The Effect of Psychological Flexibility, Meaning in Life, and Work Engagement on Teacher Burnout*

Hayrunnisa ÇELİK[1], Meliha TUZGÖL DOST[2]

[1] Ministry of National Education, Ankara, Türkiye   0000-0002-0617-2116

[2] Faculty of Education, Hacettepe University, Ankara, Türkiye   0000-0001-7852-6633

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to analyse teachers' psychological flexibility, meaning in life, and work engagement to explain their burnout; for this purpose, we tested the 'Teacher Burnout Model'. This was a quantitative research study that employed the relational model. The sample consisted of 575 teachers with varying years of work experience. Participants were selected using convenience sampling. The findings showed that meaning in life and work engagement predicted teachers' burnout at a statistically significant level. Similarly, meaning in life and work engagement predicted teachers' psychological flexibility at a statistically significant level. However, teachers' psychological flexibility did not predict burnout at a statistically significant level although there was a negative relationship between the two variables. Therefore, the mediating role of psychological flexibility in the relationship between meaning in life and work commitment, and burnout was found to be insignificant.

Keywords:
Burnout, psychological flexibility, meaning in life, work engagement, teacher

1. Introduction

Stress is a major part of modern work life. Some factors that create a stressful work environment are global competition, working conditions, pressure on basic rights, part-time and temporary employment options, technological developments, and difficulty in identifying the boundaries between work and private life (International Labour Organization (ILO), 2016). Teaching is considered to be one of the most stressful jobs worldwide, and teachers believe their profession to be a stressful one (Chan, 2006). There are several factors that lead to stress, and chronic stress may evolve into burnout (Kosir et al., 2015). Research has long addressed the problem of teacher burnout (Cherniss, 1990; Maslach, 1993), and the number of studies focusing on this problem has increased in recent years, with the growing prevalence of burnout (Holmström et al., 2023; Pyhalttö et al., 2021; Upadyaya & Salmela-Aro, 2020). Teacher burnout is caused by various factors such as heavy workload, communication problems with students and colleagues, working conditions, low wages, and changing conditions in work life (Amitai & Van Houtte, 2022; Rasanen et al., 2020; Stoeber & Rennet, 2008). However, few studies have focused on the mental health factors leading to burnout among teachers (Zee & Koomen, 2016; Paleksic et al., 2015).

In Turkey, the number of studies on teacher burnout has increased significantly since the 2000s (Amasralı, 2016; Başol & Altay, 2009; Çatır, 2014; Çiçek, 2018; Durdu, 2010; Emlek, 2005; Erdemoğlu Şahin, 2007; Gündoğdu, 2013; Korolay, 2014; Süslü Kalafat, 2017; Tunaboylu, 2015). A literature review showed that previous studies primarily examined teacher burnout according to various demographic variables, evaluated

burnout in educational organisations, addressed the connection between burnout and different fields of teaching, and examined the relationship between job satisfaction and burnout. However, only a few studies have examined the relationship between teacher burnout and mental health in recent years. Teachers have considered giving up teaching as a profession at least once, although they describe meaning in life as collecting good memories, raising children, or working at a school they like (Göçen, 2019). Teachers' level of burnout displays statistically significant differences according to their psychological flexibility, loneliness, and perceived level of social support (Saruhan, 2019). The current study focuses on the relationship between burnout and psychological flexibility, meaning in life, and work engagement, all of which are related to mental health.

Definitions of Psychological Flexibility, Meaning in Life, and Work Engagement and Their Relationships with Burnout

Psychological flexibility is the first variable addressed in relation to burnout in the current study. Psychological flexibility is described as the ability to stay in contact with the present moment regardless of one's feelings and thoughts, while choosing behaviours in line with one's priorities. Psychological flexibility is the fundamental concept of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, and the basic goal of the behaviour change process (Hayes et al., 2012). According to Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, psychological flexibility is composed of six core processes: contact with the present moment, acceptance, cognitive defusion, self as context, values clarification, and committed action (Hayes et al., 2004). Whereas, psychological inflexibility is considered the opposite of psychological flexibility, and studies on the topic mostly focus on identifying psychological inflexibility (Hayes et al., 2004; Luoma et al., 2011). Psychological flexibility is related to a positive mood, a high level of well-being, self-compassion, an increase in job satisfaction and performance, and a high level of life satisfaction (Bond et al., 2006; Fledderus et al., 2013; Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010; Kent et al., 2019; Yadavaia et al., 2014). Furthermore, employees' level of burnout is related to their psychological flexibility (Hayes et al., 2004; Lloyd et al., 2013; Rosado, 2015). Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, along with awareness-based training, increase employees' psychological flexibility as well as improving mental health and decreasing job-related burnout (Abenavoli et al., 2013; Roeser et al., 2013).

