



Students Bullying toward Teachers and Teacher Self-Efficacy Beliefs

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate bullied and non-bullied teachers by their students in terms of teacher self-efficacy beliefs, which is an important variable for the teaching profession. The participants of the study were 540 volunteer teachers teaching in the 6th, 7th, and 8th grades of junior high and high schools. The teacher self-efficacy scale and a questionnaire were used as data-collection instruments. When the scores obtained from the teacher self-efficacy scale of teachers were compared, a statistically significant difference was found in favor of the non-bullied group. Following this analysis, the scores of bullied and non-bullied teachers on the three subscales of teacher self-efficacy scale were compared and significant differences were determined on student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management sub-scales of the teacher self-efficacy scale in favor of non-bullied teachers.

Keywords

Bullying
Teacher self-efficacy
Bullying toward teachers

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Introduction

Although bullying is a type of behavior individuals may experience at any age and anywhere, in recent years, there has been an increase (Ada, 2010; Hymel, Rocke-Henderson, & Bonanno, 2005; Kartal, 2008; Pekel, 2004; Pişkin, 2010; Pişkin & Ayas 2005) in bullying occurring among students during childhood and adolescence, which attracted the attention of education researchers. Previously conducted studies have attempted to determine types and frequency of bullying faced by students (Baldry & Farrington, 1999; Glover, Gough, Johnson & Cartwright, 2000; Kartal & Bilgin, 2008; Olweus, 1992; Pişkin, 2002; Pişkin, 2010), its causes (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2004; Kapçı, 2004; Kartal & Bilgin, 2009; Koç, 2007) and features, such as age and gender of bullies and their victims (Ada, 2010; Carney & Merrell, 2001; Eslea & Rees, 2001; Olweus, 1993; Olweus, 1994; Sawyer, Bradshaw, & O'Brennan, 2008; Yang, Kim, Kim, Shin, & Yoon, 2006).

Although they are not as prominent as peer bullying among students, bullying toward teachers by school administrators (Cemaloğlu, 2007; Conn, 2004; Mullet, 2006), bullying toward students by teachers (Champell, Casey, De La Cruz, Ferrel, Forman, Lipkin et al., 2004; Twemlow, Fonagey, Sacco, & Brethour, 2006), and bullying toward teachers by students (Benefield, 2004; De Wet & Jacobs 2006; James, Lawlor, Courtney, Flynn, Henry, & Murphy, 2008; Pervin & Turner, 1998; Terry, 1998) can be listed as other bullying forms. Among these, bullying toward teachers by students is a recognized problem but very little research has been done on this subject (De Wet, 2010).

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Bullying is defined as repeated aggressive behaviors of a person or group to hurt, upset, and cause stress to a victim who is usually physically, mentally, socially, or psychologically weaker than the bully (Conn, 2004; Greene, 2006; Monks & Smith, 2006; Olweus, 2003; Smith, Cowie, Olafsson, & Liefvooghe, 2002). On the other hand, the aggression against a person who serves as a source of learners' social, cognitive, and emotional development and ensures learners' safety (De Wet, 2010) is called "bullying toward teacher."

In the late 1990s, several studies reported that bullying in schools is observed not just among students, and that students sometimes target their teachers, although the teacher is an adult. In two studies conducted in the UK (Pervin & Turner, 1998; Terry, 1998), teachers were asked to evaluate students' bullying behaviors toward teachers. The results of these studies showed that 91% of 84 teachers in the survey conducted by Pervin & Turner (1998) and 56.4% of 101 teachers in the study by Terry (1998) were bullied by their students. More recently, according to the results of a study conducted by Benefield (2004) on 587 teachers in New Zealand, 28% of teachers stated that they were bullied. The majority (79.7%) of 544 teachers who participated in another study conducted in South Africa (De Wet & Jacobs, 2006) stated that they were bullied by their students.

