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Student Burnout at English Preparatory Programs: A Case Study

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate to what extent the repeat Turkish EFL students experience burnout considering the three dimensions: exhaustion, cynicism and professional efficacy, explore whether there is any relationship between these subcategories, and also find out the common metaphors that the Turkish EFL students use to define burnout during their language learning process in a preparatory program at a foundation (non-profit, private) university in Istanbul, Turkey. A sample of fifty-four B1 (intermediate) level Turkish EFL students repeating the same preparatory program for two years and five Turkish EFL instructors offering intensive courses in this particular program participated in the study. The quantitative data was obtained through the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Survey while the qualitative data was collected from semi-structured interviews and metaphor. The findings of the study revealed that the B1 (intermediate) Turkish EFL students experience high level of exhaustion and cynicism whereas they face low level of professional efficacy indicating their burnout level in the preparatory program.

Keywords: Student, Burnout, Maslach Burnout Inventory, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Preparatory Program.

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Introduction

Burnout is a syndrome which has recently come into stage in many fields of research. In early studies it was related particularly to professions requiring high human contact; however, today it is investigated almost in all professions. Traditionally, burnout is considered as a three-dimensional syndrome (i.e. emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment which is measured with the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS; Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Emotional exhaustion refers to feelings of being depleted of one's emotional resources. This dimension is particularly regarded as the basic individual stress component of the syndrome. The second burnout dimension depersonalization is associated with negative, cynical or excessively detached responses to other people at work. Specifically, depersonalization represents the interpersonal component of burnout. Finally, reduced personal accomplishment refers to feelings of decline in one's competence and productivity which represents the self-evaluation component of burnout (Maslach, 1999).

Literature Review

Originally, the three dimensions of MBI-HSS address recipients like, teachers, patients, or clients. However, in recent years, the concept of burnout was broadened to almost every job, and even non-occupational samples such as students (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). Although being a student is not officially considered a profession, from a psychological perspective their core activities can be considered as work. According to Schaufeli & Taris (2005) and Hu & Schaufeli (2009), since students take part in an organizational structure filled with compulsory activities, the activities they are dealing with can be considered as work. Students, therefore, might experience burnout as they feel exhausted due to study requirements, approaching cynically toward one's studies and feeling inadequate in their field (Schaufeli, Martinez, Pinto, Salanova, & Bakker, 2002).

Several studies have revealed that school alone can be a driver generating stress for students. Problems at school might affect students' performance and therefore, induce burnout (Chang, Rand, & Strunk, 2000; Grayson & Alvarez, 2008; Howes, Matheson, & Hamilton, 1994; Tatar & Horenczyk, 2003; Woodrum, 2005). In addition, students are generally under pressure to attain high levels of achievement and satisfactory grades at every level of their education by constantly studying and passing yet more tests in order to be successful at school. They feel that their teachers and parents anticipate high success from them since they are repeatedly reminded to study harder (Yıldırım & Ergene, 2003). Therefore, the experience stress due to their heavy coursework which might cause emotional exhaustion, tendency of depersonalization and feeling of low achievement. As a result, these students may tend to be absent from school, have low motivation to courses and, in many cases, drop out of school entirely (McCarthy et al., 1990; Yang & Farn, 2005).

Considering tertiary education, the concept of burnout has also been investigated among undergraduate students. Many distinguished scholars stated that undergraduate students might also experience the symptoms of burnout due to the heavy workload during their academic studies (Chambel & Curral, 2005; Li, Song, & Guo, 2009; Schaufeli, Martinez, Pinto, Salanova, & Bakker, 2002). Apart from academic workload, factors such as formation of new friendships, loss of present friendships, adaptation to a different study environment, financial concerns, rivalry with peers, love affairs, managerial issues and troubles with time management have also been proved to lead to student burnout (Cushman & West, 2006; Dyrbye et al., 2005; Moffat et al., 2004; Pines et al., 1981; Weckwerth & Flynn, 2006).

In accordance with the previous research carried out on stress amongst university students, it has also been confirmed that academic pressure and concerns are considerable causes of stress among students (Moffat et al., 2004; Monk & Mahmood, 1999). Cushman and West (2006) emphasized the effect of the academic demands with some phrases of their participants; "I had so many assignments, projects and presentations all due at once" and "It was the overwhelming deadlines and number of important immediate decisions to be made" (p. 25).