Meaning of life is another variable that needs to be understood to explain burnout. Meaning of life is described as a responsibility to fulfil or an authentic test (Frankl, 2014), and to benefit oneself and others (Adler, 2014). When people feel that their life is meaningful, their motivation towards life increases. Having meaning in life means to know what one wants and how to lead one's life, know what one wants to do, and be aware of what one finds important in life. It is composed of individuals' quest for meaning, which refers to making efforts to understand the meaning and goal of one's life (Steger et al., 2006). People choose professions in order to meet the needs that remained unmet during their childhood, and to make their life meaningful. However, they experience burnout when they cannot meet these needs (Pines, 2002). Meaning in life is positively related to well-being (Brassai et al., 2015; Datu & Mateo, 2015), happiness (King & Hicks, 2007), hope (Feldman & Snyder, 2005), and self-efficacy (Lightsey et al., 2014). Those who find their life meaningful are more resistant to difficulties in life (Frankl, 2014; Krause, 2009), and experience less burnout (Misra, 1986; Kumar Mohanty, 1991; Li, 2007; Vassilopoulos & Poulis, 2017). Therefore, we suppose that meaning in life can explain burnout in teachers.

Work engagement is a separate concept, considered the opposite of burnout. Work engagement means focusing deeply on one's job, dedicating oneself to the job, and having a high level of job motivation (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010). If employees have strong work engagement, their job performance increases, and creativity at work improves, which in turn, contributes to an increase in the satisfaction of those who receive their professional services (Bakker et al., 2014). In addition, employees with a high level of work engagement tend to have a better psychological and physical health (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). When teachers have a higher level of commitment to their organisation, they experience burnout less (Werang et al., 2015; Vurdu, 2017). It is supposed that teachers' work engagement regarding their occupation is different from their commitment to the organisation they work in. Therefore, we aim to examine whether teachers' work engagement predicts burnout.

Psychological flexibility means being open to experiencing whatever feelings and thoughts one has towards the difficulties in life, and behaving in line with one's values (Hayes et al., 2004). It is the ability to adapt in the

face of difficulties (Bryan et al., 2015). The goal is not to enjoy difficulties or sorrow to face them, but to be able to behave according to one's values to make life meaningful (Harris, 2016). Life can be meaningful even in the face of difficulties and during tough times. A momentary scene in nature, a sense of humour, or one's beloved ones can make life meaningful (Frankl, 2014). People desire to achieve a meaningful life, and meaning of life is an indicator of psychological health (Lentt, 2004; Steger et al., 2006). A meaningful life is necessary for personal development and psychological well-being (Frankl, 2014; Ryff & Singer, 1998).

Psychological flexibility is not related to the presence of distress at workplace but to resilience and the ability to work well even with distress (Holmberg et al., 2020). Work engagement is a positive attitude that appears along with willingness, dedication, and motivation for work (Schaufeli et al., 2002). A high level of psychological flexibility refers to a lower level of job-related psychological distress, such as a neurotic attitude, cynicism, stress, and emotional burnout, as well as a high level of workplace functionality such as self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and work commitment (Xu et al., 2018; Holmberg et al., 2019). Therefore, we suppose that work engagement predicts psychological flexibility.

The Research Problem

Socio-cultural changes, technological developments, and structural changes in the education system directly affect teachers and the education system. Furthermore, migration brings along challenges to the education system, such as adaptation and discipline, physical deficiencies, and cultural hardships, not only in Türkiye but worldwide (Karakuş, 2006; Birinci, 2003). Likewise, closure of schools all around the world and the switch to distance education due to the COVID-19 pandemic had both positive and negative impacts on students, teachers, and parents (Tuzgöl Dost et al., 2022). The physical and psychological changes, changes in classroom dynamics, and adaptation to new educational situations experienced by teachers during the pandemic, as well as stress due to excessive workload predicted their burnout (Kapçak ve Sakız, 2022). A study on the use of technology in education showed that technology-based learning environments had a positive impact on academic success (Göksu & Bolat, 2020). However, in Türkiye, teachers consider insufficient knowledge about using technology to be the most important cause of burnout (Durak & Seferoğlu, 2017). Burnout also occurs due to excessive course load, administrative pressures, lack of communication among employees, and personal inadequacy (İş & Güçlü, 2024). Moreover, there are frequent changes in evaluation and assessment in the education system, appointment procedures for principals and teachers, career steps for teachers, and student registration and monitoring (Argon & Özçelik, 2008). It is likely that teachers are burdened with more responsibilities to adapt to these changes, which in turn, leads to burnout among them. When teachers continue working in a condition of burnout, they experience disappointment, stress, and anxiety at the workplace, and display pathological symptoms and antisocial behaviours (Bibou-Nakou et al., 1999; Schultz, 2001). Exploring the relationship between burnout and mental health is of vital importance to take steps to diminish burnout. We assumed that meaning in life, psychological flexibility, and work commitment would serve as protective factors against burnout for teachers.

