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Job Burnout as a Predictor of Teachers' Level of Life Satisfaction During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract. After the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus, almost all employees have experienced changes to their working conditions. Concepts such as distance work, distance education, and online teaching have been encountered by teachers, the instructional techniques have changed and the use of technology has become more prevalent. Due to the changes in teaching roles during distance education practices, re-examining teachers' life satisfaction levels has been considered to be necessary. Totally 535 teachers working in both public and private schools in Istanbul were contacted in order to examine the role of job burnout in predicting life satisfaction among teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey (MBI-ES) and Satisfaction with Life Scale were used as data collection tools in the study. The theoretical model tested within the scope of the study was verified. According to the verified model, job burnout of teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic was found to be a negative and significant predictor of life satisfaction. The findings were discussed in line with the literature. Recommendations were made to increase the motivation of teachers.

Keywords. Teacher's life satisfaction, job burnout of teachers, teachers in COVID-19 pandemic, online education

Introduction

The COVID-19 virus, which the World Health Organization classified as a "public health emergency of international concern" on January 30, 2020, was first diagnosed in Turkey on March 11, 2020 (Ministry of Health, 2020). The detection of the COVID-19 virus prompted rapid changes in many areas, especially in health and education. As in many countries, Turkey has also taken measures to control the virus by administering distance education (Ministry of National Education, MoNE, 2020). The transition to distance education has, however, caused some problems. These problems have not only affected teachers and students but also parents and education administrators (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Daniel, 2020; Tarkar, 2020; Can, 2020; Erzen & Ceylan, 2020; Saygi, 2021; Sezgin, 2021; Yılmaz, Mutlu, Güner, Doğanay

&Yılmaz 2020). Due to inexperience and lack of competence in technology, the administration of distance education has become a stressful and difficult process for teachers who are used to face-to-face instruction (Yılmaz, Mutlu, Güner, Doğanay & Yılmaz, 2020). A previous study on the problems encountered by classroom teachers in distance education during the pandemic process (Saygı, 2021) identified the problems such as technological incompetence, student participation as well as measurement and evaluation. Kırmızıgül (2020) argues that teachers' interaction with students, communication, and the way of instruction have changed as a result of the transition to distance education. These changes, as well as technology, could have made it difficult for teachers to adapt. Supporting and motivating teachers during the pandemic is emphasized to be important (Can, 2020). Both education employees and their families have been determined to be adversely affected by the sudden outbreak, health risks resulting from the pandemic, and educational problems (Demir and Kale, 2020; Kurt, Kandemir & Çelik, 2021; Şenol and Yaşar, 2020). In addition to families and educators, students have also experienced educational and emotional difficulties during this process (Bozkurt, 2020; Karadeniz & Zabcı, 2020; Sarı & Nayır, 2020). The Education Reform Initiative 2021 report states that the processes such as teachers' attempts to adapt distance education teaching techniques to online systems, students' access to distance education,

and lack of learning experienced by students have affected teachers' psychological and professional well-being during the pandemic (Aktaş Salman, Düşkün & Arık, 2021). Having difficulties at work may result in a tendency towards negative emotions in individuals. Therefore, it is crucial to determine whether job burnout is experienced among teachers with different levels of experience in different fields.

Freudenberger introduced the term burnout in 1974 and described it as failure, weariness, or exhaustion caused by making excessive demands on energy, power, or resources. Burnout is generally defined as a pattern of symptoms, and people with job burnout often experience professional dissatisfaction and fatigue (Öztürk, 2019). Generally, burnout is defined as an employee's exhaustion resulting in the inability to work despite all efforts (Freudenberger, 1974). In occupations that involve human-human interaction, burnout is a serious syndrome that affects both teachers and students negatively (Shlenskaya, Karnaukhova, Son & Lapteva 2020). Maslach (2003) defines job burnout as a long-term response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors at work. Job burnout is a three-dimensional syndrome including emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a low sense of personal accomplishment (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001). Due to factors such as constant contact with people, stress, and working conditions, burnout is more prevalent in some occupational groups. Teaching is considered to be one of these occupations. Farber (1984) suggests that teachers may be prone to burnout due to problems with students, parents, and administrators. Persons experiencing job burnout may experience less pleasure and satisfaction in life as a result of the burnout experienced at work. Burnout in teachers has been noticed to be discussed with different variables in previous studies, and burnout is related to variables such as self-efficacy (Cansoy, Parlar & Kılınç, 2017), work-life balance (Birkan, 2020), the emotional climate of the school (Dilekçi & Kaya, 2021). One of these variables is life satisfaction (Chan, 2011; Telef, 2011; Çelik & Üstüner, 2018).