On the contrary, decreased level of social support from family and friends might result in increase of depersonalization and decrease of personal accomplishment (Jacobs, & Dodd, 2003). According to Morgan (2008), university students who are under pressure of work, time and experiencing limited social support or social contact are likely to have the risk of burnout.

Considering higher education in Turkey, undergraduate students have many duties and responsibilities to complete. One of the most important prerequisites that most Turkish universities demand is a good command in English. As in most universities English is the medium of instruction, students are supposed to pass the English proficiency exam before they start their undergraduate program at various disciplines. The ones who pass the exam with an average between 55 to 65 out of 100 points, directly start with the undergraduate program. However, the ones who fail the exam have to study at the Language Preparatory School at least for one academic semester. During the preparatory program, the students are generally exposed to a modular system offered by the Common European Framework (CEFR). While the majority of the preparatory students, pass the program after one or two semesters, some students fail and stay in the program for more than a year. This might lead to a lot of stress, loss of energy and motivation, which might consequently, lead to burnout.

Based on these overviews, the present study aims to investigate the extent of burnout the Turkish EFL students experience in the English Preparatory Program based on Maslach's (1999) three dimensions namely, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. This study also attempts to find out whether there is any relationship between these three dimensions. Finally, the study explores the common metaphors that the participating students use to define burnout during English learning process in the preparatory program. Specifically, the following research questions were addressed:

1. To what extent do the Turkish EFL students experience burnout considering the three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment in the preparatory program?
2. Is there any relationship between these three predefined dimensions?
3. What are the common metaphors that the Turkish EFL students use to define burnout during their language learning process in the preparatory program?

Methodology

Setting and Participants

This study was conducted at the English Preparatory Program offered at one of the foundation (non-profit, private) university in Istanbul, Turkey. Data was gathered from 54 Turkish EFL students and 50 EFL instructors who were enrolled in the modular system in the English Preparatory Program based on the Common European Framework (CEFR). The participants were 30 female and 24 male students with an age range of 18-22 years old. They were all B1 (intermediate) proficiency level repeat students who had been studying in the preparatory program for two years. The reason behind choosing this particular group of students was due to the fact that they were the group who spent the longest time in the program and therefore, had the highest potential to experience burnout.

As for the participating instructors, they were all females with an age range of 28-50 and at least 6 years of English teaching experience. They were all teaching B1 (intermediate) classes in the existing program.

Data Collection Instruments

In this study, data was collected from three different instruments namely, Maslach Burnout Inventory–Student Survey which formed the quantitative aspect of the study, and semi-structured interviews and also, metaphors to add a qualitative and in-depth insight into the study.

Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI)–Student Survey

In order to measure student burnout, the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) – Student Survey adopted from Schaufeli et al., (2002) was administered to the participating students. The survey was translated

into Turkish so that students felt more comfortable while answering the questions in their native language.

The MBI – Student Survey (MBI-SS) (Schaufeli et al., 2002) is an adapted version of the MBI – General Survey (MBI-GS) which was originally developed for the general assessment of burnout (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Specifically, the items in the MBI-SS are adapted from the MBI-GS for use in the student population. For instance, the item “I feel emotionally drained from my *work*” was replaced with “I feel emotionally drained from my *studies*” (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p.467).

For this study, the MBI-SS comprised two parts. The first part aimed to gather demographic information about the participating students in relation to their age, gender, the high school they graduated from, their proficiency level and the year of study at the preparatory program. As for the second part of the survey, this attempted to evaluate three aspects of burnout syndrome: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. It comprises of 15 items in total: 5 for emotional exhaustion, 4 for depersonalization and 6 for reduced personal accomplishment. The items in the survey are scored on a 7-point frequency scale (ranging from *never* to *everyday*). High scores on emotional exhaustion and depersonalization reflect high degree of burnout whereas low scores on reduced personal accomplishment support high burnout.

Semi-structured Interviews

Another primary source of data in this study were the semi-structured interviews given to the students and instructors after the implementation of MBI-SS. The questions were prepared parallel to the items in the MBI-SS with an attempt to gather insight information about students’ burnout. Interviews with similar wording were also carried out with the instructors to find out their perceptions on student burnout in their classroom.

