Teachers’ Perceptions of the Appropriateness of Teacher Self-Disclosure: A Case Study from Turkey

Öğretmenin Kendini Açması Uygunluğu Konusunda Öğretmen Algıları: Türkiye’den Bir Durum Çalışması

Fidel Çakmak¹ and Betül Arap²

Abstract
Teacher self-disclosure (TSD) is regarded as a means of increasing student understanding, participation, interest, and motivation. The aim of the present paper is to investigate in-service and pre-service teachers’ perceptions of the appropriateness of teacher self-disclosure in a Turkish context. It is a replication study of that of Zhang, Shi, Tonelson, & Robinson (2009) and included pre-service teachers (n=76) and in-service teachers (n=60) from Turkey. The results indicate statistically significant differences within two groups of teachers in their perceptions of the appropriateness of teacher self-disclosure in two areas: common topics and uncommon topics. There were no statistically significant differences in three other dimensions; uncommon purposes, common purposes and consideration of students. Both studies have yielded similar results in terms of the perceptions of the purpose of teacher self-disclosure and of the inappropriateness of uncommon topics. Contrasting results were found in the appropriateness of common topics of teacher self-disclosure, uncommon purpose and consideration of students. The study contributes to the field as a furtherance of the case study with a sample from Turkey and it implies that the year of experience and teaching context might affect the perceptions of appropriateness of TSD.

Key words: teacher self-disclosure, perception of teacher self-disclosure, appropriateness of teacher self-disclosure

Özet

Anahtar sözcüklər: öğretmenin kendisini açması, öğretmenin kendisini açması ile ilgili algılama, öğretmenin kendisini açmalarının uygunluğu

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Introduction
Teachers are regarded as one of the crucial components of communication in the classroom. Research on classroom communication has underlined several aspects of teachers’ teaching and classroom management skills, namely, attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs about the teaching context to have a better understanding of teachers’ personal stances on the job. One of the study areas, teacher self-disclosure, focuses on teachers’ perceptions about personalizing their teaching through self-disclosure. As teachers spend a certain amount of time in the class, they share their personal stories, their sense of humor, and anecdotes in order to enhance students’ motivation, interest, and participation.

Since teacher self-disclosure is used both consciously and unconsciously in the classroom, research into the practice is relevant. Why teachers disclose their personal and professional information, whether they regard such disclosures as relevant to the students’ profile (background, grade level, gender, and so forth) and what kind of topics they choose to disclose about themselves in the class are of particular interest. These studies not only contribute to the research field but also provide an opportunity for teachers to better understand the practice of self-disclosure. The present study aims to replicate the study by Zhang et al. (2009) so as to provide information regarding teachers’ perceptions of the appropriateness of self-disclosure with a case study from Turkey and to contribute to the research field by showing the possible differences or similarities in the results between the original and the present study.

Self-disclosure and outcomes
Self-disclosure, in its early definition in communication studies, was linked to the bipartite level of relationship with others involving the attitudes of love and trust (Jourard, 1971). Proposing a more specific definition, Goldstein and Benassi (1994) defined it as a teacher’s “sharing of their personal and professional information and experience about himself and herself” (p. 212). It has been also referred to as a kind of message about the self when a person communicates with another being (Wheeless&Grotz, 1976), as a positive feeling of interpersonal solidarity and trust (Wheeless, 1978), and as a barometer of developing closeness between interactants (Taylor, 1979). In the teaching field, studies on teacher self-disclosure (TSD) have mentioned that the feeling of liking is slightly different than that of self-disclosure in the classroom (McCarthy&Schmeck, 1982; Cayanus&Martin, 2004; Lannutti&Strauman, 2006). The former is more “illustrative” than the latter (Lannutti&Strauman, 2006, p.196). In other words, disclosure is a beneficial outcome for the recipient and stems from the discloser’s liking and wanting to initiate a more intimate relationship and, in the exchange of this, the recipient expects to receive the outcome in the form of disclosure.

