



The effects of teacher immediacy and student burnout on empowerment and resistance among Turkish pre-service teachers



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ABSTRACT

This study examined the role of teacher immediacy and student burnout on empowerment and resistance behaviors among university students attending a faculty of education in Turkey. A total of 329 pre-service teachers ranging in age from 17–37 (mean age: 20.57 years) participated in the study. Hierarchical regression results revealed that teacher immediacy positively predicted all three dimensions of student empowerment and negatively predicted student resistance. Efficacy was a positive predictor of the competence and impact dimensions of learner empowerment and a negative predictor of resistance, whereas cynicism was a negative predictor of the meaningfulness dimension of empowerment and a positive predictor of resistance. In addition, teacher immediacy had a stronger effect on learner empowerment than student burnout, while student burnout had a stronger effect on resistance than teacher immediacy.

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1. Introduction

Interpersonal perceptions and communicative relationships are crucial elements of teacher–student interaction, a significant component of the teaching–learning process (Richmond, Gorham, & McCroskey, 1987). In recent decades, one of the important challenges in higher education has been “to figure out how to manage the classroom environment so that students feel intrinsically motivated to learn and perform high quality work” (Frymier, Shulman, & Houser, 1996, p. 181). As suggested by Bolkan and Goodboy (2011), in order to create a positive learning environment, instructors need to be competent in social interaction as well as in their subject area. This emphasizes the fact that effective teaching requires instructors to effectively manage the interplay between the academic and social dimensions of the classroom (Walker, 2009), which in turn requires a relational approach to teaching and effective interpersonal communication skills (Graham, West, & Schaller, 1992). In other words, teacher–student interaction plays an important role in establishing an effective teaching–learning environment and is affected by instructor behavior as well as by student characteristics. Recently, in relation to an effective teaching–learning environment, learner empowerment, as an expansion of traditional views of motivation, has been the focus of research studies mostly in the field of communication education. Likewise, student resistance has also received considerable attention in the instructional communication research. Research has shown that teacher immediacy as an instructor behavior is important to both learner empowerment (Houser & Frymier, 2009) and student resistance (Kearney, Plax, & Smith, 1986).

Whereas the relationships of teacher immediacy with learner empowerment and student resistance have been well documented in western contexts, especially with American samples, little is known about the role of teacher immediacy in learner empowerment and student resistance in non-western contexts. To this end, the first aim of this study is to examine the role of teacher immediacy in learner empowerment and student resistance in a non-western context. Further, previous research has shown that individual factors are also associated with learner empowerment (e.g. Frymier et al., 1996). In this study student burnout was considered as an individual factor that would be associated with learner empowerment and student resistance. The second aim of this study, then, is to investigate the role of student burnout, as an individual characteristic, in student empowerment and resistance. Although the factors that affected the student burnout have been mostly studied in the literature, the findings on the consequences of student burnout are limited in number. Therefore, investigating the role of student burnout in learner empowerment and student resistance would contribute to the findings on these two constructs.

2. Literature review

2.1. Learner empowerment

The concept of ‘learner empowerment’, a broader version of ‘motivation’, was initially transferred from the realm of manager–employee relationships to an educational context by Frymier et al. (1996), who described three dimensions of learner empowerment: meaningfulness, i.e. learners find a task meaningful; competence, i.e. learners feel competent to perform a task; and impact, i.e. learners feel that their efforts have an impact on the scheme of things. According to Frymier et al.

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(1996), empowerment can be a useful construct in conceptualizing a student's intrinsic motivation in a classroom environment. Schrodtt et al. (2008) consider learner empowerment to be “a cognitive belief state of personal involvement and self-efficacy that ultimately results in a heightened sense of personal effectiveness among students” (p. 184). As a motivation-related construct, learner empowerment is positively correlated with intrinsic motivation and negatively correlated with extrinsic motivation and amotivation (Brooks & Young, 2011). Several recent studies have focused on identifying specific characteristics of the learning environment that empower students. Houser and Frymier (2009) indicate that an important dimension in learner empowerment is the teacher–student relationship, a major factor in affective learning in the classroom. Elements of relational communication such as teacher immediacy (Houser & Frymier, 2009), attendance policy and assessment choice (Brooks & Young, 2011) and use of power in the classroom (Schrodtt et al., 2008) have also been shown to have an effect on students' feelings of empowerment.