Metaphors

Apart from the scale and interviews, metaphors were chosen as a third data collection instrument to help participating students to express their own in-depth feelings, ideas and beliefs about their learning process freely. More specifically, the students were asked to come up with metaphors about how they associate their English learning process with a season, fruit, sports and meal. They were requested to write a single metaphor under each category through which they could convey their personal perception of being in the English Preparatory Program.

Besides, they were asked to express their rationale for why they chose those particular metaphors or images and elaborate them in detail. These metaphors were adapted from the study by Can and Dağlıoğlu (2012), which aimed to investigate how the intermediate level EFL students visualize their former and current course book in the English Preparatory Program.

Data Analysis

In this study, the obtained data was analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Firstly, the quantitative data gathered from the scale was analyzed through SPSS 21.0 statistical analysis program. In addition, the qualitative data obtained through semi-structured interviews and metaphors went through content analysis. The process began with the open coding of the data followed by inducing categories from these codes. The categories and themes were subject to the checking of inter-raters. To identify the degree of inter-rater reliability, two experts in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) identified themes from the codes. The interrater reliability for the raters was found to be .86 which indicated close agreement on the general themes apart from the different verbalizations of similar concepts. Finally, the frequencies for each metaphor related to fruit, sports, season and meal were calculated and reported separately.

Results

Maslach Burnout Inventory–Student Survey

As stated in previous sections in this study, the quantitative data was gathered through the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Student Survey. For the analysis of the data for the first research question, the normative response categories and their corresponding values for emotional exhaustion,

depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment on the MBI-SS were analyzed based on the table below taken from Bosley's (2004) study on levels of burnout and job satisfaction in large-scale agribusiness.

Table 1

Maslach Burnout Inventory Normative Score Categorization

Response Category	EE	DP	RPA
High	≥ 3.2	≥ 2.2	≥ 5.0
Moderate	2.01-3.19	1.01-2.19	4.01-4.99
Low	≤ 2.0	≤ 1.0	≤ 4.0

Note: EE: Emotional Exhaustion, DP: Depersonalization, RPA: Reduced Personal Accomplishment

Specifically, descriptive statistics were reported to show to what extent the participating students experienced burnout in relation to the three dimensions namely, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment in the preparatory program. At Table 3, the average of mean scores for each dimension and the categorization were reported separately.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Students' Burnout Level

Burnout Dimensions	M	SD	Burnout Category
EE	4.83	0.825	High
DP	3.87	1.532	High
RPA	1.76	1.088	Low

According to the results shown in the table above, the mean exhaustion score for respondents was high (4.83), which indicated that the students experienced exhaustion a few times a week. As for depersonalization the mean score was high (3.87), which showed that the students experienced this particular feeling every week. Lastly, the mean reduced personal accomplishment score was low (1.76), which indicated that reduced personal accomplishment was experienced by students monthly. In sum, the B1 students had "high" level of emotional exhaustion, "high" level of depersonalization and "low" level of reduced personal accomplishment.

Furthermore, to complement these quantitative findings gathered by questionnaire, semi-structured interviews were carried out with 25 students and 5 Turkish EFL instructors of the B1 program to provide qualitative evidence. The following section discusses the findings related to the three burnout dimensions in detail.

Exhaustion

As for the exhaustion dimension of burnout, 25 of the participating students were asked how they feel before, during and after attending the preparatory program. The same questions were asked to the instructors as well to find out their perceptions towards students' feelings. Both groups of participants stated that the students were sleepy, pessimistic, bad, stressed, depressed, bored, and demotivated before and during the courses, and they felt tired and exhausted after the program. These findings were found to demonstrate a positive correlation with the level of exhaustion regarding student burnout. In relation to these questions, instructors and the students made the following comments:

Before courses:

'I feel so sleepy before I start the courses, especially in the morning. I am usually very pessimistic, and I feel really bad when I think that I have to attend the preparatory program'. (Student 2, Personal Communication)

During courses:

'I think most of them feel bored and demotivated during the courses. As they continuously encounter failure, they have already lost their faith in success'. (Instructor 4, Personal communication)

After courses:

'After they finish the prep program, my students feel exhausted and they say they are going to sleep right away'. (Instructor 1, Personal Communication)

