Compassion Analysis of Academic Personnel According to Their Moral Maturity Levels

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Abstract

The relationship between academic personnel's moral maturity and compassion levels, and whether or not this relationship differs by gender or membership to a non-governmental organization (NGO), were examined in this research. To this end, academics working at state universities around Turkey, selected using the convenience sampling method, were asked to complete an online personal information form prepared by the researchers. Compassion Scale revised by Demirci Seyrek, Ersanlı and Tunç (2016) and the Moral Maturity Scale developed by Şengün and Kaya (2007) were applied to the academics. The forms of 423 academics that answered the measurement forms were subjected to analysis. A positive relationship was found between the moral maturity levels and compassion and its subscales of sensitivity, empathy, understanding and humanitarianism. It was also concluded that prediction of the compassion levels by the moral maturity levels did not differ by either gender or membership of an NGO.

Keywords: academic personnel, compassion, moral maturity

1. Introduction

Individuals acquire behaviors and approaches compliant with the principles and values of their society and the universal culture as a result of their social relationships with others. Involving positive changes that continue from birth until death, this process, which is described as social development or socialization, has such an impact on individuals' social behaviors, emotions, attitudes and values that they satisfy others in the society. Social maturity and social responsibility, which are defined as the level of maintaining the social relationships expected from individuals of their age, are the products of this environment (Ersanlı, 2012). Individuals' relationships with others are evaluated by compliance with these rules. Inclusion in a society starts with accepting the rules and conditions of the society. One of the most important factors that determine the working of society is moral rules. As individuals internalize these rules, they become morally more mature.

Regarding the role of socialization in the moral development of individuals, schools are institutions that provide the second biggest contribution to the individual development of students after their families by helping them acquire both academic skills and humane values (Yüksel, 2005). Educational institutions on every level ensure that young members of society are raised in accordance with its society and culture; moreover, they aim to train young people in light of the era's scientific facts so that they can take society to the next level. If an individual cannot comprehend or does not believe in moral principles, he/she cannot behave accordingly; however, the fact that an individual can comprehend these principles does not necessarily mean that he/she will use the principles in his/her life (Kohlberg & Wasserman, 1980). Human characteristics such as values, emotions, will, purpose and ego strength are significant in these principles being present in an individual's life (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977). Students take their teachers as examples from several aspects from the first years of their educational lives to higher education as well as regarding them as models of emotional coping and cognitive balancing (Goleman, 2003; Izard, 2002). An educational setting fed by a compassionate pedagogical approach supports both the academic and the moral and humane development of students (Hao, 2011). This means that academic competencies of teachers and faculty members, as well as their human and moral characteristics, might be important in student development (Temli, Şen, & Akar, 2011).

Compassion, which can be placed top among these human characteristics, enables individuals to share their emotions with others and identify with their emotions (Kim, 2011). Miller(1996) defines compassion as the desire that one's and others' pain disappear and they achieve happiness (cited in Kim, 2011). Compassion is the ability to recognize and respect the existence of others, and their rights and freedom to live (Demirci-Seyrek, Ersanlı, & Tunç, 2016). Compassion suggests that we experience what others possess, therefore reaching out to them (Williams, 2008). By this means, compassion is also an important social wisdom that attributes value to others' minds and emotions on the same level (Braun, 1992) by helping us elude our concerns and fears (Carr, 1999).

Moral maturity is the level of perfection that helps individuals feel immorality and deviance in their emotions, thoughts, judgments and attitudes in their consciences (Şengün, 2008). Lickona (1991) defines the morally mature individual as someone who is reliable, responsible, fair, self-controlled, and a good, highly empathic person; above all, they are someone who is expected to be a good, law-abiding citizen (cited in Şengün,

2008). According to Kohlberg (1968/1995), morality is a cognitive construct that covers conscious judgment and decision-making in the matters of fairness-unfairness, right-wrong, and good-bad behavior in accordance with the decision (Çiftçi, 2003). According to Lickona(1991), knowing, desiring and doing what is good are three elements of morality (cited in Şengün, 2008) Individuals with improved moral judgment ability also have the ability of critical-rational negotiation; they can listen to ideas which they disagree with, and then criticize and evaluate those ideas, postponing, refreshing and changing their own preliminary thoughts instead of objecting to them right away (Çiftçi, 2003). In this sense, moral maturity levels of academic personnel can be described as some of the most important elements in an atmosphere required for free thought and scientific development at universities (Temli et al., 2011).

Contributing to the scientific world through new research in their fields, academic personnel are individuals who perform educational activities for the development of students who enroll in the institutions of higher education. The two world wars, in which the whole world witnessed severely fearful and concerning incidents, could exemplify the idea that the acquirement of technique without moral progress can be used in bad faith (Fukuyama, 1999). Consequently, academic personnel's compassion and moral maturity levels are as important as their knowledge in their fields to deliver their responsibilities towards their students and society at a desired level, and as important as their mastery in efficient educational-instructional methods and techniques to transfer that knowledge.