Satisfaction is defined as “the state of being content with what you have” in TDK (Turkish Language Association). Neugarten, Havighurst & Tobin (1961) introduced the concept of life satisfaction to the literature, and Diener (1984) recognized it as a dimension of subjective well-being. Diener defined life satisfaction as a cognitive and affective evaluation of a person’s life. Life satisfaction can be defined as the individuals’ general evaluation about the quality of their life based on the criteria they choose (Tuzgöl-Dost, 2007) and includes satisfaction in all dimensions of life (Özer, 2001). In the literature, concepts such as happiness, psychological well-being, and subjective well-being are discussed together with the concept of life satisfaction, and these concepts are sometimes used interchangeably (Sahraç, 2007). As COVID-19 has affected many aspects of life, this pandemic is considered to have the potential to affect people's life satisfaction. It may therefore be useful to re-analyze individuals' satisfaction levels with life, or their perceptions of their quality of life, with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Teachers' roles and responsibilities can be influenced by changes in social life. In turn, this is considered to affect teachers' perception of work life and professional performance (Seferoğlu, Yıldız & Yücel, 2014). In the studies carried out abroad, teachers were determined to develop an increased level of cynicism and exhaustion in the first three months following the pandemic (Sokal, Trudel & Babb, 2020). Madigan and Kim (2021) report that burnout has multiple effects on teachers, and it is not yet known how being trained by a teacher with a high level of burnout affects student experiences. Teachers who love their profession and have the ability to cope with difficult conditions are essential for raising healthy generations and achieving qualified educational activities (Kırımoğlu, Yıldırım & Temiz, 2010). This planned study is considered to be important for determining teachers' job burnout and life satisfaction levels during the pandemic.

As a result of the pandemic, face-to-face education practices have been suspended in primary and secondary schools, and courses are instructed with videos on television channels through the Education Information Network (EBA) according to the program organized by level of grade. Afterward, multimedia applications have been used to administer the courses, which students and teachers could access via audio and video from home. Most teachers had to use the online teaching application for the first time in their professional careers. Apart from the pandemic-related problems, the necessity of teaching practices may also have created some negativities that can be expressed as burnout in teachers.

During the pandemic, people have strived to protect themselves from the disease and remain psychologically sound (Karal & Biçer, 2020). People's level of life satisfaction has been considered to be associated with job burnout. Therefore, investigating the level of job burnout as a predictor of teachers' life satisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic process is considered important for further studies to increase teacher motivation.

The purpose of this study was to determine whether the job burnout level of teachers was a significant predictor of their life satisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, this study aimed to determine the predictive power of teachers' emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal achievement dimensions of life satisfaction. The following theoretical model was tested based on this purpose.

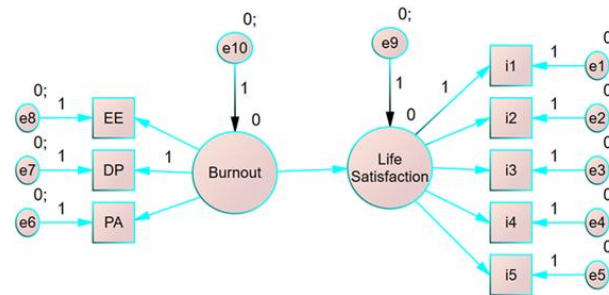


Figure 1. Theoretical model

EE: Emotional Exhaustion, DP: Depersonalization, PA: Personal Achievement

1. Methodology

Study Model

The study was based on a relational screening model. The relational screening model determines the presence of change between two or more variables and specifies the level of change (Karasar, 2020). In accordance with this theoretical model, sub-dimensions of EE, DP, and PA were measured in order to determine the predictive power of teachers' burnout scores on life satisfaction scores.