Furthermore, when the students were asked how they feel when they think about attending the program, both groups gave similar answers. Specifically, most of the students were demotivated, stressed, under pressure, and they also worried about not being able to pass the proficiency exam at the end of the year which again showed their high level of exhaustion, as illustrated in the excerpts below:

'I feel really demotivated and stressed when I think about the courses in the prep program. It also makes me feel under pressure since I have to pass the proficiency exam at the end of the year. However, I am not motivated enough to study'. (Student 20, Personal Communication)

Depersonalization

As for the identification of the depersonalization level of burnout, the opinions of the students about continuing their education in the undergraduate program at their own disciplines, it can be said that most of them expressed more positive feelings, stating that it will be more useful for their career than the preparatory program. To put it simply, they referred to the undergraduate program more positively while their negative feelings for being in the preparatory program remained which showed the high level of depersonalization. The following excerpt illustrates the specific level of student burnout:

'I feel enthusiastic and ready to enter my department because I've got really bored with being in the prep school. I have been studying here for two years and it really annoys me and my family'. (Student 9, Personal Communication)

To find out the real potential of these students in following their studies at university after they finish the preparatory program, the students and the instructors gave varying accounts. Essentially, the students' answers were consistent and supported the quantitative data for depersonalization level since it was lower than exhaustion level. However, the instructors' answers varied. While some believed that the students had the potential, others did not. One possible explanation for this finding may be the fact that each class has a different dynamic, or students sometimes perform differently in each lesson or with different instructors. The following comments are taken from both the students and instructors:

'I think I am losing time in the prep program. Instead of struggling here, I could be in my own department improving myself for my future career'. (Student 17, Personal Communication)

'Since I really want to study in my department and learn new things about it, I believe that I have the potential to do well at university studies'. (Student 24, Personal Communication)

Reduced Personal Accomplishment

When it comes to the last subcategory of burnout, reduced personal accomplishment, the students experienced low level as indicated from the comments of students and instructors.

First of all, when the two groups of participants were asked about the importance of studying at a university, they implied low level of awareness as shown in the following comments:

These students don't understand what it means to study at university. Neither do they realize the fact that studying at university requires ambition and hard work. As they are studying at a private university, they think it should be an easy and comfortable process for them. (Instructor 3, Personal Communication)

Moreover, when they were asked if they could solve the problems they encountered in the lesson on their own, most of the answers obtained from the students and the instructors expressed negative feelings. A possible explanation behind this finding might be the students' lack of critical thinking and their need for guidance in problem solving in general. The following comments support this finding:

'Most probably they will not be able to solve their problems on their own, as they do not possess problem solving and critical thinking skills'. (Instructor 3, Personal Communication)

In addition, the obtained data from the interviews showed that the students did not try to make an effective contribution to the preparatory classes they attended, and also possessed mostly negative feelings due to lack of attention. The following excerpts from the students and the instructors clarify this point:

'I do not think that they can make an effective contribution as they don't pay attention to the lessons properly. Their behavior is mostly disruptive and their attention can be distracted very easily'. (Instructor 2, Personal Communication)

Besides, for the last question of the interview related to the students' feelings when they achieve their goals, the data obtained showed positive feelings (e.g. self-confidence, motivation and happiness) and attitudes as shown in the following comments:

'They feel more self-confident and motivated when they achieve their goals. They need this feeling as they have always experienced failure'. (Instructor 1, Personal Communication)

For the second research question in this study that aimed to find out whether there was any relationship between the three burnout dimensions (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment), data was gathered from Maslach Burnout Inventory – Student Survey administered to the B1 (intermediate) Turkish EFL students in the English Preparatory Program. The following table shows the correlation between the three dimensions:

Table 3
Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient Levels of Significance

Spearman's rho		Correlations		
		EE	DP	RPA
EE	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.635**	.233
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.090
	N	54	54	54
DP	Correlation Coefficient	.635**	1.000	.255
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.062
	N	54	54	54
RPA	Correlation Coefficient	.233	.255	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.090	.062	.
	N	54	54	54

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Examining the results between variables, there was a positive and medium level relationship between emotional exhaustion and depersonalization ($r=.635$; $p<.01$). Accordingly, an increase in emotional exhaustion led to a medium level increase in depersonalization for student burnout. As for the further analysis, there was not a significant relationship between emotional exhaustion and reduced personal

accomplishment ($r = .233$; $p < .01$). Similarly, there was not a significant relationship between reduced personal accomplishment and depersonalization ($r = .255$; $p < .01$).