Studies have also highlighted the functions of TSD such as content clarity
(Wambach & Brothen, 1997), building a rapport with the students for the purpose of improving their motivation (Sorensen, 1989; Mazer et al., 2007; Cayanus et al., 2009), their interest (Cayanus et al., 2003) and their participation in classroom tasks (Goldstein & Benassi, 1994). Additionally some of them have included the possible outcomes of TSD demonstrating the effects of TSD on student learning (Hartlep, 2001), on students’ emotional experiences and their evaluations of their teachers (Lannutti & Strauman, 2006), on social interaction in the class (Cayanus & Martin, 2004). In addition to these studies, Connelly & Clandinin (1988) point out a relation between teacher decision making in the curriculum implementation and TSD, claiming that TSD could function as curriculum. In a similar vein, Zhang et al. (2009) suggest examining the appropriateness of TSD in regard with the curriculum implementation with an emphasis on “what teachers can and cannot self-disclose (topics), for what purposes teachers can or cannot self-disclose and what students’ needs the teacher should consider” (p.1118). According to them, it could help teachers to revisit their decisions about what they should or should not discuss in the class, what they should take into account when they use TSD and whether their self-disclosure best serves the students. These considerations are highly likely to affect the curriculum implementation and learning outcomes.

**Method**

This present study set out to act as a replication of Zhang et al.’s (2009) study and to investigate pre-service and in-service teachers’ perceptions of the appropriateness of teacher self-disclosure in the Turkish context; therefore, the researchers employed the same self-report survey.

**Participants**

The study was conducted in Mersin and Adana, Turkey. Participants consisted of seventy-six pre-service teachers and sixty in-service teachers. Out of 76 pre-service teachers, 17 (22.3%) were male and 59 (77.7%) were female and they were enrolled in teacher education programs at Mersin and Çukurova University. Out of 60 in-service teachers with more than five years of experience, 11 (18.3%) were male, who possess an average of 12 years of experience, and forty-nine (81.7%) were female, who possess an average of 11.7 years of experience, and they are all currently working at secondary and high schools in Mersin and Adana, Turkey.

**Instrument**

Based on existing literature reviews and a certain theoretical framework, the survey, ‘The Appropriateness of Teacher Self-Disclosure Scale’ (see Appendix), was developed and used by Zhang et al. (2009). Since this was a replication study, the same scale was employed as a data collection instrument in this study. It involves 20 items
that aim to measure the US pre-service and in-service teachers’ attitudes towards three domains: topics, purposes and considerations. Under those three domains, there are five dimensions that are subsets of the domains. The first dimension, ‘Common topics’, comprises five items: personal experiences/stories, information related to their family, relatives and friends, personal opinions and personal interests or hobbies. The second dimension, ‘Uncommon topics’, comprises three items: political perspectives, religious beliefs and information from teachers’ intimate relationships. The third dimension, ‘Common purposes’, comprises seven items: to offer real-world practical examples, to attract students’ attention, to create positive teacher–student relationships, to set social role models, to create a class environment comfortable for students, to enhance student learning interests and to clarify teaching content. The fourth dimension, ‘Uncommon purposes’, comprises two items: to entertain their students and to please the teachers themselves. The fifth dimension, ‘Consideration of students’, comprises four items: consideration of students’ cultural background, grade level, gender and emotional status. The survey also includes a five-point Likert scale (ranging from 1, ‘Very inappropriate’, to 5, ‘Very appropriate’). The response of 5, as the highest value, means ‘Very appropriate’, indicating the most acceptable TSD (Teacher Self-Disclosure), whereas the response of 1, as the lowest value, means ‘Very inappropriate’, indicating the least acceptable TSD.

The Cronbach Alpha value was recalculated for 20 items in the scale (α = .81). As for the validity of the scale, the Principal Component Analysis with Varimax rotation of the items was conducted to analyze the results for the 20-item scale and compare the factor loadings of the appropriateness of TSD scale with the loadings given in Zhang et al.’s study. The items loaded on a component mostly remained similar to the original study. In the original study, five dimensions with eigenvalues over 1.00, accounting for 61% of the total variance were identified. Seven items (#9, #10, #11, #12, #13, #14, #16) were loaded on the first component, common purposes; four items (#17, #18, #19, #20) were loaded on the second component, consideration of students; three items (#2, #3, #5) were loaded on the third component, uncommon topics; two items (#5, #15) were loaded on the fourth component, uncommon purposes and four items (#1, #4, #6, #7) were loaded on the fifth component, common topics. In the present study, the researchers found five broad factors and eigenvalues to be over 1.00, containing 83% of the total variance. Seven items (#9, #10, #11, #12, #13, #14, #16) were loaded on the first component. Two items (#4, #7) were loaded on the second component, four items (#17, #18, #19, #20) were loaded on the third component. Two items (#2, #3) were loaded on the fourth component. Three items (#1, #5, #6) were loaded on the fifth component.