The hypotheses below were tested as it was anticipated that they would contribute to determining the prominent competencies and qualities in the training of academic personnel:

Academic personnel's moral maturity level is a significant predictor of their compassion levels.

Prediction of academic personnel's compassion levels by moral maturity levels differ significantly by gender.

Prediction of academic personnel's compassion levels by moral maturity levels differ significantly by membership of an NGO.

2. Method

The relational survey model was utilized in this research to determine the academic personnel's compassion levels by their moral maturity levels (Karasar, 2011).

Study Group

The sample of this research was composed of 423 academic personnel who were chosen via the convenience sampling method from among academic personnel of 18 state universities, and who answered the scale questions completely. Descriptive statistics of the participant academic personnel are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Sampling

VARIABLE		f	%
Gender	Woman	168	39.7
	Man	255	60.3
Total		423	100
NGO Membership	No	253	59.8
	Yes	170	40.2
Total		423	100

According to Table 1, 39.7% of the participants were female while 60.3% were male. Further, 55.7% of the single participants were female and 44.3% were male. In addition, 59.8% of the participants reported no membership of any NGO.

2. 1. Measures

2. 1. 1. Moral Maturity Scale

The Moral Maturity Scale developed by Şengün and Kaya (2007) was used in the study. It is a five-point Likert-type scale which has 66 items with 52 of them reflecting positive moral maturity and 14 of them reflecting negative moral maturity. Negative items are reverse scored, and scores over the average score of 198 indicate high moral maturity. Şengün and Kaya found the scale's reliability coefficient to be 0.93 in their study with high school students. The internal consistency reliability coefficient was calculated to be 0.90 in this study.

2. 1. 2. Compassion Scale

The 37-item Compassion Scale, of which a pre-study was performed by Seyrek and Ersanlı (2013) to identify compassion levels of adults, was revised through an application with the adult population that had received a university education by Demirci-Seyrek, Ersanlı and Tunç (2016) . It was seen in the construct analysis that item-total correlations of the scale, which is composed of one item, explaining 52.98% of the total variance, and four subscales (sensitivity, empathy, understanding, humanitarianism), differ between 0.34 and 0.62 (p<.01). The reliability coefficients were found to be 0.70, 0.65, 0.62 and 0.55 for sensitivity, empathy, understanding and humanitarianism, respectively. Cronbach's Alpha value was calculated to be 0.81 for the whole scale. A confirmatory factor analysis of the 15-item form was performed with a sample of 803 academic personnel. The

result of the confirmatory factor analysis was found to be x2=160.87 and x2/ sd= 2.24. RMSEA, AGFI, GFI, RMR, SRMR, and CFI values of the scale were calculated to be 0.039, 0.96, 0.98, 0.022, 0.05 and 0.95, respectively; thus, the four-factor construct was confirmed.

2. 1. 3. Personal Information Sheet

The researchers included several variables in the personal information form to identify individual traits of the participant academic personnel.

2. 2. Data Collection and Analysis

In the first phase, via e-mail, the purpose of the research and the steps of the procedure were explained to the participants; it was stated that participation in the research was on a voluntary basis, and the participants were asked to complete the personal information form and the instruments.

The researchers graded the answers given by the academic personnel in the sample and the data were analyzed in the SPSS software. In the data analysis, Pearson's product-moment correlation and regression analysis were used.

3. Results

Statistical analyses conducted to test the research hypotheses and the findings achieved in these analyses are mentioned below.

Academic personnel's moral maturity level is a significant predictor of their compassion levels.

To test the first research hypothesis, the relationship between academic personnel's moral maturity scores and compassion total score and compassion subscale scores in the first place .It was found in the Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient test that there was a positive moderate relationship between the moral maturity scores and compassion, and the subscale scores (Table 2).

Table 2. The Relationship Between Academic personnel's Moral Maturity Scores and Compassion Scores

	Compassion	Sensitivity	Empathy	Understanding	Humanitarianism
Moral Maturity	0.633	0.522	0.429	0.569	0.340

*p<.001

The basic linear regression analysis was also performed to test the first research hypothesis so that it could be found whether or not the academic personnel's moral maturity scores predicted their compassion scores and the subscale scores of sensitivity, empathy, understanding and humanitarianism (Table 3).