Study Group

The target population of this study included teachers working in formal education institutions affiliated with the Istanbul Provincial Directorate of National Education during the spring term of the 2020-2021 academic year. Based on the National Education Statistics (MoNE, 2022) a total of 163,440 teachers worked in various educational institutions in the 2020-2021 academic year, including 14,371 in preschool, 43,391 in primary, 47,374 in intermediate, and 58,304 in secondary schools. The measurement tools were sent to be answered via Google Forms to 535 randomly selected teachers working in Istanbul. 73,6% (394) of the participants in the study were female and 26,4% (141) were male. 31,58% (169) of the participants were classroom teachers, 10,28% (55) were preschool teachers, 44,92% (235) were secondary school teachers, and 14,20% (76) were teachers of vocational and technical secondary education branches.

Measurement Tools in the Study

Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey (MBI-ES) and Satisfaction with Life Scale were used in the study. Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey (MBI-ES) Maslach, Jackson, and Schwab adapted the Maslach Burnout Inventory for educators in 1996, and thus the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey (MBI-ES) was developed. The MBI-ES was adapted into Turkish by İnce and Şahin (2015). MBI-ES included 3 sub-dimensions as "Emotional Exhaustion (EE), Depersonalization (DP) and Personal Achievement (PA)" and 22 items in 7-point Likert type.

Dimensions	Number of Items	İnce and Şahin, 2015 (N:760)	Current Study (N:535)
EE	9	.88	.90
DP	5	.78	.80
PA	8	.74	.78

Table 1. Internal Consistency Coefficients (Cronbach's Alpha) Calculated for MBI-ES

The internal consistency coefficients calculated for MBI-ES were presented in Table 1. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficients calculated for each sub-dimension in the adapted inventory (İnce & Şahin, 2015) were 0.88 for EE, 0.78 for DP, and 0.74 for PA. The internal consistency coefficients calculated in this study were .90 for EE, .80 for DP, and .78 for PA. The internal consistency coefficients calculated in this study for EE, DP, and PA proved the measurement tool to be reliable enough.

The high score obtained from the EE and DP dimensions indicated a high level of burnout for the person. The PA dimension was scored differently from the other sub-dimensions. The low score in the PA dimension indicated the individual to have a high level of burnout due to the inability to meet the requirements of the job. In other words, the high score from this sub-dimension indicated a low level of burnout (İnce & Şahin, 2015).

Satisfaction with Life Scale

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) was developed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin (1985) and adapted into Turkish by Dağlı & Baysal (2016). The scale included 5 items and the items were in a 5-point Likert type graded between "I totally disagree" and "I totally agree". There were no reversely coded items in the scale.

Number of Items	Dağlı and Baysal, 2016 (N:760)	Current Study (N:535)
5	.88	.89

Table 2. Internal Consistency Coefficients (Cronbach's Alpha) Calculated for SWLS

The internal consistency coefficients calculated for the SWLS were presented in Table 2. The Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient for the scale adapted into Turkish was 0.88 (Dağlı & Baysal, 2016). The internal consistency coefficient calculated for the current study was .89. This calculated coefficient indicated SWLS to be reliable enough in this study.

Individuals whose positive evaluations of their lives were higher than their negative evaluations had a greater quality of life (Dağlı & Baysal, 2016). In this context, one could infer that a high SWLS score indicated a high quality of life, whereas a low score indicated a low quality of life.

Data Collection

Researchers obtained the necessary approval from the University's Human Researches Educational Sciences Ethics Committee before beginning the data collection process. Then, necessary permissions for the study were obtained from the Istanbul Provincial Directorate of National Education, where the data of the study were collected. the data collection tools were

created electronically (Google forms) and the data collection process was started. To finish the process, each participant was asked to answer all the questions, and after each question was answered, the process moved to the next stage. Thus, incomplete answers were prevented and all participants were included in the study.

Data Analysis

AMOS software was used for data analysis of the study. The AMOS was used to develop structural equation models. The theoretical model illustrated in Figure 1 was created for the structural equation modeling. Then, the measurement model and the hypothetical model were tested, and the standardized regression coefficients between the variables were calculated. In this process, the fit indices of the measurement model were calculated, the model was compared with the fit criteria, and the necessary evaluations based on the purpose of the study were made.