**Data Collection**

The survey was sent to 70 in-service teachers through e-mail. 60 of them respond-
ed, which shows a response rate of 86%. In order to reach a larger number of participants more conveniently, the questionnaire was also uploaded to a website to send the scale online without any postage. The link of the website was sent to the teachers to inform them about the research and the scale. As for pre-service teachers, the instrument was distributed at Mersin University just before they had their ELT course. It took approximately fifteen minutes for them to complete the scale. The participation in the study was voluntary.

**Data Analysis**

The five dimensions of TSD comprised ‘Common topics’, ‘Uncommon topics’, ‘Common purposes’, ‘Uncommon purposes’ and ‘Consideration of students’. These dimensions were similar to the study of Zhang et al. (2009) and the corresponding values of those dimensions were calculated according to the loadings of the items under these dimensions. Five independent-samples t-tests were conducted to evaluate the assumption that pre-service and in-service teachers differed in their perceptions of the appropriateness of TSD. Means and standard deviations for each dimension were reported to indicate different degrees of the perceived appropriateness of each dimension of TSD. Levene’s test was conducted to evaluate the assumption that the variances for two groups were equal.

However, prior to conducting any analysis of the data, the outliers were checked and eliminated (Field, 2005). In addition to this, in order to sustain the normal distribution assumption of independent t-test, the data had to be corrected by using SQRT \((6-X)\) transformation.

To control overall Type I error, Bonferroni adjustment at alpha level was applied, which resulted in .01 alpha level. After the transformations, the results of Levene’s test indicated that for the transformed data of ‘Common topics’, ‘Uncommon topics’, ‘Common purposes’, and ‘Consideration of students’, the variances in the groups were equal \([F(1,134) = 3.026, p = .084; F(1,134) = 0.014, p = .906; F(1,134) = 4.026, p = .047; F(1,134) = 0.012, p = .912, \text{ respectively}]\). However, due to the fact that the significance of values of Levene’s test for the dimension of ‘Uncommon purposes’ were less than 0.01, \(t\) value for unequal variance was reported.

**Results**

Means and standard deviations of the pre-service and in-service teachers’ perceptions of five dimensions of the appropriateness of TSD are reported in Table 1.
Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the appropriateness of TSD

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<td>Common topics</td>
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<td>1.36</td>
<td>0.16</td>
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<td>Uncommon purpose</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>0.20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consideration of students</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>0.23</td>
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</table>

As seen from the table, in-service teachers reported higher means than pre-service teachers in the dimension of ‘Common topics’ and ‘Uncommon purposes’. On the other hand, pre-service teachers reported higher means than in-service teachers in the dimension of ‘Uncommon topics’, Common purpose’ and ‘Consideration of students.’ In order to compare the means of the two groups of teachers’ perceptions of appropriateness of the five dimensions, five independent samples t-tests were conducted. The results of the t-tests indicated that there were statistically significant differences between pre-service teachers and in-service teachers, in their perceptions of appropriateness of ‘Common topics’, $t(134) = -2.909$, $p<.01$, with small effect size ($d=0.2$); and ‘Uncommon topics’ $t(134)=3.434$, $p<.01$, with medium effect size ($d=0.2$). Moreover, the results showed no statistically significant differences between the two groups of teachers in their perceptions of appropriateness of ‘Common purposes’ [$t(134) =0.275$, $p>.01$], ‘Uncommon purposes’ [$t (104.723) =-1.998$, $p>.01$] and ‘Consideration of students’ [$t (134) = 0.506$, $p>.01$].

