



Positive Characteristics in Primary School Teachers: The Interactive Roles of Psychological Capital and Mindfulness in Teaching

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ABSTRACT

The reinforcing effects of positive characteristics in maintaining teachers' and students' psychological health have been well documented. However, there has been very little research into the determinants of what constitutes positive characteristics among teachers. Neither the full role played by mindfulness nor the psychological capital of teachers with positive characteristics remains unknown. This study marks the beginning of an investigation into such an issue. The sample of the study involved the participation of 374 teachers. In Model 1, the mediating role of psychological capital was tested in the relationship between mindfulness in teaching and teacher positivity. Meanwhile, in Model 2, the mediating role of mindfulness in teaching was tested in the relationship between psychological capital and positive teacher characteristics. In Model 1, the standardised path coefficients between the variables were not found to be statistically significant, thus prompting the test of a second structural model. The results showed that mindfulness in teaching appeared to constitute a full mediator in the relationship between psychological capital and positive characteristics among primary school teachers.

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Keywords:

Positive characteristics, mindfulness in teaching, psychological capital, teachers.

1. Introduction

Teachers conduct their teaching activities in classes consisting of students with different emotional, social, and academic needs. Both eastern and western literature supports that carrying on teaching activities in a group with different needs and is mostly heterogeneous from this perspective brings various mental and professional difficulties (Baltaş & Baltaş; 1998). From this perspective, finding out the factors that may affect the positive characteristics of teachers buffering against these challenging experiences is assumed as an important step in the field.

In recent years, the increase in studies on the effects of personal and professional characteristics of educators on students' social, emotional, and academic skills facilitated a more detailed examination of teachers' positive characteristics. The imbibing of positive characteristics among those leading the learning process is assumed important for both teachers and students alike. Supportively, studies indicate that teachers' well-being is positively related to their' self-efficacy (Huang, Yin, & Tang, 2019) and job performance (Hwang et al., 2017) as well as with their students' academic adjustment (Zee & Koomen, 2016). In this regard, it is crucial to uncover the positive characteristics of educators.

Recent literature on teachers' positive characteristics, personality (Kim et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2018), and teacher-student interactions (Ahmad, 2017; Pianta et al., 2020) are well studied as positive teacher

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characteristics. Furthermore, various academics use this area of research as the basis of their studies into what characteristics contribute to a positive teacher. This is still a controversial field of study, but several approaches have been developed to this end. One study cites the analytical/synthetic, organisation/openness, lecturer/group interaction, lecturer-student interaction, and dynamism/enthusiasm approaches (Aregbeyen 2010), while another posits that, for adolescents, in particular, simply extraverted teachers are those most "liked" (Eryilmaz, 2014). According to Eryilmaz and Bek's (2018) "positive teacher" approach (2018), which provides the basis for this research, positive characteristics among teachers include an extroverted personality and the ability to embody their subject, form positive relationships with students, increase student participation, and boost students' flow experience.

The general concept of psychological capital focuses on improving human life. Luthans, Youssef, and Avolio (2007) characterise psychological capital as a blend of self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism. The elements of psychological capital include high self-efficacy, contribution to positive choices, motivational effort, patience, and positive thinking. It is asserted that this psychological factor may lead to a reduction in stress. Hope has a positive effect on emotional health and coping with difficulties (Luthans & Church 2002). Hopeful individuals are less anxious and enjoy interacting with people. is more specifically the psychological capacity to "bounce back" from negative to positive aspects (Luthans 2002). Studies on the professional variables related to the psychological capital of teachers suggest that psychological capital is related to such individual processes as teaching effectiveness, work engagement (Tösten et al., 2019), job performance (Fraide et al., 2016), job involvement, and job satisfaction (Demir, 2018). These findings show that teachers high in psychological capital can be more successful in maintaining their attention to the subject they teach and consider the needs of students. So, psychological capital can be a potential variable directly related to mindfulness in teaching.

Mindfulness originates from Buddhist spiritual meditation practices (Hanh 1976) and related to teachers' positive characteristics, such as teaching self-efficacy (Flook et al., 2013) and classroom management skills (Caldwell et al., 2010). Mindfulness is related to psychological capital and/or its components (Brockway, 2019; Malinowski & Lim, 2015; Schussler et al., 2018). These studies on the relations of mindfulness and psychological capital among teachers have examined mindfulness at the dispositional level. Unlike dispositional mindfulness, interpersonal mindfulness examines social behaviours associated with mindfulness, such as parenting and teaching (Khoury 2018). Frank, Jennings, and Greenberg (2016) have examined interpersonal mindfulness in teaching processes. They describe mindfulness in teaching as the teachers' ability to reflect their dispositional mindfulness skills into the teaching processes. According to this approach, two basic factors are used to observe mindfulness in teaching: a) teacher intrapersonal mindfulness in teaching includes the teacher's flexibility between effective teaching and classroom management processes and observing the needs of students, and b) teacher interpersonal mindfulness in teaching involves calmness, compassion, and a sensitivity to student's needs. These two aspects can be affected by psychological capital because psychological capital is an inner experience. In other words, teachers' ability to direct and maintain their attention and awareness toward themselves and their students during the teaching process may be influenced by psychological capital, as in other positive educational characteristics.