James et al. (2008) and De Wet (2006) maintain that findings indicating existence of bullying toward teachers in schools are of great importance for bullying prevention policies, and that the programs developed to prevent school bullying should include bullying toward teachers. Programs prepared to prevent school bullying evidently stated that teachers, administrators, students, and parents should cooperate to prevent bullying (Kartal & Bilgin, 2007; Olweus, 1992; Olweus, 1994; Stevens, Bourdeaudhuij, & Van Oost, 2000) and to emphasize the role of teachers, because they can reach many students during the implementation of the programs (Carney & Merrell, 2001; Conn, 2004; Dölek, 2002; Greene, 2006; James et al., 2008; Kartal, 2008; Kartal & Bilgin, 2007; Pişkin, 2002; Yoon & Kerber, 2003). However, such programs do not incorporate any explanations about prevention of bullying toward teachers.

In another study conducted in two phases in the USA, bullying toward teachers was investigated from the perspective of students (James et al., 2008). The first phase in 2003 included 2300 students and the second phase in 2005 included 919 students who were asked whether they bullied their teachers. The results showed that 28.2% of the students participating in the first phase and 16.3% of those participating in the second phase admitted to bullying their teachers. Additionally, a qualitative study conducted by De Wet (2010) suggested that bullying toward teachers may affect teachers' personal lives, teaching-learning process in the classroom, and relationships between teachers and other individuals in the society. Similarly, other studies (Pervin & Turner, 1998; Terry, 1998; Benefield, 2004; De Wet & Jacobs, 2006) conducted on bullied teachers emphasized that being bullied can affect the performance and morale of teachers, which may in turn be reflected on students' learning.

In Turkey, studies related to bullying toward teachers are very new and limited in number. Although it did not directly deal with bullying toward teachers, in a study conducted by the Turkish Education Union (Türk Eğitim-Sen, 2009) to determine the level of violence experienced in schools across Turkey, 23% of the 1010 surveyed teachers stated that they were exposed to violence by their students and 65.1%, 16.9%, 14.4%, and 3.6% of these teachers reported that they suffered verbal, psychological, physical, and sexual violence, respectively. In a qualitative study conducted by Yaman and Kocabaşoğlu (2011), teachers in junior high and high who were exposed to bullying by their students were identified and interviewed. According to the results of the study, the following points were determined: teachers usually suffer from group-oriented bullying; among high school students, bullies are mostly tenth graders; the bull students have problematic family lives; media, virtual world, and social environment trigger bullying; and teachers suffer verbal, emotional, and mixed bullying in decreasing order.

The investigations on bullying toward teachers by students were actualized in various countries, conducted very limited number, and only aimed to identify the existing situation (Benefield, 2004; De Wet, 2010). With the findings obtained from such investigations, it is rather difficult to make any predictions on why teachers are bullied and professional characteristics of bullied and non-bullied teachers. It is clear that studying bullied and non-bullied teachers with respect to variables related to teaching profession would be beneficial for preventing school bullying and identifying teachers who are likely to be bullied. Therefore, assessing the bullying status of teachers in terms of teacher self-efficacy belief was required. Teacher self-efficacy is considered as an important variable used to explain individual differences between teachers' activities as well as to understand and develop teachers' behaviors. (Enochs & Riggs, 1990; Saracaloğlu & Yenice, 2009; Senemoğlu, 2005; Yılmaz, Köseoğlu, Gerçek, & Soran, 2004). Teacher self-efficacy, which is based on the social cognitive theory and Bandura's self-efficacy concept, is defined as teachers' belief that they can influence learning of students, including that of students with low motivation learning difficulties (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2001). Bandura (1997) suggests that teacher self-efficacy beliefs affect their orientation toward the educational process as well as their instructional activities in general.