This study has yielded different results than Zhang et al.’s (2009) study except for two similar results. Both of the studies found a significant difference between the two groups of teachers in their perceptions of the appropriateness of uncommon purposes. Like Zhang et al.’s study, this study found that there was no significant difference between the two groups of teachers in their perceptions of common topics. However, in Zhang et al.’s study, the difference between the two groups in their perceptions of uncommon purpose and considerations of students was found to be significant, whereas in this study, it was found insignificant. In addition to this, the difference between the two groups of teachers in their perceptions of appropriateness of common topics was found to be insignificant in Zhang et al.’s study. Contrarily, it was found significant in this study.

Discussion

As some pre-existing studies (Gregory, 2005; Zhang et al., 2007) have shown, both pre-service and in-service teachers agree on which of the seven purposes of TSD
are appropriate. These are to create positive teacher-student relationships, to clarify learning materials, to enhance students’ learning interests, to offer real-world practical examples, to create a positive class environment for students, to attract students’ attention, and to set social models. This means that both groups of teachers are aware of potential and function of TSD. It also indicates that TSD has some implications out of the classroom context, creating social models for students. As pointed out by Zhang et al. (2009), teachers wisely use their power and potential to bridge the gap between school and society by setting social models and demonstrating teacher leadership. The teachers might disclose their personal or professional information to help students to have a better understanding of the society they live in through the interaction in the class. Additionally, unlike in-service teachers, pre-service teachers showed a higher level of unacceptance of the uncommon topics such as political perspectives, religious beliefs, and information about their intimate relationships. They found these topics uncommon and inappropriate to disclose. This finding is also consistent with the replicated study. It shows that pre-service teachers are more cautious and they avoid talking about intimate relationships or issues such as religion and political perspectives. These may be related to the social norms or taboos which pre-service teachers, as the young generation of society, might be more exposed to.

The finding about the common topics deviates from the replicated study. In-service teachers having higher means for TSD topics than pre-service teachers shows that experienced teachers are more predisposed to employ teachers’ personal experiences/stories, information related to their family, relatives and friends, personal opinions, and personal interests or hobbies. This might indicate that as pre-service teachers are not in service yet, they might have a relatively narrow view of TSD topics to be disclosed. It is sensible to consider that the more a teacher teaches in the class, the more he or she is aware of the instructional means for teaching. Another contrasting finding is that pre-service teachers showed a lower degree of acceptance for uncommon purposes, which might stress the possibility that pre-service teachers might be more focused on the phases of teaching and on fulfilling the activities in the lesson plan and so avoid the idea of entertainment or amusement.

As a final contrasting point, the finding about the consideration of students deviates from the replicated study. This deviation may depend on the number of participants in the case study as well as on the difference in the research context. What constitute crucial considerations for a student are relative to the environment where the research is conducted; such perceptions about the consideration of students might not be fixed or global.

**Conclusion and Implication**

The present study as a furtherance of Zhang et al.’s (2009) provides a contribution to TSD studies with quantitative evidence from a Turkish context. It has been found out
that pre-service and in-service teachers differ in their perceptions of appropriateness of common topics, uncommon purposes and uncommon topics. The findings suggest that both groups of teachers are conscious about the purpose of TSD and consideration of student characteristics and diversity in the class. The fact that they differ in common topics, uncommon purposes and topics might reflect that pre-service teachers are not in service yet; therefore, they might have a very focused and rigid way of teaching. For consideration of students and common purposes, it could be stated that teachers are aware of why they employ TSD. This might go in parallel with the awareness of what to do in the class as a part of curriculum implementation.

The present study offers two basic implications. Firstly, the difference in in-service and pre-service teachers’ perceptions of appropriateness of TSD implies that experience in the field might affect the perceptions of common and uncommon topics. As experienced teachers spend time in actual teaching, they might have a broader vision of means for self-disclosure. Secondly, the teacher education programs might be influencing attitudes towards TSD in students entering the field of teaching as they set principles of what teachers are supposed to do in the class. Therefore, pre-service training experiences could be investigated in relation to TSD. Further studies could be carried out to investigate students’ perceptions of their classroom teachers’ self-disclosure. This would provide a more complete picture by considering both self-disclosure functions in the classroom and students’ observation or evaluation of TSD.