In the current study, we tested a 'Teacher Burnout Model' to explain teacher burnout. In the model, we examined the relationships between teachers' burnout, psychological flexibility, meaning in life, and work engagement. In this context, we sought answers for the following research questions:

1. Do teachers' meaning in life, work engagement, and psychological flexibility predict their burnout?

2. Does teachers' psychological flexibility have a mediating role in burnout?

3. Do teachers' meaning in life and work engagement predict their psychological flexibility?

The hypotheses regarding the established structural model and research questions were as follows:

H1: Teachers' psychological flexibility predicts their burnout.

H2: Teachers' psychological flexibility plays a mediating role in burnout.

H3: Teachers' meaning in life predicts their burnout.

H4: Teachers' work engagement predicts their burnout.

H5: Teachers' meaning in life predicts their psychological flexibility.

H6: Teachers' work engagement predicts their psychological flexibility.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Model

This was a descriptive study that employed the correlational survey model, a research model that aims to determine the existence of a joint change or the degree of change between two or more variables (Karasar, 2014). In this study, teachers' burnout, psychological flexibility, meaning in life, and work engagement were examined using a structural equation model.

2.2. Research Sample

We gathered data from 575 teachers working at state-run schools of the Turkish Ministry of National Education, from pre-school to 12th grade in high school. Participants were recruited using convenience sampling. The participant teachers worked in Ankara and Denizli provinces of Turkey. These two provinces were selected owing to the convenience of access for the researchers. However, care was taken to include teachers from all formal educational institutions. Of the participants, 65% were female (n=377), while 35% were male (n=198). This ratio represents the gender distribution of teachers in Türkiye (MEB, 2022). Most of the participants were in-field-teachers at secondary schools (n=229, 39%), while others were either class teachers (n=145, 25%), in-field-teachers at high schools (n=105, 18%), pre-school teachers (n=46, 8%), or teachers at other institutions (n=50, 9%). The participants had been teaching for 16–20 years on average at the time of the study (SS=9). The teachers' average age was between 41–50 years (SS=11).

2.3. Data Collection Tools and Procedure

We gathered data from February to March 2022. The researchers contacted school principals to provide information about the study, to reach the teachers. Upon receiving permission from school principals, the teachers were informed about the study, and they participated on a voluntary basis. The first researcher collected the data by communicating with the teachers face-to-face. The data collection tools were administered both as a hard copy and an online form. The teachers were asked to provide consent before participating in the study. They were informed that they could leave the study whenever they wanted. The participants did not specify their names, and all data were kept confidential.

We used the Burnout Scale, Teacher Psychological Flexibility Scale, Meaning in Life Questionnaire, and Utrecht Work Engagement Scale. We used the Burnout Scale (Symbol-MT) developed by Pines and Aronson (1988) to identify teachers' burnout level. This scale is composed of three sub-scales: emotional exhaustion (e.g. emotionally tired) (Symbol-DT), mental exhaustion (e.g. feeling trapped) (Symbol-ZT), and physical exhaustion (e.g. exhausted) (Symbol-FT). It is a 7-point Likert-type scale (1=never, 7=always). The internal consistency reliability coefficient of the scale was .90, and test-retest reliability coefficient was .88. The scale was adapted for the Turkish population by Çapri (2006). Internal consistency and test-retest reliability coefficients were .93 and .73, respectively. Factor loads of the scale items varied between .80 and .40.