Results of previous studies showed that teacher self-efficacy belief was significantly associated with teacher behaviors (Allinder, 1994; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001) as well as student achievement and attitudes (Anderson, Grene, & Loewen, 1988; Ross 1992; Woolfook & Hoy 1990). Teacher self-efficacy was also observed to correlate with classroom behaviors, including objectives set by teachers and their efforts in education (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Similarly, it was reported by previous studies that teachers with high teacher self-efficacy belief are satisfied with the teaching profession to a larger extent and are more diligent (Allinder, 1994), they remain in the teaching profession for a longer time (Burley, Hall, Villeme, & Brockmeier, 1991; Glickman & Tamashiro, 1982), and they are more willing to employ new teaching methods and strategies (Cousins & Walker, 2000; Stein & Wang, 1998). In contrast, teachers with low teacher self-efficacy belief preferred to use negative strategies for classroom management and to regret their choice of the teaching profession (Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Hoy, 2000).

Although the literature emphasized that teacher self-efficacy belief is effective on teacher behaviors and student attitudes, no study discusses them as a variable related to bullying toward teachers. In this context, through this study, an answer is sought for the following questions: "What are the teacher self-efficacy belief levels of bullied and non-bullied participant teachers?" and "Is there a difference between bullied and non-bullied teachers in terms of teacher self-efficacy beliefs?" The results obtained are believed to contribute to the fact that teachers take a more active role in preventing school bullying and to the institutes that implement in-service or pre-service teacher training programs.

Method

Study Group

Teachers who participated in the research were contacted during teachers' in-service training activities (seminars and conferences) held in the Osmangazi district in cooperation with the Uludag University's Faculty of Education and The District Directorate for National Education in the Bursa province. Of teachers who were invited to these events, 540 (269 females, 271 males) volunteered to participate in the study. Of the volunteer teachers, 276 are junior high school teachers (6th, 7th, and 8th grades) and 264 are high school teachers.

Data Collection Tools

In this study, an elaborate version of teacher self-efficacy scale developed by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk (2001) was used to determine teachers' self-efficacy beliefs. Teacher self-efficacy scale was adapted to Turkish by Çapa, Çakiroğlu, and Sarıkaya (2005). The teacher self-efficacy scale contains 24 items. The scale includes three subscales: student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management. The participants were asked to rate their agreement to each statement in the scale on a 9-point Likert scale, ranging from insufficient (1.2), slightly sufficient (3, 4), a little sufficient (5.6), quite sufficient (7.8), very sufficient (9). The lowest score that can be obtained from the scale is 24, and the highest score is 216. According to this, the range of 24–88 represent low score, 89–153 mid score, and 154–216 high score. The reliability and validity study of the scale, which was adapted to Turkish, was conducted, and a Cronbach alpha value of .93 was obtained for the entire scale. Reliability values of subscales in the scale were .82, .86, and .84 for student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management, respectively (Çapa, Çakiroğlu, & Sarıkaya, 2005).

In the present study, to test the scale's validity and reliability, factor analysis was conducted using the varimax rotation technique and the first factor accounted for 23.3% (8 items) of total variance of the scale, with the second and third factors accounting for 21.9% (9 items) and 20.2% (7 items) of the total variance, respectively. Three factors accounted for a total variance of 65.4%. Reliability value of the scale was .92. The reliability values found for the subscales were .83 for student engagement and classroom management and .85 for instructional strategies. The number of factors established in this study was analogous with previous work done on the scale and the factor structure was not distinct, and therefore it was deemed reasonable to use the scale in its current form.

In addition, an information collection form was prepared to determine the grades at which teachers serve, teachers' gender, and whether they were bullied. In this form, definition of bullying and some examples of bullying were provided. In the form, bullying was defined as "repeated and voluntary behaviors which physically, mentally, socially or psychologically upset and cause stress to a victim." However, the imbalance of power between a bully and bullied was not mentioned because it was believed to likely affect teachers' responses. Such definition was followed by the question "While teaching, were you bullied by your students?."

