Cronbach’s α coefficients for deep acting is 0,87 in this study.

Emotional Exhaustion

The teachers’ emotional exhaustion was measured with the emotional exhaustion subscale from a modified Turkish version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory for Educators (İnce & Şahin, 2015). On the scale, the emotional exhaustion of teachers was measured by 9 items. The scale has exhibited good validity and reliability in a previous study (Wu, Zeng, Qin, & Zheng, 2003).Cronbach’s α coefficients for this scale is 0,93. After structural

equation modeling it is found that comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.967; X²/sd (Chi-square/sd)is 2,873 and SRMR (standardized root mean square residual) is 0,038.

Results

Table 1 represents descriptive statistics of teachers’ school climate, surface acting, deep acting and emotional exhaustion.

Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics among the latent variables are presented in Table 1. On average, teachers’ perception of school climate was neutral M(Mean)=3.15, SD (Standard Deviation) =0.65), neither very negative nor very positive (the range of the scale was from 1 to 5). Regarding emotional labor strategies, teachers reported more deep acting (M = 3.29, SD = 1.04) than surface acting (M = 2.27, SD = 1.02).

Table 1. Means and Standart Deviations

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
School Climate	3,1459	0,65214
Surface Acting	2,2665	1,02129
Deep Acting	3,2948	1,04649
Emotional Exhaustion	2,6981	0,88846

Hypothesis Testing

As indicated in Figure 2, the standardized coefficient (β) is estimated which explains the predictive power of the independent variable and presents an easily grasped picture of effect size. The closer the magnitude to 1.0, the higher the correlation and the greater the predictive power of the variable is. The results demonstrated that school climate is unrelated to the surface and deep acting

among teachers (p>0,05). Hypothesis 1 and 2 did not receive support. Moreover, school climate is negatively related to emotional exhaustion among teachers (β=-,47, p<,01). Furthermore, surface acting is positively related to emotional exhaustion (β=,48, p<,01) but deep acting is unrelated to emotional exhaustion (β=,00,p>0,05). In this case, hypothesis 1,2 and 5 aren’t accepted but hypothesis 3 and 4 are accepted.

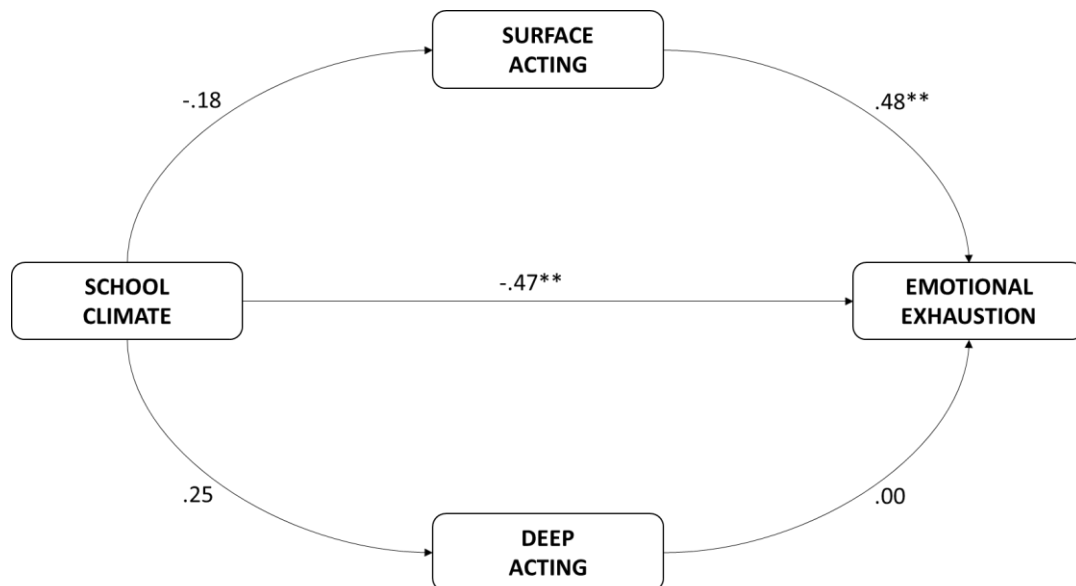


Figure 2. Results of Path Analysis

Additionally, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted and it is revealed that the data fit the hypothesized model at a particular significance level. The results from CFA include model fit indices showing the degree to which a hypothesized model accurately represents relationships among observed variables. Several criteria were used to examine the goodness of fit. These criteria included the chi-square statistic (χ^2); ratio of chi-square to degrees of freedom (χ^2 / df), the TLI, CFI, and RMSEA. Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) indicates the errors of fit in the covariance matrix. Values of 0.08 or less are acceptable. Comparative fit index (CFI) is an incremental fit index that assesses the model in relation to a null model with

no measurement error. CFI levels of 0.90 or higher are recommended. Also, Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) another incremental fit index level of 90 or higher are recommended. The result of the ratio of chi-square to the degree of freedom must be 3 or less than 3 (Iacobucci, 2010).

The measurement model included four latent variables (school climate, surface acting, deep acting and emotional exhaustion) and 22 observed variables. Fit indices revealed good model fit: $\chi^2(202, N=212) = 404.441, p < 0.001, RMSEA = 0.069, CFI = 0.931, TLI = 0.921$. The results of the confirmatory factor analysis are shown at the table below.