Limitations
Two limitations of this present study need to be acknowledged. The first limitation is related to the number of participants. A larger sample could be reached to yield more sound results in terms of general validity. The second limitation could be the division of in-service teachers as teachers working at K-12 as teaching context might affect the perceptions of the teachers about the appropriateness of TSD.

Özet

Giriş

Öğretmenler sınıfta farklıda olarak veya olamayarak kendilerini öğrencilere açar-


**Yöntem**

Bu çalışma Zhang ve arkadaşlarının (2009) çalışmasının temel aldığı bir uyarlama çalışmasıdır ve bu araştırmacıların kullandığı ölçek (Öğretmenin Kendini Açma Uygunluğu Ölçeği) veri toplama aracı olarak temel alınmıştır (Field, 2005). Araştırma, Türkiye’nin Adana ve Mersin illerinden 76 hizmet öncesi öğretmen adayı ve 60 hiz-
metteki öğretmen olmak üzere toplamda 136 öğretmen ile yürütülmüştür.

**Bulgular**

Hizmetteki öğretmenlerin sıradan konular ya da sıra dışı amaç kategorilerinde ÖKA’dan yararlanmaları noktasında hizmet öncesi öğretmen adaylarına göre daha yüksek bir ortalamaya sahip olduklarını tespit edilmişdir. Diğer yandan, hizmet öncesi öğretmen adaylarının ÖKA’dan yararlanma noktasında sıra dışı konularda, sıradan amaç ve öğrencileri dikkate alma kategorilerinde daha yüksek bir ortalamaya sahip oldukları tespit edilmiştir. İki grubun beş boyut (sıradan konular, sıra dışı konular, sıra dışı amaçlar, sıradan amaçlar ve öğrencileri dikkate alma) uygunluk anlayışının ortalamalarını karşılaştırmak için, beş bağımsız t-testi yapılmıştır. T-testi sonuçları sıradan konuların uygunluğu [t(134) = -2.909, p<.01] ve sıra dışı konular [t(134)=3.434, p<.01] algısında iki grup arasında istatistiksel olarak önemli fark olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Buna rağmen, sonuçlarda sıradan amaçlar, sıra dışı amaçlar ve öğrencileri dikkate alma boyutlarında istatistiksel olarak önemli fark ortaya çıkmamıştır.


**Tartışma**

adaylarının yakın/özel ilişkiler ve din ya da politik görüşler gibi meseleleri konusunda daha dikkatli oldukları ve bu bilgileri paylaşmaktan kaçınıklarını göstermektedir. Bu durum toplumun yeni nesli olan öğretmen adaylarının maruz kaldıkları sosyal normlar ve tabularla alakalı olabilir.


Son olarak öğrencileri dikkate alma konusundaki bulgu uyarlanmış çalışmadan farklılık göstermektedir. Bu farklılık vaka çalışmasındaki katılımcıların sayısı sıradan araştırma bağlamındaki farklılıktan kaynaklanabilir. Bir öğrenciye dair önemli düşüncelerin ne olduğu araştırmanın yürütüldüğü çevreye göre değişmekle birlikte öğrencileri dikkate alma konusundaki gibi algılar durağan ya da geniş çaplı olmayabilir.

**Sonuç**

References
Wheeless, L. R. (1978). A follow-up study of the relationships among trust, disclosure


Appendix: Teacher Self-Disclosure Scale and the Questionnaire

THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear participant,
This questionnaire (Zhang et al., 2009) is designed to investigate your perceptions of appropriateness of teacher self-disclosure (TSD)*. Your responses will be kept confidential. Thank you very much for your participation in advance!

* TSD (Teacher Self-disclosure): A teacher’s sharing of personal and professional information and experience about himself/herself

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1. Please select your gender.
   - Female
   - Male

2. Please select your current role in education.
   - Pre-Service
   - In-service

3. Please state how many years of experience in teaching you possess (if any)

4. Please respond to the following statements to reflect how appropriate you think those teacher self-disclosure (TSD) behaviors are by circling only one number for each statement.

   1 means TSD is very inappropriate (VI), 2 means that TSD is inappropriate (IA), 3 means that TSD is undecided (UND), 4 means TSD is appropriate (A), and 5 means TSD is very appropriate (VA).

### (A) Topics

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### (C) Consideration of students

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