Furthermore, in an attempt to find out the common metaphors the students use to define their burnout during the language learning process in the B1 class of the preparatory program, data was gathered from four themes predefined by the researcher.

As stated in the previous sections of this study, students were asked to come up with four themes about how they associate their English learning process namely with a season, fruit, sports and meal with a detailed explanation giving the rationale of why they chose these metaphors for each category given.

According to the results of the metaphorical analysis, each metaphor was grouped under the themes fruit, sports, season and meal including the obtained frequencies. In addition, the perceptions of students and teachers were presented including the most and least common excerpts. The following section describes the findings under each metaphor in detail.

Burnout as Fruit

Considering the fruit metaphors, the majority of the participating students shared common responses. The following tables shows the frequencies for each fruit:

Table 4

Frequencies for Fruit Metaphor

Fruit Metaphors	Frequency
Pomogranate	8
Watermelon	6
Avocado	3
Quince	3
Grapefruit	1
Lemon	1
Orange	1
Pineapple	1
Kiwi	1
TOTAL	25

Within the fruit category, the most common metaphor was a “pomegranate” representing a total of eight. Regarding this metaphor, one of the students commented, *‘I associate my language learning process with a pomegranate because it is a laboring food to eat. It is delicious, but I get tired whenever I try to eat it’*. (Student 5, personal communication, December 24, 2015) Another student stated that *‘Language learning is like eating a pomegranate since they are both complicated and hard. When you finish eating it, you get tired and your hands get dirty. It is the same for English. You get tired while you are learning’*. (Student 12, Personal Communication)

The second most common metaphor as fruit was “watermelon” with six metaphors in total. To exemplify, a student said, *‘Language learning is like a watermelon because a watermelon is usually very big and heavy to carry. Also, it has a lot of seeds inside which makes it harder to eat’*. (Student 7, Personal Communication)

Another one expressed his thoughts as follows, *‘It looks like a watermelon because a language is huge. There are a lot of things to learn and you encounter too much trouble like the seeds in a watermelon’*. (Student 14, Personal Communication)

Furthermore, the following common metaphors were “avocado” and “quince” with three metaphors each. The following excerpts are examples considering these two metaphors: *‘It can be an avocado because supposedly it is a very beneficial fruit but it is hard to find and tastes disgusting’*, (Student 6, Personal Communication) *‘It is definitely a quince because I hate quinces. They are too hard to chew and swallow. English is really hard as well’*. (Student 22, Personal Communication)

Apart from these common metaphors, other seven students gave differing metaphors related to fruit for their perceptions of language learning process. Those metaphors included grapefruit, lemon, orange, sour cherry, pineapple and kiwi. Their explanations were quite similar to each other since most of them stated that they did not like the fruit in the metaphor or that it was hard to consume.

In brief, when all the metaphors mentioned above are analyzed, it is seen that students have negative perceptions about their language learning process, such as being tiring and painful, which might lead to a conclusion that they experience burnout in the preparatory program.

Burnout as Sports

As for the sports metaphor, the preparatory students expressed their most common metaphors which are displayed in the table below:

Table 5

Frequencies for Sports Metaphor

Sports Metaphors	Frequency
Swimming	9
Football	7
Kick boxing	2
Karate	2
Basketball	1
Pilates	1
Body-building	1
Chess	1
Ice-skating	1
TOTAL	25

As displayed in the table above, “swimming” was the most common metaphor with nine metaphors in the sports category. When they were asked about which sport they associate their language learning process with, a student made the following comment:

It is swimming because with each stroke, you go further. However, you get tired after a while, but in the end, you feel relieved. It is the same for language learning. You learn something every day, but you get tired after a while. Equally, I hope to feel relieved when it is over.
(Student 3, Personal Communication)

In addition, “football” was the second most common metaphor identified by seven participants. To illustrate, one student stated, ‘*I associate it with football because it is a long game with ninety minutes and this duration is very tiring for footballers as they are running continuously to score a goal*’. (Student 17, Personal Communication)