Results

According to the analysis results, 40.9% of 540 participant teachers ($n = 221$) stated that they were bullied, whereas 59.1% stated that they were not bullied ($n = 319$). As seen in Table 1, 43% of participant teachers scored moderately, whereas 32.2% scored high and 24.8% scored low on the teacher self-efficacy scale. Moreover, 35.7% of bullied teachers scored low, 54.8% moderate, and 9.5% high on the teacher self-efficacy scale, whereas 48% of non-bullied teachers scored high on the teacher self-efficacy scale. Only 17.2% of the scores of teachers from non-bullied group were low and 34.8% were moderate. It is clear that the majority of teachers bullied by their students achieved moderate and low scores on the teacher self-efficacy scale, however, a few of them had high teacher self-efficacy. Frequencies and percentages of non-bullied teachers, who got low and moderate scores on the teacher self-efficacy scale, were less than those of the bullied teachers. However, a large portion of non-bullied teachers was found to have high teacher self-efficacy scores.

Table1. Distribution of Teacher Self-Efficacy Scores of Bullied and Non-Bullied Teachers

	Low (Scores 24 to 88)		Moderate (Scores 89 to 153)		High (Scores 154 to 216)		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Bullied teachers	79	35.7	121	54.8	21	9.5	221	40.9
Non-bullied teachers	55	17.2	111	34.8	153	48	319	59.1
Total	134	24.8	232	43	174	32.2	540	100

To test the statistical significance of this observed difference, the Kolmogorov Smirnov test was employed to test whether the distribution fits the assumption of normality. The null hypothesis of the Kolmogorov Smirnov test indicates that a distribution is normal. Therefore, where p value is smaller than the specified level of significance, the null hypothesis should be rejected. The results of the analysis conducted using the data from this study indicates that the distribution is not normal ($z = 2.285$, $p < .05$).

Table 2. Results of the Kolmogorov Smirnov Test

	Teacher Self-efficacy Scores
n	540
K-Smirnov Z	2.285
Mean	130.3
Standard deviation	40.4
P	.000*

* $P < .05$

The distribution was not normal, and therefore the comparison between bullied and non-bullied teachers' scores on the teacher self-efficacy scale was actualized using a non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test. This analysis is used to test whether two independent samples are random samples taken from a population with the same median, where parametric tests cannot be used. Analysis results are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Comparison of Teacher Self-Efficacy Scores of Teachers using the Mann-Whitney U

	n	Mean rank	U	p
Bullied teachers	319	338.8		
Non-bullied teachers	221	171.9	13462.5	.000*
Total	540			

* $P < .05$

According to the analysis results, the comparison of the teacher self-efficacy scores showed that there was a statistically significant difference between bullied and non-bullied teachers; this difference was in favor of non-bullied group ($U = 13462.5$, $p < 0.05$). Following this analysis, the scores of the bullied and non-bullied teachers on the three subscales of teacher self-efficacy scale were compared and the results are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Comparison of Teacher Self-Efficacy Subscale Scores of Teachers using Mann-Whitney U Test

Subscales		n	Mean Rank	U	P
Student engagement	Bullied teachers	319	348.3	10425.5	.000*
	Non-bullied teachers	221	158.2		
Instructional strategies	Bullied teachers	319	320.4	19335.5	.000*
	Non-bullied teachers	221	198.5		
Classroom management	Bullied teachers	319	334.4	14870	.000*
	Non-bullied teachers	221	178.3		

* $P < .05$

As shown in the table, significant differences were found between teachers' mean ranks on student engagement ($U = 10425.5$, $p < 0.05$), instructional strategies ($U = 19335.5$, $p < 0.05$), and classroom management ($U = 14,870$, $p < 0.05$) subscales of teacher self-efficacy scale with respect to the variable of being bullied. These differences were in favor of the non-bullied teachers on three subscales.