We used the Teacher Psychological Flexibility Scale (Symbol-PE) developed by Çelik Aslan and Tuzgöl Dost (2023) to identify teachers' level of psychological flexibility. Explanatory factor analysis, conducted to assess the scale validity, showed that the scale had six factors, including contact with the present moment (e.g. There are times when I feel scaped out, thinking about the past or future, during class) (Symbol-SATO), defusion (e.g. I can become aware of my thoughts including generalizations in my relationship with my colleagues, and stop them) (Symbol-DA), self as context (e.g. I can observe the effect of my thoughts and feelings on my behaviours) (Symbol-BBB), acceptance (e.g. I can continue doing things out of school even when I have difficult feelings at school) (Symbol-K), values clarification (e.g. I know my principles that guide my life as a teacher) (Symbol-DN), and committed action (e.g. I establish relationships with my students and school staff in line with my values) (Symbol-DDD). It is a 5-point Likert-type scale containing 23 items (1=Not true for me at all, 5=Absolutely true for me). Factor loads of the scale items varied between .75 and .50. The internal consistency reliability coefficient was .80, and test-retest reliability coefficient was .77. Confirmatory factor analysis, conducted with a different participant group, showed that the fit indices of the scale were between acceptable intervals (χ^2= 324.559; sd= 213; p<.00; χ^2/ sd= 1.52; SRMR=.03; RMSEA=.04; NFI=.82; NNFI=.91; GFI=.90; CFI=.92; AGFI=.87).

We used the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (Symbol-YA) developed by Streger and others (2006) to assess teachers' meaning in life. The questionnaire is composed of two dimensions including search for meaning (e.g.

I am looking for something that will make me feel that my life is meaningful) (Symbol-AA) and presence of meaning (e.g. I know what makes my life meaningful) (Symbol-AV). It is a 7-point Likert-type scale (1=Definitely false, 7=Definitely true). Item reliability of the scale varied between .81 and .92. Test-retest with a one-month interval yielded a reliability coefficient of .7 for presence of meaning and .73 for search for meaning. One-factor fit indices of the scale were high (RMSEA=.04, CFI=.99, GFI=.97, NFI=.97). The scale was adapted for the Turkish population by Boyraz et al. (2013). Confirmatory factor analysis showed that the fit indices of the scale were acceptable (χ^2/df=2.59, CFI=.956, RMSEA =.062, SRMR=.073).

We used the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Symbol-IB) developed by Schaufeli and others (2002) to identify teachers' level of work engagement. The scale is composed of three sub-scales: vigour (e.g. I am willing to go to work when I get up in the morning) (Symbol-IID), dedication (e.g. I am totally immersed in my job while working) (Symbol-IA), and absorption (e.g. I forget about everything around me while I am working) (Symbol-IY). It is a 5-point Likert-type scale with 17 items (1=Strongly disagree, 5=Strongly agree). Internal consistency coefficient was .80 for the vigour subscale, .91 for dedication, and .75 for absorption. The scale was adapted for the Turkish population by Eryılmaz and Doğan (2012). The three-factor structure of the scale was confirmed by confirmatory factor analysis (χ^2/ df=3.46, p<.001, CFI=0.98, RMSEA=0.84, NFI=0.97). Internal consistency reliability coefficient was .94, test-retest reliability with a one-month interval was .85.

2.4. Data Analysis

This study aimed to test a structural equation model, to determine if the data confirmed the hypotheses establishing the model (Kline, 2016). We used LISREL 8.80 program to analyse the model. We examined the data fit through chi-square goodness of fit (χ^2), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Normed Fit Index (NFI), Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), Incremental Fit Index (IFI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). The acceptable level is .05 and below for χ^2/ *df* (Kline, 2016), .10 and below for RMSEA and SRMR (Schumacker & Lomax, 1996), .90 and above for NFI and IFI (Hu & Bentler, 1999), .90 and above for CFI, .90 and above for GFI, and .85 and above for AGFI (Schermelleh-Engel & Moosbruger, 2003).

Before testing a model in a structural equation model, it is necessary to describe the variables (Table 1) and the relationships among the variables, and conduct confirmatory factor analysis for the scales (Table 2) (Kline, 2016).