Similarly, another student commented, ‘*I think it is football because it is an important sport all around the world. English is also very important everywhere. However, it is just as hard as explaining offside to a woman*’. (Student 9, Personal Communication)

Moreover, the following metaphors were “kick boxing” and “karate” with two metaphors each. For example, one student explained why he chose “karate” with these words: ‘*Language learning is like doing karate because there is the sense of getting repeatedly battered in both. In karate, this is a physical beating, but in learning it is mental*’. (Student 23, Personal Communication) Another one commented, ‘*It is like kick boxing since you are kicked all the time while you are learning a language*’. (Student 19, Personal Communication)

In addition, the rest of the participants wrote basketball, pilates, body-building, chess and ice-skating as metaphors with quite similar explanations such as being difficult or boring which supported their burnout during the process of language learning.

Burnout as Season

As for the season metaphor, the participants shared their most common and least common seasons providing the reasons behind them. The obtained frequencies are as follows:

Table 6

Frequencies for Season Metaphor

Season Metaphors	Frequency
Winter	14
Autumn	8
Summer	3
TOTAL	25

According to the results displayed in Table 6, “winter” was perceived as the most common season with fourteen metaphors, “autumn” with eight metaphors, and “summer” was the choice of three students. To begin with, a participating student perceived his language learning process as the winter season made the following comment:

The language learning process at prep school is like winter because I cannot bear cold, rain and snow. The conditions are really hard for people in winter. We can say the same things for English. It is too difficult to learn. (Student 11, Personal Communication)

Another one stated, ‘*I think it is winter since it is boring and unpleasant. Also, it makes people sick as it is too cold*’. (Student 2, Personal Communication) As for “autumn” a student explained his rationale with these words: ‘*It is autumn because it gives us the signals of hard winter conditions. Most of us are sad in autumn since it is school time*’. (Student 4, Personal Communication) Another student made the following comments:

‘I think the language learning process is like autumn or winter because in autumn trees dry and leaves fall down. It shows the signals of the winter. The weather is usually gloomy, and people are depressed. In my opinion, learning English has the same effects on people’. (Student 15, Personal Communication)

In addition, two students said “summer” and one of them commented, ‘*It is summer because I hate summer as it is too hot and sultry*’. (Student 16, Personal Communication)

To conclude, as shown in those metaphors, the students related their language learning process with explanations including negative feelings towards the season they chose as a metaphor. Specifically, they used mostly negative adjectives such as boring, difficult and depressing and this proves how much they experience burnout during their learning process in the preparatory program.

Burnout as Meal

The last category of the metaphoric analysis was “meal”. The preparatory students gave varying answers as illustrated in the table below:

Table 7

Frequencies for Meal Metaphor

Meal Metaphors	Frequency
Okra	8
Zucchini	6
Broccoli	4
Spinach	4
Leek	1
Cauliflower	1
Spaghetti	1
TOTAL	25

Within the meal category, the most common metaphor was “okra” with eight metaphors. One student stated, *‘I associate language learning process with okra because it is a meal I can never eat. Its taste is weird and I want to throw up whenever I try to eat’*. (Student 4, Personal Communication). In addition, “Zucchini” was the next most common one with six metaphors. One student commented, *‘I think it is zucchini because it is tasteless and it palls’*. (Student 14, Personal Communication) (In Turkish there is an idiom “kabak tadi vermek” that means pall.) Some students used this idiom to express their negative feelings towards language learning.

“Broccoli” and “spinach” were the following metaphors with four metaphors each. One student wrote broccoli because he did not like its taste. Besides, another one explained why he chose spinach with these words: *‘I hate spinach even though everybody says it is beneficial. It is the same with English for me. I hate it, but everybody says I have to learn it because it is very helpful in finding a good job’*. (Student 21, Personal Communication)

The rest eight participants wrote metaphors for this category such as leek, cauliflower and spaghetti with similar explanations mostly explaining their perceptions frequently with negative adjectives (e.g. tasteless and weird) about the language learning process in the preparatory program which again showed their burnout level.