Table 3. Moral Maturity Score of Academic Personnel Compassion Status and Sub-scale Score

	β	t	p	R	R²
Compassion	0.621	16.799	.000	0.633	0.401
Sensitivity	0.521	12.544	.000	0.522	0.272
Empathy	0.429	9.749	.000	0.429	0.184
Understanding	0.601	14.198	.000	0.569	0.324
Humanitarianism	0.340	7.411	.000	0.340	0.115

*p<.001

According to Table 3, the moral maturity levels of the academic personnel significantly predicted their levels of compassion (the whole scale) (β= 0.621, p<.001, R2 =.401); sensitivity (β = 0.521, p<.001, R2 =.0.272); empathy (β = 0.429, p<.001, R2 =.0.184); understanding (β = 0.601, p<.001, R2 =.0.324); and humanitarianism (β = 0.340, p<.001, (R2 =.0.115).

Prediction of academic personnel's compassion levels by moral maturity levels differ significantly by gender.

The participant academic personnel's levels of moral maturity and compassion were compared to their gender to test the second research hypothesis. Accordingly, it was found that the intragroup regression trends were equal; both of the gender groups had normal distribution in the population, and their variances were homogenous. The academics' Corrected Compassion Scale scores compared with their Moral Maturity Scale scores are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. The Academics' Corrected Compassion Scale Scores Compared with Their Moral Maturity Scale Scores

Gender	N	Mean	Corrected Mean
Woman	168	64.500	64.159
Man	255	62.941	63.222

The mean Compassion Scale scores were, accordingly, calculated to be 64.50 for the female participants and 62.94 for the male participants. A difference was observed between the mean scores in favor of the female participants. The corrected mean Compassion Scale scores were 64.15 for the female participants and 63.22 for the male participants (Table 4).

The results of the covariance analysis that was performed to see whether the difference observed between the corrected mean Compassion Scale scores of the groups was significant are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. The Results of Covariance (ANCOVA) Analysis for Determining the Relationship Between the Moral Maturity Levels of the Academic Personnel and Their Compassion Situations According to Gender

Variance Source	Sum of Squares	sd	F	p	R²
Moral Maturity Total Score	6770.457	1	277.108	.000*	0.398
Gender	82.569	1	3.379	0.067	0.08
Error	10261.661	422			
Total	17278.213	423			

The results indicate that prediction of the academic personnel's compassion levels by their moral maturity levels did not differ significantly by gender $F(1,422)=3.379$, p>.05). These findings do not meet the related research hypothesis (Table 5).

Prediction of academic personnel's compassion levels by moral maturity levels differ significantly by membership of an NGO.

The participant academic personnel's levels of moral maturity and compassion were compared to their membership of an NGO to test the third research hypothesis. Accordingly, it was found that the intragroup regression trends were equal; both groups formed based on membership of an NGO had normal distribution in the population, and their variances were found to be homogenous. Corrected Compassion Scale scores of the academic personnel by their Moral Maturity Scale scores are shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Corrected Compassion Scale Scores of The Academic Personnel By Their Moral Maturity Scale Scores

Membership of NGO	N	Mean	Corrected Mean
Yes	253	63.478	63.516
No	170	63.682	63.606

According to Table 6, the mean Compassion Scale scores were calculated as 63.68 for the academic personnel who were members of an NGO and 63.47 for the academic personnel who were not. It can be concluded from these results that the academic personnel who were members of an NGO had higher mean Compassion Scale scores than the academic personnel who were not (Table 6).

A difference was observed between the corrected mean Compassion Scale scores of the groups in favor of the group that had no membership of an NGO. The results of the covariance analysis performed to see whether the difference observed between the corrected mean Compassion Scale scores of the groups was significant are shown in Table7.

Table 7. The Results of Covariance (ANCOVA) Analysis for Determining the Relationship Between the Academic Maturity Levels of the Academic Personnel and Their Compassion Situations According to Membership of NGO

Variance Source	Sum of Square	sd	F	p	R²
Moral Maturity Total Score	6930.701	1	281.429	.000*	0.401
Membership of an NGO	0.953	1	0.039	.844	0.000
Error	1034.277	420			
Total	17278.213	422			

* p<.05

The results indicate that prediction of the academic personnel's compassion levels by their moral maturity levels did not differ significantly in favor of those who were members of an NGO ($F(1,420)=0.039$, p>.05). These findings do not meet the third research hypothesis (Table 7).

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

Development in moral maturity levels enables individuals to care about and fulfill their responsibility towards society. As compassion is an attribute that helps individuals bestow the same rights and responsibilities to themselves and others and care about others, it is of importance that academic personnel possess these qualities so that they can meet their societal responsibilities. Academic personnel not only raise qualified workforces that serve society, but they also affect the fate of society and humanity through the scientific studies they conduct. Academic personnel with such awareness can facilitate the performance of their responsibilities in the free and democratic environments that they create. In these environments, academic personnel can be scientists who nourish the hearts and minds of the next generation with an approach respecting the honor and rights of humans and shaped by empathy and compassion (Poppo, 2006).