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables*

		Min	Max	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
MT Teacher Burnout	DT-Emotional Exhaustion	7	49	18.40	8.48	0.84	0.36
	FT-Physical Exhaustion	7	46	19.35	7.43	0.62	0.21
	ZT-Mental Exhaustion	7	46	16.53	6.48	1.08	1.63
PE Psychological Flexibility	SATO- Contact with the Present Moment	3	15	10.44	2.94	-0.40	-0.32
	K-Acceptance	4	14	10.37	1.36	-0.72	1.64
	DN-Values Clarification	15	20	19.15	1.29	-.1.54	1.41
	DDD-Committed Action	14	25	22.78	2.41	-1.16	0.94
	BBB-Self as Context	9	20	17.58	2.11	-0.83	0.47
	DA-Defusion	5	20	16.37	2.72	-0.58	0.17
YA Meaning in Life	AA- Search for Meaning	5	35	20.87	8.57	-0.19	-0.88
	AV-Presence of Meaning	10	35	30.60	4.41	-1.23	1.59
IB Work Engagement	IID-Vigor	7	30	25.75	4.05	-1.04	0.99
	IA-Dedication	11	25	22.70	2.85	-1.36	1.55
	IY-Absorption	12	30	25.47	3.70	-0.72	0.07

Table 1 shows the distribution of the variables as well as skewness and kurtosis values. The skewness and kurtosis values varied between +/-2, which meant that the data displayed a normal distribution (George & Mallery, 2010).

The model developed to identify teachers' burnout included relationships between burnout, psychological flexibility, meaning in life, and work engagement (Table 2).

Table 2. *Relationships Between Variables*

	MT	PE	YA	IB
MT-Burnout	1			
PE-Psychological Flexibility	-0.37**	1		
YA- Meaning in Life	-0.52**	0.61**	1	
IB-Work Engagement	-0.59**	0.47**	-0.5**	1

***p<.01*

Psychological flexibility was negatively correlated with burnout (r=-0.37), and positively correlated with meaning in life (r=0.61) and work engagement (r=0.47). Furthermore, burnout was negatively correlated with meaning in life (r=-0.52) and work engagement (r=-0.59). Last, there was a negative correlation between work engagement and meaning in life (r=-0.5).

According to the confirmatory factor analysis fit indices, the path coefficients of all the dimensions making up the variables were outside the critical values of +/-1.96 at the .05 significance level (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2015). Confirmatory factor analysis fit indices were adequate and good (χ^2= 326.22; SD= 70; p<.00; χ^2/SD=4.66; RMSEA=.08; NFI=.95; NNFI=.95; CFI=.96; GFI=.92; AGFI=.88). The predictive levels of the dimensions making up the variables are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. *Findings of Confirmatory Factor Analysis for the Scales*

	MT	PE	YA	IB
DT- Emotional Exhaustion	.96			
FT- Physical Exhaustion	.92			
ZT- Mental Exhaustion	.87			
SATO- Contact with the Present Moment		.33		
K- Acceptance		.33		
DN-Values Clarification		.77		
DDD- Committed Action		.64		
BBB- Self as Context		.55		
DA- Defusion		.57		
AA- Search for Meaning			.20	
AV- Presence of Meaning			.96	
IID-Vigor				.95
IA- Dedication				.86
IY- Absorption				.86

2.5. Ethical Considerations

The researchers received permission from Hacettepe University Ethics Commission (no. E-35853172-300-00001845438, commission decision date: 26 October 2021). All study procedures were conducted in line with the 1964 Helsinki declaration.