Ethical Considerations

2. FINDINGS

Measurement Model Test

In the structural equation model, the relations between the variables were primarily released, and in this way, the measurement model analyzing the relationship between the variables with CFA was tested. The regression coefficients standardized among the variables in the study were illustrated in Figure 2.

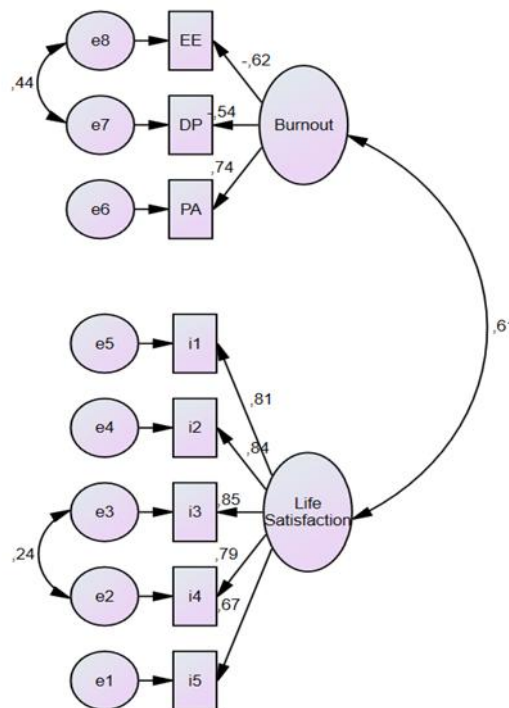


Figure 2. MBI-ES and SLWS measurement model
EE: Emotional Exhaustion, DP: Depersonalization, PA: Personal Achievement, SWL: Satisfaction with Life

The coefficients between the latent variables in the measurement model and the variables specified to be correlational with these variables were determined to be significant ($p < .01$). According to this finding, the correlation coefficient between the latent variable of Burnout and the latent variable of Satisfaction with Life was found to be $-.61$.

Fit Index	Values	Good Fit	Acceptable Fit
X^2/Df	4,50	0-3	3-5
RMSEA	0.08	.00-.05	.05-.08
SRMR	0.46	.00-.05	.05-.10
CFI	.97	.95-1.00	.90-.95
NNFI	.96	.95-1.00	.90-.95
IFI	.97	.95-1.00	.90-.95
RFI	.93	.95-1.00	.90-.95
TLI	.95	.95-1.00	.90-.95

The fit values for the hypothetical model were χ^2 / df 4.50, RMSEA=.08, CFI=.97, IFI=.97, TLI=.95, RFI=.93, and NNFI=.96. These calculated data indicated the hypothetical model to have acceptable fit values. In addition to the hypothetical model, the standardized regression coefficients calculated in this model were presented in Figure 3.

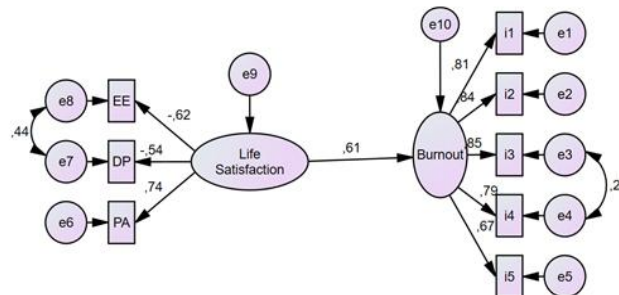


Table 3. Fit Values and Model Fit Criteria Calculated for the Measurement Model

Model fit criteria and good fit and acceptable fit criteria related to these fit criteria were presented in Table 3 (Tabachnick & Fidel, 2015; Karagöz, 2017). In the measurement model, χ^2/df was 4.50, RMSEA=.080, and RFI=.93. These calculated measurements were determined to meet the acceptable fit criteria. On the other hand, CFI=.97, IFI=.97, TLI=.95, NNFI=.96. These calculated fit indices also met the good fit criteria. Based on these findings, the measurement model created to test the hypothetical model had good and acceptable fit values.

Findings Related to Hypothetical Model Testing

After the measurement model was tested and verified, the hypothetical model proposed in the current study was tested, and the fit values for this test are shown in Table 4.