2.2. Student resistance behaviors

Student resistance behaviors refer to students' opposition to teachers' compliance-gaining attempts (Burroughs, 2007; Kearney et al., 1986). According to Burroughs, Kearney, and Plax (1989), this resistance can be categorized as either active or passive, with the latter more common, as it is more socially acceptable and less disruptive to the classroom (Kearney & Plax, 1992). Alpert (1991) mentions reluctant participation such as silence and mumbling as examples of resistance behavior, but argues that conformity can also be a mode of resistance. Previous research has shown instructor behavior to have an effect on student resistance. Bolkan and Goodboy (2011) found that charismatic leadership decreases student resistance, with instructors' sensitivity to student needs, sensitivity to the environment and articulation of a strategic vision to be significantly associated with student resistance. Zhang, Zhang, and Castelluccio (2011) found that teacher misbehavior and credibility differently predict resistance across cultures. Their study found the trustworthiness dimension of teacher credibility and the offensiveness dimension of teacher misbehavior to be significant predictors of resistance among Chinese college students, whereas among U.S. college students, the trustworthiness and competence dimensions of teacher credibility and the indolence and incompetence dimensions of teacher misbehavior were significant predictors of resistance. There are very few studies that examine the relationship between teacher immediacy and student resistance. Among them, a study carried out by Burroughs (2007) suggested an association between student resistance to compliance and nonverbal immediacy behaviors of teachers; specifically, students were found more likely to passively reject requests from their non-immediate classroom teachers.

2.3. Teacher immediacy

Immediacy, a concept first advanced by Mehrabian (1969), refers to a perception of physical and psychological closeness between people (Richmond, 2002). Immediacy can be both verbal and nonverbal (Mehrabian, 1981). Nonverbal immediacy behaviors include “moving away from a desk or podium, facing students, touching students, establishing eye contact with students, smiling at students, moving around the room, having a relaxed body posture and being vocally expressive” (Richmond et al., 1987, p. 580). Verbal immediacy is achieved by “verbally effective messages that show openness to the other, friendship for the other, or empathy with the other” (Richmond, 2002, p. 67); thus, messages that encourage students to communicate and addressing students by their preferred names could be considered examples of teacher verbal immediacy. Previous research has indicated immediacy behaviors to be related to various important learning outcomes. Early evidence of the role of immediacy in teacher effectiveness was provided by Andersen (1979). More recently, a meta-analytical review article by

Witt, Wheelless, and Allen (2004) reported a consistent association between nonverbal and verbal immediacy and perceived and affective learning, although the correlation between both forms of immediacy and cognitive learning was markedly lower. Immediacy behaviors were associated with positive student affect (Plax, Kearney, McCroskey, & Richmond, 1986), affective learning, learning indicators, state motivation (Frymier & Houser, 2000), cognitive learning (Richmond et al., 1987), students' feelings of empowerment (Houser & Frymier, 2009) and reduced student resistance (Kearney et al., 1986). More specifically, Kearney et al. (1986) found that immediate teachers were less likely to be resisted by their students; in other words, “students may be more willing to comply with teachers they like as opposed to teachers they don't” (p. 23).

2.4. Student burnout

The concept of burnout has been the focus of research in psychology and associated disciplines since the 1970s. Although burnout was originally restricted to the domain of human services, it has been extended towards all types of professions. Burnout among teachers (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Parker, Martin, Colmar, & Liem, 2012) and university faculty members (Lackritz, 2004) has attracted much attention in the relevant literature. There is some evidence that burnout is also experienced by college students (e.g. Gold & Michael, 1985; Schaufeli, Martinez, Marques-Pinto, Salanova, & Bakker, 2002). In the case of students, burnout refers to “feeling exhausted because of study demands, having a cynical and detached attitude toward one's study and feeling incompetent as a student” (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 465). However, previous research has focused mainly on the factors affecting student burnout (e.g. Alarcon, Edwards, & Menke, 2011; Cushman & West, 2006), with research into the consequences of burnout among university students very limited. In one of these few studies, burnout was found to be negatively related to academic performance (Schaufeli et al., 2002) and academic achievement (Yang, 2004). In another study, emotional exhaustion was found to reduce felt accomplishment and, as a result, to negatively affect commitment (Neumann, Finaly-Neumann, & Reichel, 1990).

3. The aim of the present study

As noted above, it has been well evidenced that teacher immediacy is a valid predictor of learner empowerment in the western context. However, little is known regarding the predictive power of immediacy for learner empowerment and student resistance in a non-western context. Further, so far, very limited research has investigated the consequences of student burnout among university students. Based on prior findings, the first hypothesis was that teacher immediacy would significantly predict all three dimensions of learner empowerment (i.e. impact, meaningfulness, and competence). Secondly, it was hypothesized that efficacy, exhaustion and cynicism dimensions of student burnout would significantly predict three dimensions of learner empowerment. Based on the findings of prior research, the third hypothesis predicted that immediacy would significantly predict student resistance, and in the fourth hypothesis, it was predicted that efficacy, exhaustion and cynicism would significantly predict student resistance.

4. Methodology

4.1. Study participants, environment and procedures

The study sample was comprised of 329 pre-service teachers (226 females, 103 males) attending different programs within the faculty of education of a public university in Turkey. Participants ranged in age from 17–37 (mean age: 20.57 years, $SD = 2.21$). Sophomores accounted for the majority of participants (36.5%, $n = 120$), followed by seniors (28.9%, $n = 95$), freshmen (21.6%, $n = 71$) and juniors

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