3. Findings

In structural equation models, path coefficients must lie outside t-values +/-1.96 to be significant (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2015). In the current study, the path coefficient between psychological flexibility and burnout was within the specified critical interval, which means that it was not significant (Figure 1). Therefore, this path was removed from the model of teacher burnout.
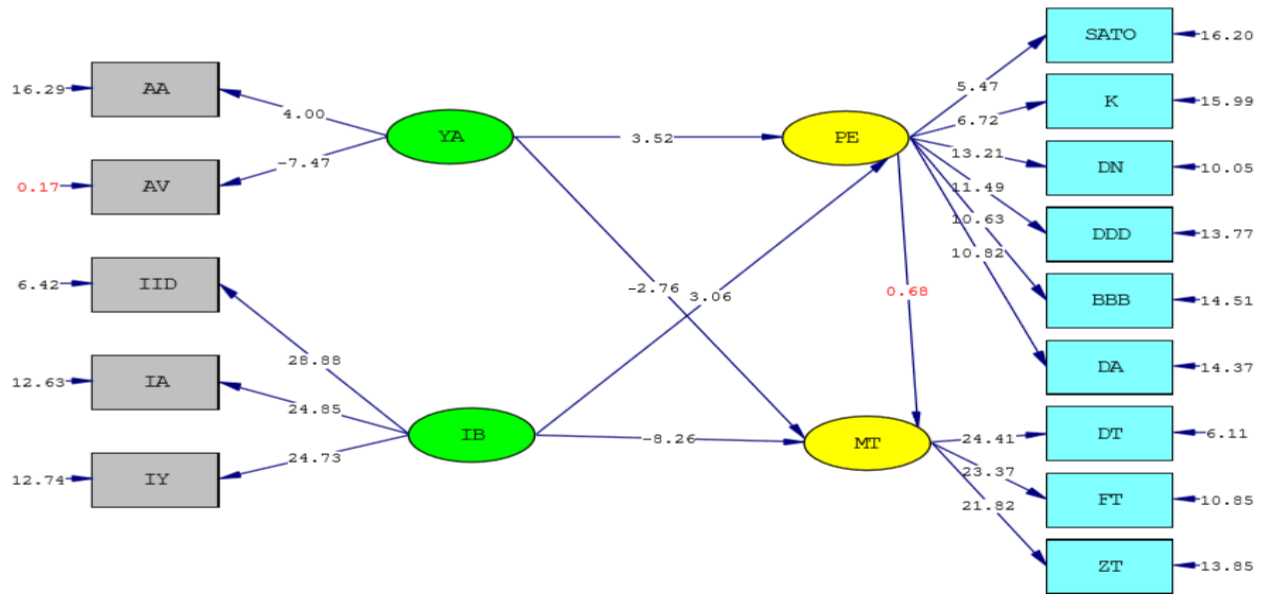
MT: Teacher Burnout, PE: Psychological Flexibility, YA: Meaning in Life, IB: Work Engagement, DT: Emotional Exhaustion, FT: Physical Exhaustion, ZT: Mental Exhaustion, SATO: Contact with the Present Moment, K: Acceptance, DN: Values, DDD: Committed Action, BBB: Self as Context, DA: Defusion, AA: Search for Meaning, AV: Presence of Meaning, IID: Vigor, IA: Dedication, IY: Absorption

Figure 1. *Teacher Burnout Model*

Fit indices regarding this structural model were adequate and good (χ^2/ sd= 4.60, RMSEA=.08, NFI = .95, CFI = .96, AGFI = .88, GFI = .92, IFI = .96,)). Although the data fit the model, we removed the path between psychological flexibility and professional burnout, and re-set the model. Figure 2 presents the final model showing the predictive power of the variables.
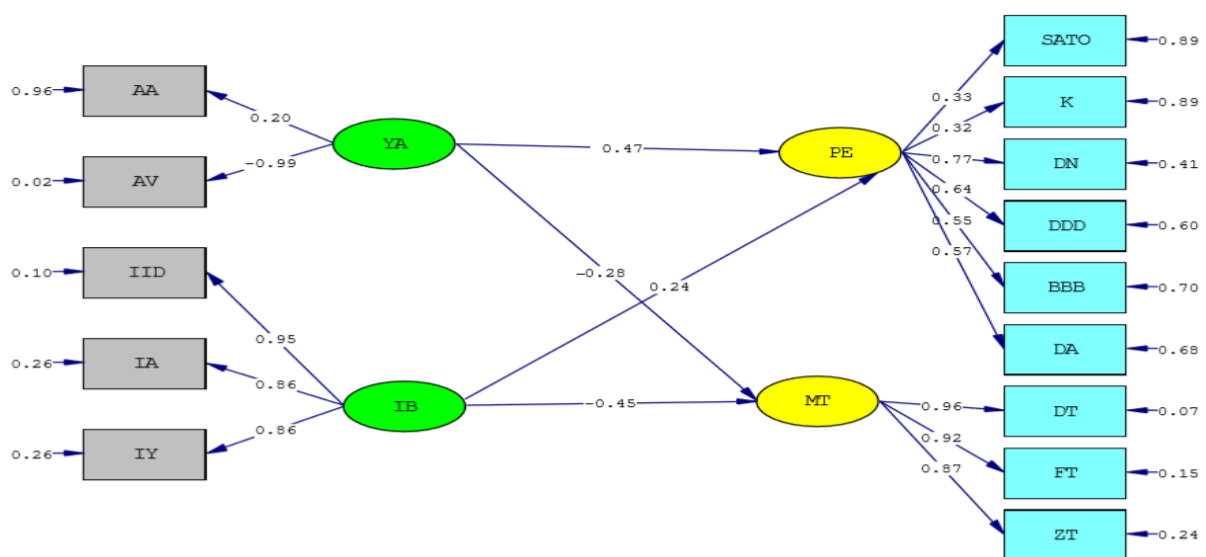
MT: Teacher Burnout, PE: Psychological Flexibility, YA: Meaning in Life, IB: Work Engagement, DT: Emotional Exhaustion, FT: Physical Exhaustion, ZT: Mental Exhaustion, SATO: Contact with the Present Moment, K: Acceptance, DN: Values, DDD: Committed Action, BBB: Self as Context, DA: Defusion, AA: Search for Meaning, AV: Presence of Meaning, IID: Vigor, IA: Dedication, IY: Absorption