Fit Index	Values	Good Fit	Acceptable Fit
X^2/Df	4,50	0-3	3-5
RMSEA	.08	.00-.05	.05-.08
SRMR	.46	.00-.05	.05-.10
CFI	.97	.95-1.00	.90-.95
NNFI	.96	.95-1.00	.90-.95
IFI	.97	.95-1.00	.90-.95
RFI	.93	.95-1.00	.90-.95
TL	.95	.95-1.00	.90-.95

Table 4. Fit Values for the Hypothetical Model

Figure 3. Hypothetical model created for MBI-ES and SWL

EE: Emotional Exhaustion, DP: Depersonalization, PA: Personal Achievement

In the hypothetical model in Figure 3, the coefficient of the path between the latent variables of Burnout and Life Satisfaction was .61 and this path was found to be significant ($p < .001$). The standardized path coefficients, standard error, and t-test results, as well as non-standardized path coefficients for the relationships between latent variables in the hypothetical model were presented in Table 5.

Structural Relationships	B	β	S.E	CR (t)
Burnout → Life Satisfaction	.21	.61	.027	7.688

Note ** $p < .001$

Table 5. Values of Direct Effects Related to the Hypothetical Model

Modifications to the Measurement Model and Hypothetical Model

In the structural equation modeling, the program proposed to re-evaluate the fit coefficients of the model established by the researchers and to create covariance matrices

between the observed variables and latent variables in order to obtain a better fit. These values, called Modification Indices (MI), were interpreted by the researcher and appropriate changes were made to the model depending on the literature (Chou & Huh, 2012).

In this study, two of the modifications suggested by the AMOS analysis program for the measurement model and the hypothetical model were considered appropriate by the researchers. The initially suggested modification was to draw a covariance between the two sub-dimensions of Burnout latent variables, Emotional Exhaustion, and Depersonalization. Upon reviewing relevant literature, it was found that high scores on these two sub-dimensions of the Maslach Burnout Scale indicated the individuals to have emotional problems. Therefore, covariance was drawn between these two sub-dimensions, and modifications were made. The second modification was suggested between the third and fourth items of the Satisfaction with Life Scale. The third item (I am satisfied with my life) and the fourth item (So far, I have gotten the things that are important to me in my life) indicated satisfaction with life in general, and both items could be regarded as measuring similar characteristics. Therefore, a modification was made by drawing covariance between these two items.

The hypothetical model was also modified based on the modifications in the measurement model.

3. Discussion and conclusion

The theoretical model tested within the scope of the study was validated. According to the validated model, in this study carried out with teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic, the level of job burnout was found to be a negative and significant predictor of life satisfaction. The previous studies conducted with teachers before the pandemic in the literature indicated professional burnout and life satisfaction to have a negative relationship (Aydemir, Diken, Yıkımsı, Aksoy & Özokçu, 2014; Karaaslan, Uslu & Esen, 2020; Karabaş, 2018; Yavuz, 2019). There were findings indicating that the level of professional burnout among teachers was a negative predictor of satisfaction with life (Çelik & Kahraman, 2018; Çelik & Üstüner, 2018). The findings obtained from the studies carried out before the pandemic supported the research findings.

Similar results were also noticed when the studies carried out during the Covid-19 period were reviewed. In this period, COVID-19 was observed to generally affect education stakeholders negatively as individuals were particularly affected by the restricted social life and tended to behave in anxiety-provoking behaviors such as protecting themselves and getting rid of this situation (Yayla, 2021). There were studies reporting that the fear and anxiety due to the COVID-19 were related to the job burnout of teachers. COVID-19 anxiety, teaching anxiety, communication anxiety with parents, and administrative support were found to be significant predictors of teacher burnout (Pressley, 2021). However, fear of COVID-19 was found to have a positive relationship with emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, and negative with personal achievement (Şahin, 2021). However, teachers experienced difficulties such as students' lack of focus, difficulty in teacher control, lack of technical tools, disconnection, and low participation rates during the distance education process (Akgül, 2021). In addition, due to low participation in distance education courses and turned-off cameras, there was no interaction between teachers and students, which led teachers to feel unsatisfied with their own performance (Çelik, 2021). The preparation of course materials by teachers and evaluation of student success in distance education were also considered as obstacles in the distance education process (Çok, 2021). In addition to these, teachers' undertaking the role of both parents and