Based on these overviews, it can be indicated that the metaphors or images used by the students in four predefined categories (fruit, sports, season and meal) were explained mostly by using symbolism the vast majority of which demonstrated negative feelings towards their studies. Specifically, they used mostly negative adjectives such as boring, difficult and depressing to talk about their experience of burnout during the learning process in the preparatory program.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to investigate and compare the extent of burnout the Turkish EFL students experience in the English Preparatory Program based on Maslach’s (1999) three dimensions namely emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. The study also attempted to explore the common metaphors related to fruit, sports, season and meal that the students shared related to their language learning experiences in the preparatory program. The following part discusses the findings of this study in terms of each research question.

To begin with, the first research question attempted to investigate to what extent the Turkish EFL students of a B1 level class experience burnout in relation with the three predefined dimensions in the preparatory program. To begin with, the quantitative data collected from Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Survey revealed that students experienced burnout a few times a month (medium level) when the total average score gained from the survey was examined. As for the dimensions of burnout, it can be stated that the participating students experienced emotional exhaustion a few times a week whereas they experienced depersonalization every week. Finally, reduced personal accomplishment was experienced by students monthly.

Furthermore, the qualitative data obtained from semi-structured interviews carried out both with the students and instructors enrolled in the English Preparatory Program also supported the result that students experienced burnout in the English Preparatory Department, and when it was analyzed under dimensions, their level of emotional exhaustion is higher than depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. Therefore, it could be said that the results were consistent with each other and generally overlapped.

First of all, these findings echo the viewpoint of Maslach et al. (2001), suggesting that although burnout has generally been studied as a work-related disorder, it may be experienced in the school context since students have an amount of work comparable to a full-time job, including attending classes, completing assignment and taking exams. These study requirements and responsibilities may cause burnout as in our study.

In addition, the findings of the current study are also in harmony with Alparslan and Doğaner’s (2009) study on “the relation of burnout level of health care workers with socio-demographic and professional variables”. In their study, the findings showed that midwives working in their profession purely for economic reasons and who were not pleased, scored “high” in terms of levels of emotional

exhaustion and depersonalization as well as showed a lower sense of personal accomplishment. On the other hand, the findings of this study are not in accordance with the study by Bař and Yıldırım (2012) on “burnout levels of elementary school principals” showing the result that the elementary school principals have “low” level of emotional exhaustion and “moderate” level of reduced personal accomplishment and depersonalization.

In brief, since high scores on emotional exhaustion and depersonalization and low scores on reduced personal accomplishment reflect a high degree of burnout (Schaufeli et al., 2002), it can be concluded that the participating students experience burnout in the preparatory department.

The second question of this study aimed to find out whether there is any relationship between the three burnout dimensions. The data collected from Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Survey was administered to the Turkish EFL students enrolled in the B1 level classes of the preparatory program.

To begin with, the quantitative analysis of MBI-SS showed a positive and medium level relation between emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. On the other hand, there was no significant relationship between emotional exhaustion and reduced personal accomplishment, or between reduced personal accomplishment and depersonalization

Based on these analyses, it could be said that they were partially in harmony with Leiter and Maslach’s (1988) model of burnout dimensions. In their study, higher levels of emotional exhaustion led to higher levels of depersonalization, and consequently, higher levels of depersonalization resulted in lower levels of reduced personal accomplishment. The results of the current study revealed a positive medium level relation between emotional exhaustion and depersonalization which means that emotional exhaustion might trigger depersonalization. Apart from these findings, the findings also showed that even though the average score gained by reduced personal accomplishment was low, there was no significant relationship between depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment in this study, which again showed the level of burnout experienced by students.

Similarly, the findings of Brouwers and Tomic (2014) concluded that the warning signs of emotional exhaustion should not be ignored in order to prevent and treat burnout at an early stage. In application of this theory into the findings of the present study, “high” level of emotional exhaustion could be considered as warning signs of “high” level of burnout which the B1 (intermediate) level EFL students might experience in the preparatory program. The findings of this study revealed that the level of burnout was medium; however, they experienced a high level of emotional exhaustion, which triggered high level of depersonalization, which leads to low level of reduced personal accomplishment. Regarding those findings, it could be said that students suffered the potential of having high levels of burnout in the preparatory department.