Figure 2. *Final Teacher Burnout Model*

3.1. The Effect of Psychological Flexibility, Meaning in Life, and Work Engagement on Burnout

The model showed the predictive effect of psychological flexibility, meaning in life, and work engagement on burnout. As the path between teachers' psychological flexibility and burnout was found to be insignificant, it was removed from the model. Teachers' psychological flexibility did not predict burnout. Therefore, we found no mediating role of psychological flexibility. *Hypotheses 1* and *2* were rejected. We also found out that meaning in life negatively predicted burnout (ß=.-28, p<.000). *Hypothesis 3* was accepted. Furthermore, teachers' work engagement negatively predicted burnout (ß=.-45, p<.000). *Hypothesis 4* was accepted. Hence, meaning in life and work engagement predicted teachers' burnout (Figure 1).

3.2. The Effect of Meaning in Life and Work Engagement on Psychological Flexibility

In the current study, we also examined whether the variables predicted psychological flexibility. We found that meaning in life positively predicted teachers' psychological flexibility (ß =.47, p<.000). *Hypothesis 5* was accepted. Likewise, teachers' work engagement positively predicted their psychological flexibility (ß=.24, p<.000). *Hypothesis 6* was accepted. Hence, meaning in life and work engagement predicted teachers' psychological flexibility (Figure 2).

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Schools face constant changes as a result of socio-cultural change, technological developments in learning and teaching, and structural changes in the education system. Schools assign teachers new roles and responsibilities to adapt to these changes. These responsibilities lead to an increase in stress and fatigue and a decrease in performance, which is reflected in burnout among teachers. Teachers' mental health can play a significant role in preventing burnout and coping with it. Therefore, it is important to examine if mental health predicts teacher burnout.

This study examined the effect of meaning in life, psychological flexibility, and work engagement on teacher burnout. Moreover, it investigated the effect of meaning in life and work engagement on teachers' psychological flexibility. The current findings offer a different perspective to understand teacher burnout, and thus, can contribute to efforts to decrease burnout among teachers.

4.1. The Effect of Psychological Flexibility, Meaning in Life, and Work Engagement on Burnout

The first hypothesis of this study states the effect of teachers' psychological flexibility, meaning in life, and work engagement on burnout. We found that the effect of teachers' psychological flexibility on burnout was nonsignificant. Although there was a negative relationship between psychological flexibility and burnout, psychological flexibility did not significantly predict burnout. Therefore, we found no mediating effect of psychological flexibility. In previous studies that examined the relationship between psychological inflexibility and burnout, psychological inflexibility was found to have a narrower range of behavioural repertoire with negative internal experiences. Psychological inflexibility is the opposite of psychological flexibility (Harris, 2016). Some studies revealed a positive relationship between psychological inflexibility and burnout (emotional exhaustion and depersonalization) in medical students (Kroska et al., 2017; Toprak et al., 2020). Similarly, psychological inflexibility and burnout were positively correlated in intensive care nurses (Iglesias et al., 2010). A study involving teachers concluded that emotional exhaustion and depersonalization were positively correlated with psychological inflexibility. Although psychological inflexibility is considered to be the opposite of flexibility, in the current study, flexibility did not predict burnout. One reason for this might be that while psychological inflexibility and flexibility are two separate concepts, and flexibility consists of six different dimensions, teachers working in Türkiye may have difficulty being in the present moment owing to financial concerns and constant changes in the education system. Likewise, teachers may avoid acting in line with their values owing to the regulations and laws they are subject to or the fear of losing their jobs. Therefore, teachers' psychological flexibility levels may not have predicted their burnout.