teachers at home during the distance education process carried out during the pandemic period also distressed teachers (Çelik, 2021). Teachers preferred face-to-face education and wanted schools to be opened (Tanta, 2021). It was considered that teachers who faced these problems in the distance education process were possible to have difficulties in carrying on their profession. These problems could trigger job burnout by preventing teachers from creating a comfortable working environment with their students. Being away from school as one of the environments where teachers provided social support was also considered to be a determinant of job burnout and life satisfaction. Lack of face-to-face communication with colleagues and being away from the school that offered an opportunity to discuss the problems encountered could have contributed to job burnout among teachers.

Pressley (2021) stated that teachers had a high burnout score during the COVID-19 pandemic process. It was found by Sokal et al. (2020) that teachers' resilience and burnout were negatively correlated at the beginning of the pandemic, and burnout scores increased over time. In this study, resilience and burnout levels of the teachers were found to be significantly correlated with their attitudes towards technology and change and their competencies. The teachers were observed to express the indicators of burnout as loss of face-to-face education routine during the pandemic, increased teaching load, having more responsibility during the pandemic than before, having less support and resources, excessive workload, use of technology, lack of necessary pedagogical preparation or digital competences to improve their role as teachers in the virtual environment (Izquierdo, Caraveo, Villegas & Díaz, 2021; Orejarena, Murillo & Vicente, 2021; Pellerone, 2021; Sánchez-Pujalte, Mateu, Etchezahar & Yepes, 2021; Williams, 2020). Teachers' professional roles changed in a complex way, resulting in a decrease in teachers' satisfaction levels and a rapid onset of emotional exhaustion with the outbreak of Covid-19 (Li & Yu, 2022). In addition, teachers who had previous training and experience in online teaching were noticed to have a lower level of stress and a higher level of life satisfaction (Hidalgo-Andrade, Hermosa-Bosano & Paz, 2021). The studies carried out on teachers during the pandemic period also supported the research findings.

As a result, the life satisfaction of teachers facing professional uncertainties and problems could be negatively affected. In fact, work-life was one of the factors affecting life satisfaction. Yetim (2001) stated that satisfaction from work life directly affected subjective well-being, including life satisfaction, and the development of relationships, skills, and abilities in the workplace contributed to the meaning of life. Most professional duties and tasks take place in a daily time frame, so changes in professional routines and standards are determinative of life satisfaction. Therefore, the life satisfaction of individuals is bound to be negatively impacted. In the suspension of face-to-face education, it was observed that the changes and complexity in the roles of the teachers experiencing a sense of belonging to society and their relationships with students in the classroom increased the teachers' burnout levels and negatively affected life satisfaction. While fulfilling their professional duties and responsibilities, concepts such as remote work, distance education, and online teaching caused teachers' living conditions to change. Working hours changed, face-to-face communication with colleagues decreased, classroom management became difficult, the use of technology increased, and preparing materials possible to be used in distance education became necessary, as well. In addition, job burnout caused teachers to question their lives and professions. It was considered that the life satisfaction of professionally satisfied teachers improved positively.

Although face-to-face education started in primary and secondary education institutions, it was important to prepare teachers for new situations that required the use of

distance education applications. Therefore, teachers needed technological, pedagogical, and social support. Further studies on teachers' job burnout would make positive contributions to their life satisfaction levels. Moreover, it was considered that further studies would increase the quality of education and contribute to the learning experiences of the students.

Some suggestions were possible to be made in line with the results of this study. Teachers experiencing job burnout could receive professional help and the factors affecting it could be studied more in-depth. It could be possible to carry out studies to increase teacher motivation and to create digital platforms where teachers could collaborate. Communication between education stakeholders could be strengthened, and studies could be carried out to increase the participation of students in distance education processes. Teachers could be trained on the use of digital tools and applications used in educational activities.

The study also had some limitations. The study sample was limited only to the teachers working in public and private schools in Istanbul in 2020-2021, who voluntarily participated in the study. It was considered beneficial to support the findings obtained from this study with studies conducted with different samples.

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