The third research question of this study tried to identify the common metaphors the participating students used to define their burnout. To begin with, when all the metaphors used by the students were analyzed, it was concluded that the students had approached quite negatively towards their language learning process, which was in harmony with Maslach and Leiter’s (1997) argument stating that people get to work with energy, involvement and efficacy and they are motivated to work; however, when they experience burnout, they lose their sense of enthusiasm and engagement and the initially positive feelings begin to sour. Specifically, students were asked to state a name of a fruit that they associated with their language learning process. The metaphors and explanations they gave showed overwhelmingly negative perceptions about the language learning process they had been subjected to describing it as tiring and painful. In a similar fashion, as for the other three metaphors – sports, season and meal categories – the students’ expressions were quite similar since they used mostly negative adjectives, such as difficult, boring, depressing and tasteless, to give the rationale of why they chose those metaphors for each category.

As a conclusion, the findings of this research question showed that metaphors can be used as a strong tool in revealing and explaining burnout images of students relating to the concepts present in the study. From this perspective, it is clear that metaphors offer some evidence about the potential level of student burnout and can serve as data collection instruments for various research topics in the field.

Pedagogical Implications

The present study contains both descriptive and practical implications to be taken into consideration. The results provided an insight into what extent the Turkish EFL students experience burnout in relation to the three dimensions of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment, and furthermore, helped to shed light on the question of whether there is any relationship between these dimensions. The results also delineated the common metaphors identified by the participating students indicating traces about their burnout level during the language learning process in the preparatory program.

According to the findings gathered through the analysis of the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Survey and semi-structured interviews carried out both with the students and instructors of the B1 level class, this particular group can be seen as having the potential to experience burnout in the preparatory program. Additionally, the data obtained through analysis of metaphors supported that the burnout syndrome caused them to have a negative attitude towards their learning process which should be taken into consideration to deal with burnout.

Moreover, based on the findings gathered through analysis of the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Survey and semi-structured interviews, it has been seen that emotional exhaustion dimension was the highest subcategory of burnout that the B1 level students experienced. Since this is the ultimate warning sign of impending high level of burnout (Brouwers & Tomic, 2014), administrators and the instructors should take note and discuss the necessary precautions that need to be taken in order to prevent the condition from developing while in its early stages. More specifically, considering the potential negative effects of burnout on students, preparatory programs could supply more psychological guidance to help their students handle problems during the language learning process.

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

Although the present study contains some interesting and important findings, these should be taken as suggestive rather than definitive due to a number of limitations particularly related to the participants and the timing of the study. First, the participants were repeat students who had been studying in the preparatory department for two years due to having failed the first time around. They were especially chosen from this group as they were seen as the group with the highest potential to experience burnout. Conducting the study with this specific repeat group revealed useful results, but to observe a regular group may be efficient to generalize the results gained in up-coming studies. Another limitation was about timing of the study. The data was collected during the first semester of the academic year. The participants were already stressed about repeating the same program at the beginning of the year, thus, conducting the study in the second semester may reveal different results. Despite these limitations, this study is significant for the field of student burnout since it provides a foundation for further research to build upon.

Evidently, this study has several recommendations to be taken into consideration for further research. First of all, it is likely that burnout level and relationship between the dimensions of it are believed to vary across contexts. Therefore, it is recommended to replicate the present study with more participants in different levels and preparatory programs to compare the differences across different EFL settings. Additionally, students' burnout levels, the relationship between the dimensions of burnout and students' perceptions of burnout during the language learning process were identified. However, their demographic information was not taken into consideration in the analysis process. Therefore, one worthwhile recommendation for the study being replicated would be the factoring in of demographic variables such as gender, age and proficiency level. Finally, different data collection instruments and data analysis procedures could be used with the same group of participants to fully investigate the effectiveness of this particular research design.

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that the Turkish EFL students enrolled in the B1 classes of the English Preparatory Program experienced burnout showing high levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization and low level of reduced personal accomplishment. Moreover, a medium level positive relationship between emotional exhaustion and depersonalization was indentified while,

conversely, there was not a significant relationship between depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment or emotional exhaustion and reduced personal accomplishment. Additionally, the data collected from the metaphors supported the student burnout experienced in the program. To conclude, with the obtained findings, this study furthers awareness in the field of student burnout, an at-present under-explored topic of research. In addition, the hope is that the research may enrich current views on the topic in various educational contexts.

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