Teachers' feeling that their lives are meaningful indicates that they experience less burnout. Similar to the current findings, previous studies showed a negative relationship between meaning in life and burnout among teachers (Misra, 1986; Kumar Mohanty, 1991; Li, 2007; Vassilopoulos & Poulis, 2017). People need to find their lives meaningful and their work important. When they cannot fulfil this need, they experience burnout (Pines, 2002). When teachers find their educational practices unimportant and meaningless, they may do their job

carelessly, restlessly, and reluctantly, which causes them to experience burnout over time. When employees in different professional fields feel that their lives are meaningful, this acts as a protective factor against burnout and fatigue (Chudnicki, 2020; Hooker et al., 2020; Krok, 2016). Teachers might be able to make their lives meaningful as they realise what is important to them at the moment. Therefore, supervised activities, expert support groups, and sharing groups with colleagues to support teachers in the work environment can help teachers realise what is important to them.

Teachers' work engagement predicts burnout. As teachers' work engagement increases, their burnout decreases. Although in some studies work engagement and burnout are used as opposites, other studies examine work engagement and burnout together. Work engagement is negatively related to all sub-dimensions of burnout (Hakanen et al., 2006; Demerouti et al., 2010; Maricutoiu et al., 2017). As teachers are responsible for student development in several areas, they have a lot to do at school. When they focus on their job, love it, dedicate themselves to it, and do it with enthusiasm and excitement, they will be less likely to experience burnout. To this end, it is important to organise the work environment in a way that facilitates teachers' commitment to their work.

4.2. The Effect of Meaning in Life and Work Engagement on Psychological Flexibility

This study also formulated a hypothesis examining the effect of meaning in life and work engagement to explain teachers' psychological flexibility. We found that meaning in life predicted teachers' psychological flexibility. Teachers who feel that their life is more meaningful show greater psychological flexibility. Studies involving university students also concluded that there was a positive relationship between meaning in life and psychological flexibility (Finkelstein-Fox et al., 2020; Li et al., 2022). Another study conducted with university students during the COVID-19 pandemic found a negative relationship between meaning in life and psychological inflexibility (Arslan & Allen, 2022). The current findings are consistent with previous findings in the literature. Individuals obtain meaning in their lives to the extent that they find their existence in the here and now, and they need to accept the pain they experience by going through experiences in order to reach this meaning (Frankl, 2014). As the basis of psychological flexibility is openness to experiences, acceptance, and being in the moment, meaning in life affects psychological flexibility.

Furthermore, teachers' work engagement positively predicted psychological flexibility. In the adaptation studies of the Acceptance and Action Form II, which is the opposite of psychological flexibility and used in the measurement of inflexibility, its relationship with work engagement was examined in different languages. Similar to the current study findings, it was observed that psychological flexibility increased as work engagement increased (Holmberg et al., 2019; Holmberg et al., 2020; Ruiz & Odriozola-Gonzalez, 2014; Xu et al., 2018). A study examining the effectiveness of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy-based training concluded that the participants' work engagement increased after training (Maclean, 2013). It is expected that approaching work more energetically as well as focusing and dedicating oneself to work support the ability to continue working by accepting the difficulties encountered at work.

To understand teacher burnout, teachers' internal experiences should be examined along with organisational variables. The findings showed that work engagement and meaning in life explain teachers' burnout. As engagement and meaning in life increased, teachers' level of burnout decreased. Although teachers' burnout was negatively related to psychological flexibility, it was not predicted by psychological flexibility. Whereas, engagement and meaning in life also explained teachers' psychological flexibility, which means that psychological flexibility is predicted by work engagement and meaning in life. When teachers' work engagement and meaning in life increase, their psychological flexibility also increases. In conclusion, internal experiences should not be ignored to ensure teachers' well-being in the work environment and increase their productivity.

5. Recommendations

Occupational training practices can be developed to increase the meaning in teachers' lives and their work engagement, as factors predicting their burnout. In this way, teachers can gain skills to cope with burnout. It is important to conduct studies with different variables (e.g. mindfulness, cognitive flexibility, job satisfaction, being in the moment) that predict teachers' burnout because they increase the development of burnout. The

findings of this study can be compared with studies that focus on the effect of teachers' inner experiences on burnout. Longitudinal studies can be conducted to reveal how burnout develops over time, using these variables. In addition, planning studies to improve and support teachers' mental health can help reduce teacher burnout. Teacher supervision service can be developed and teachers' access to this service can be facilitated. Finally, the study participants included teachers working in two different provinces of Türkiye. Similar studies can be conducted in different provinces and countries to examine the effect of cultural differences.

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