In this study, the positive characteristics of primary school teachers is another variable assumed to be related to mindfulness in teaching. Eryilmaz and Bek (2018) define the characteristics of positive teachers as "having an extroverted personality" "the ability to concretise the subject taught", " establish a positive relationship with the students", "increase students' engagement in the class", and "boost students' flow experience". These explanations suggest that mindfulness in teaching can be closely related to these positive characteristics of a teacher. If teachers have flexibility in their teaching activities and students' needs, they can reflect their dispositional mindfulness skills into the teaching practices. Teachers with higher levels of mindfulness in teaching can have a better performance on positive characteristics described by Eryilmaz and Bek's (2018) positive teacher model.

Given these explanations, we have proposed a model that tests mindfulness's mediating role in teaching in the relationship between primary school teachers' psychological capital and positive characteristics. Within this scope, the following hypotheses were examined: a) psychological capital is directly related to mindfulness in teaching; b) mindfulness in teaching is directly related to positive characteristics of teachers; c) psychological capital will have indirect relations to positive teacher characteristics through the mediating role of mindfulness

in teaching. Moreover, mindfulness in terms of teaching is a new concept. While the studies already mentioned here show that psychological capital is influenced by dispositional mindfulness, we have also tested the psychological capital as mediator in the relationship between mindfulness in teaching and the positive characteristics of primary school teachers. We assume that the current study results will inform future studies and practitioners interested in studying and supporting teachers' positive characteristics and well-being.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Model

In this study, mindfulness in teaching was a mediator variable in the relationship between psychological capital and positive teacher characteristics among primary school teachers. An alternative model, which has taken psychological capital as a mediator variable in the relationship between mindfulness in teaching and positive teacher characteristics, was created. For testing the proposed and the alternative model, structural equation modelling was run. Structural equation models are used to examine the relationships between variables based on a theoretical basis (Sümer, 2000). For testing the models of this study, a path analysis was performed with the latent variables.

2.2. Research Group

The study sample was chosen through a convenience sampling method from primary school teachers working in Istanbul. The data was obtained via online forms. The sample group consisted of 374 teachers, including 202 females (54%) and 172 males (45%). The age of the teachers in the sample group ranged from 22 to 56, with a mean of 43.7 (SD=7.52).

2.3. Data Collection Tools

Psychological Capital Scale (PCS). The scale developed by Luthans et al. (2006) consists of a 6-point Likert type and 24 items. In the Turkish form, the Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of the scale came to .89. Considering the results of the CFA regarding the 4-factor structure of the scale, it was observed that the scale fits well with the Turkish sample ($cmin = 497.12$, $df = 163$, $RMSEA = 0.62$, $GFI = .92$, $AGFI = .90$, $CFI = .93$). The sum of these findings showed that the Turkish Form of the Psychological Capital Scale was valid and reliable (Erkuş & Afacan-Fındıklı, 2013). In the current study, the Cronbach-alpha of PCS was found 0.92.

Mindfulness in Teaching Scale (MTS). This scale was developed by Frank, Jennings, and Greenberg (2016) to measure teachers' mindfulness during their teaching processes. In the Turkish version of the scale, the model fit index values generated by a CFA ($c2/sd = 2.111$, $IFI = .93$, $CFI = .93$, $GFI = .95$ and $RMSEA = .054$) were satisfactory. The Cronbach-alpha internal consistency coefficient was found to be .78, and the scale showed a significant relationship with the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (Aslan Gördesli et al., 2018). In the current study, the Cronbach-alpha of MTS was found 0.61.

Positive Teacher Scale (PTS). The development study of this scale was carried out by Eryilmaz and Bek (2018). The research findings yielded a 21-item, five-dimensional scale, resulting in 63.230% of the total variance. The reliability value of the entire scale was found to be .89, which is a satisfactory value for internal consistency. The structure of the scale revealed by exploratory factor analysis was confirmed through a confirmatory factor analysis ($RMSEA = 0.067$, $NFI = 0.92$; $NNFI = 0.95$; $CFI = 0.96$; $IFI = 0.96$; $RFI = 0.91$; $GFI = 0.87$ and $AGFI = 0.83$). It was also found that there were positive and moderately significant relationships between teachers' experiencing positive emotions and displaying a positive feature. In the current study, the Cronbach-alpha of PTS was found 0.89.