Table 2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Hypothesized Model

Model	X^2 / df	TLI	CFI	RMSEA
Hypothesized Model	2,00	0.921	0.931	0.069

N=212

CFI: comparative fit index, TLI: Tucker- Lewis Index, df: Degree of freedom, X^2 : Chi-square, RMSEA: Root mean square error of approximation

Discussion and conclusions

In this study, we examined the relationship between emotional labor, perceived school climate, and emotional exhaustion. The data obtained from

212 teachers working in public schools in Istanbul. Public school teachers perform deep acting more than surface acting. Level of Turkish teachers' school climate and emotional exhaustion perception is medium. Compared to the study Yao et al. which is about Chinese primary and high school teachers' school climate, emotional labor and emotional



exhaustion mean of Chinese teachers' school climate and emotional exhaustion perceptions are medium and mean of deep acting is more than mean of surface acting (Yao X. Y., 2015). Also, Zhang & Zhu (2008) revealed that Chinese college instructors performed in deep acting the most and surface acting the least. The findings are parallel to each other.

In addition, the results revealed that the teachers' perceptions of the school climate are not related to each of emotional labor strategies. Yao et al. found that there is a negative relationship between school climate and surface acting and a positive relationship between school climate and deep acting. This difference may be due to the personality traits of the teachers, the social culture and the educational system in the country. Depending on our analysis we couldn't observe any relationship between school climate and emotional labor. This means that findings didn't support hypothesis 1 and 2. Perceived school climate is related to the support that teachers take from their principals, and students, in that sense emotions that the teacher's display is independent of their perceptions of school climate. Because teaching is such a profession that it has its own ethical standards and at the same time it has a conscientious dimension. Whether principals and colleagues support the teachers or not they don't reflect this on their emotions while teaching. On the other hand, teachers surface acting strategies are significantly related to emotional exhaustion whereas deep acting behaviors are not related to emotional exhaustion. Surface acting has a positive and a significant effect on emotional exhaustion. The more surface acting strategies teachers display the more emotional exhaustion they feel. Surface acting is a predictor of emotional exhaustion but deep acting is not among Turkish primary, middle and high school teachers. These results are consistent with those of a study by Cheung et al. and Yao et al. (Cheung et al, 2011; Yao et al, 2015). Studies done among Chinese teachers show that surface acting was significantly related to emotional exhaustion whereas deep acting was not. However, some of the results are inconsistent with those of the Turkish study of Akın et al. which found that surface acting among primary school teachers was positively related to emotional exhaustion, whereas deep acting was negatively related to emotional exhaustion (Akın et al, 2014). Like Akın et

al Zhang & Zhu (2008) found that surface acting had negative effects on teacher burnout, but deep acting had positive effects. In most studies surface acting has a positive impact on emotional exhaustion. This can be because the emotions that the teacher feels are different from the emotions they are trying to show, and this difference can lead teachers to emotional exhaustion. The impact of deep acting on emotional exhaustion varies from most studies. In some studies it has a negative effect on emotional exhaustion, in some studies, it has no effect on emotional exhaustion. Reasons for this diversity can exist from the education system, cultural difference, teacher's working conditions and income levels of teachers. It is known that emotion is perceived differently across cultures (Krone et al., 1997; Krone & Morgan, 2000). Findings supported the hypothesis 4 but didn't support the hypothesis 5.

In this study school, the climate has a negative effect on emotional exhaustion. Grayson & Alvarez (2008) found that different aspects of school climate related to each of the three primary burnout dimensions. For example, emotional exhaustion was closely associated with the climate factors of parent/community relations and student-peer relations. These results are similar to our research. Findings supported the hypothesis 3.

According to our research surface, acting increases the emotional exhaustion of teachers. Because of this result, teachers should try to perform less surface acting.

In Turkey, teachers are generally well-trained in subject knowledge, pedagogy, class management, measurement and evaluation and also theories of child development, but they do not receive formal training in effective emotional management. It seems that relevant training is necessary for teachers to be aware of the importance of emotional management in the classroom and to ensure teachers' adoption of appropriate emotional labor strategies to facilitate teaching and learning. Furthermore, school administrators must be aware of the importance of the school climate. Dimensions of such student relations, usage of resources and coordination and consultation are the main points of school climate. All of these dimensions affect the teachers' emotional exhaustion level. If the school climate is positive then teachers' emotional



exhaustion will decrease. In this point school leaders should develop motivational factors (giving awards, appreciate, presenting school resources, organizing school's physical conditions, enabling the healthy teacher-student relationship, etc.) to reduce the negative impact of surface acting. Finally, it is said that the teaching as a profession requires a high level of emotional labor and this causes the risk of emotional exhaustion for teachers. For teachers to feel good about them national educational institutions and organizations should do the following:

- Give the training to enable teachers to control and manage their emotions
- Establish a career development system for teachers to advance in career stages
- Provide opportunities for teachers to take part in projects
- Develop of school resources to increase communication between teachers, students, school management

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□ Give active roles in decisions about the education system. Teachers who think they have an influence on decisions will adopt the school environment more quickly.

- Improve teachers' income levels.

For further studies, the model of the present study with three variables can be changed with different antecedents and consequences. For instance, the effects demographic variables and personalities on emotional exhaustion can be investigated. Besides this research can be done into other business sectors (eg. health, security). Moreover, some possible limitations should be specified. Participants in this study work in primary, middle and high schools. Thus the sample might not be representative of the overall population of Turkish primary, middle and high school teachers. In addition participants' self-assessments, common method variance and social desirability limitations must be thought.



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