Discussion and Conclusion

Research conducted in different countries, such as the UK, New Zealand, South Africa, and the USA (Pervin & Turner, 1998; Terry, 1998; Benefield, 2004; De Wet & Jacobs, 2006; De Wet, 2010), revealed that teachers are bullied by their students at schools and this is an important problem. The results of this study conducted in Turkey were consistent with the results of previous studies and showing that the percentage of teachers bullied by their students cannot be underestimated. Unlike other research, in this study, bullied and non-bullied teachers were compared in terms of teacher self-efficacy, and significant differences were found between the scores of two groups on teacher self-efficacy scale as well as on corresponding subscales. In other words, teacher self-efficacy beliefs of teachers bullied by their students were found to be significantly lower than those of non-bullied teachers. Teachers with high teacher self-efficacy can be said to suffer bullying by their students to a lesser extent. Moreover, bullied teachers' scores on student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management subscales of teacher self-efficacy scale were lower than the scores of non-bullied teachers on the same subscales. Self-efficacy beliefs on these subscales of recruited non-bullied teachers were higher than those of bullied teachers.

Based on current research findings, it is not possible to say whether teachers encounter bullying because they have low teacher self-efficacy beliefs or their teacher self-efficacy beliefs declined as a result of encountering bullying. However, it is apparent that both cases should be considered while interpreting the results obtained from this study in terms of self-efficacy belief, which is a part of the social cognitive theory. According to the social cognitive theory, individuals' self-beliefs allow them to establish control over their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (Bandura, 1986). Similarly, Raudenbush, Rowan, and Cheong (1992) suggest that when a teacher strongly believes that s/he can teach his/her students and influence their performance (high teacher self-efficacy belief), students display unwanted behaviors and negative interaction with that teacher to a lesser extent. In this context, whether a teacher has a low or high teacher self-efficacy belief can be considered as an important variable in explaining the differences between bullied and non-bullied teachers.

Results of previous studies showed that teachers bullied by their students have increased stress, reduced motivation, depression, lower expectations, and question their professional skills (Pervin & Turner, 1998; Terry, 1998; Benefield, 2004; De Wet & Jacobs, 2006; De Wet, 2010); these teachers' self-efficacy beliefs may subside rapidly after they are bullied. Indeed, Bandura (1997) states that successful experiences will reinforce personal efficacy belief, whereas unsuccessful experiences will damage an individual's belief in his/her efficacy. Similarly, Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk-Hoy, and Hoy (1998) argue that the most powerful influence on self-efficacy belief arises from teachers' positive or negative teaching experiences. In this context, teachers' teacher self-efficacy beliefs were thought to change in a negative way as a result of being faced with bullying by their students.

Some of the studies on bullying (Conn, 2004; Kepenekçi & Çınkır, 2003; Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton, & Scheidt, 2001; Olweus, 1993; Olweus, 2003; Pişkin, 2002) note that there is a power imbalance between the bully and the victim, and that the bully, who is stronger, pressurizes the victim, who is weaker. It is rather difficult to describe the weakness of teachers compared to students, because a teacher is an adult and a professional engaged in the leadership of the class. Although it is not possible to explain it through this study, the data obtained suggested that there may be a relation between the concept of power imbalance and teacher self-efficacy beliefs of bullied teachers. Further studies are required to shed light on this discussion.

In the following investigations, it may be beneficial to study self-efficacy beliefs, including self-efficacy beliefs or collective self-efficacy beliefs with respect to branches (science or social sciences), of bullied and non-bullied teachers. Even measurement tools for determining teachers' self-efficacy beliefs regarding bullying can be developed. The effects of introversion/extraversion assertiveness and gender as teacher related variables and class size, number of risk group students in crowded schools, and locations of schools especially at dangerous areas as school related variables can be used in further researches to answer teacher victimization. Furthermore, studies concentrated on the support which should be provided for improving teachers' skills of coping with and preventing bullying should be emphasized, because they will contribute to the improvement of not only teachers but also the school as a whole.

As a result, the findings of this study indicate that teacher self-efficacy is a variable that should be taken into consideration in terms of bullying toward teachers. Therefore, it is clear that incorporating arrangements for ensuring and improving pre-service teachers' teacher self-efficacy beliefs in training programs for raising teachers will contribute to efforts to prevent school bullying.

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