It was concluded in this research that the academic personnel's moral maturity levels predicted their compassion levels statistically and significantly. Differing in the same way by the compassion, empathy, understanding and humanitarianism subscales of the Compassion Scale, this relationship manifests itself as qualities that academics need to have to provide a good instructional environment (Fitzmaurice, 2008). These

qualities can enhance academic personnel's compassion so that they can contribute to the existence and development of students (Kulaksızoğlu, 1995). As stated by Koç (2010), education is an inseparably mental and ethical matter. This relationship influences students' developmental attributes at the same time and rate. Hence, the fact that the first hypothesis was found to be significant reinforces this case.

While moral development is supported with a free, fair and equal environment, compassion facilitates students' change and development from every aspect in an atmosphere of equality formed by feeding the positive communication between students and academic personnel and ensuring a connection with students (Hard & Hodson, 2004; Kernochan, McCormick, & White, 2007). Academic personnel could face several hardships in a professional sense. Indeed, performing educational-instructional services in a qualified manner, conducting research, getting promotion and being wise are some of the fields of moral conflict that academic personnel may encounter in higher education (Reynold, 2008). In overcoming such challenges, the moral maturity and compassion levels of academic personnel present an important factor.

In the literature, there are studies that observed that teachers are aware of students' needs and support them in making positive changes in their lives despite the conflicts that they encounter in educational settings (Fitzmaurice, 2008). Universities are environments where science is produced and the integration of social development with universal values takes place. There are studies in the literature that state a positive relationship between educational levels and moral reasoning (Rest, Narvaez, Thoma, & Bebeau, 2000; Rest, Robbins, & Davison, 1978). Given that moral and mental developments occur in tandem, the fact that academic personnel exhibit attitudes in favor of society and the whole of humanity coincides with the findings with regard to the relevant hypothesis of the research.

The hypothesis prediction that academic personnel's compassion levels and moral maturity levels differ significantly by gender was not met in the research. Similarly, Yüksel (2012) and Çekin (2013) did not find a significant difference between the moral maturity levels of female and male preservice teachers. The fact that gender is not a determinant of moral maturity shows parallelism with this research result. On the other hand, there are studies that state that moral maturity differs significantly by gender. Al-Suhurai (2012) found female teachers' post-traditional scores of moral development to be high and male teachers' traditional scores of moral development to be high. Kaya and Aydın (2011) concluded in their research with university students that the female students had higher moral maturity levels than the male students. While there are studies that concluded no significant difference in self-compassion between genders (Neff, Kirkpatrick, & Rude, 2007), some studies reported slightly lower self-compassion levels among women compared to men (Kuzu, 2011; Neff, 2003; Neff, Hseih, & Dejitterat, 2005). It can be, accordingly, argued that the research results coincide with the literature.

Goetz, Keltner and Simon-Thomas (2010) stated that compassion enables social groups to protect weak and suffering people and guides the search for a cure for suffering and needy people, rather like a barometer that measures moral development. The desire to enhance the lifestyle of societies and contribute to their development and actualization underlie membership of an NGO. In this sense, the hypothesis that academic personnel who depend on top-tier mental skills would present their awareness of society and humanity to the benefit of society through institutions such as NGO was concluded to be significant in the research. Maya (2013) found that only 40.1% of academic personnel were members of an NGO and that they fell insufficient in social service efforts. According to Maya's finding, it can be argued that this result is not because the academic personnel are members of an NGO, but rather remain incapable in NGO services. It can also be said that similar research results are inevitable considering that NGO services are performed in general by NGO boards, rather than NGO members, and that members remain passive.

The following recommendations are made in accordance with the research results:

1. As compassion is a value that assists individuals in establishing healthier relationships with themselves and others and prevents individuals from judging themselves and others mercilessly, based on the idea that humans are not perfect when struggling with the sense of burnout, psychological counselors for academic personnel at universities can provide compassion training.

2. Given that moral development can be ensured with people sensitive to the existence of individuals in a democratic environment, academic personnel can be encouraged not only in their scientific studies, but also in their attitudes in accordance with the moral principles and humane virtues of universities that are liable to contribute to society in the path to science and civilization.

3. Since academic personnel would affect students' development in a positive way through the democratic, fair, peaceful and compassionate environment that they provide for them, studies can be performed to explore the importance of a working environment with the same qualities for academic personnel at universities.

4. It is also recommended that the compassion levels of academic personnel by other variables (personality traits, working environments, job satisfaction, etc.) are examined and to conduct studies to compare the compassion levels of academic personnel working in state and private universities by moral maturity levels.

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