2.4. Analysis of Data

The participants were recruited from the school staff voluntarily, acknowledging their informed consent. Normality and homogeneity, which were the main assumptions of the path analysis, were checked by the SPSS 22.0 program, and 25 cases that did not meet these criteria were excluded from the further analysis. The remaining analyses were thus conducted with the data obtained from 374 participants. Harmon's single factor test was run to check the common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). According to the results of this test, the scales had a single factor and explained %23.56 of the total variance. This result shows that there is not a common factor bias in this study. For checking the multicollinearity problem in the data set, tolerance and VIF values were calculated. Results showed that tolerance values were greater than 0.2, and VIF were less than 5.0.

These results indicated that there is not any multicollinearity problem (Hair et al., 1998). Lastly, we applied the model testing procedures with the AMOS 22.0 program.

2.5. Ethical

The research process started with our request to Istanbul Medipol University’s social sciences ethics committee. The committee has approved the ethical request. During the data collection process, all participants were informed about the aim and scope of the study and the importance of their voluntary attendance. Participants approved that they voluntarily participated in the study.

3. Findings

Table 1 below shows the descriptive statistics consisting of mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis coefficients regarding the examined variables and correlation coefficients showing the relationships between the study variables.

Table 1. Correlation Coefficients and Descriptive Statistics of Variables

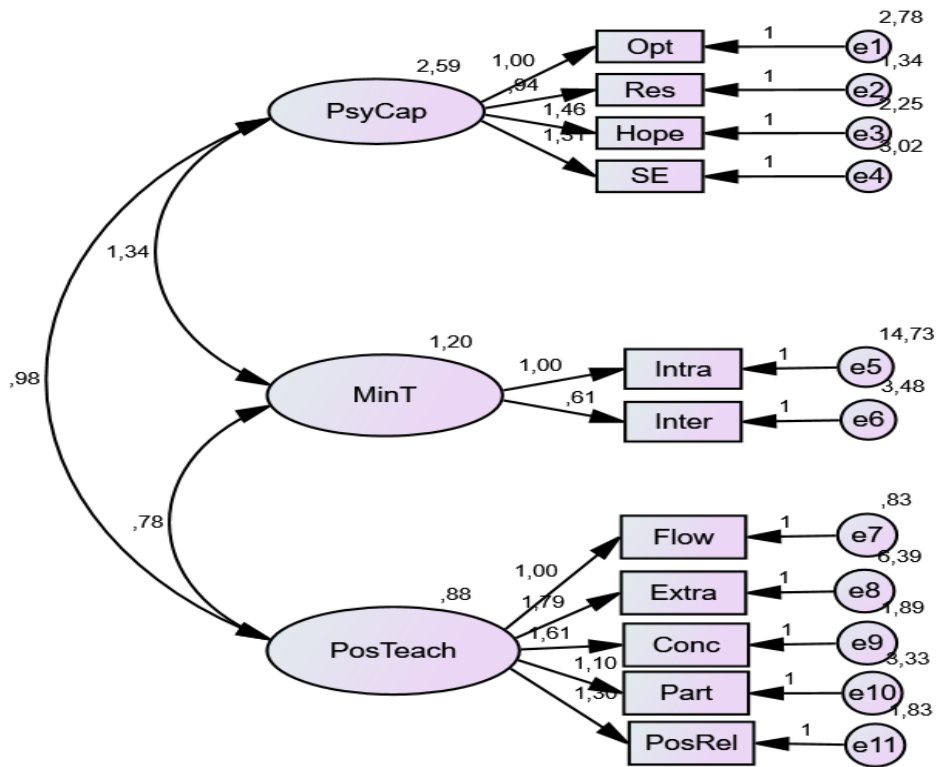
Variable	Descriptive Statistics						
	1	2	3	Mean	Standard deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
1. Mindfulness in teaching	1			56.912	4.625	-.499	-.127
2. Positive characteristics in teachers	.241**	1		92.878	7.436	-.040	-.972
3. Psychological capital	.281**	.535**	1	86.527	8.155	-.031	-.627

Note. ** p < .001, N = 374.

As shown in Table 1, the skewness ranged from -0.3 to -.753, while the kurtosis ranged from -.972 to .281. The ± 2 range recommended by Stevens (2002) for normal distribution was met, so the data of the variables showed a normal distribution. Table 1 also yields significantly positive relationships between mindfulness in teaching and positive characteristics in teachers (r= .241, p<.05), mindfulness in teaching and psychological capital (r= .28, p<.05), and between positive characteristics in teachers and psychological capital (r= .54, p<.05).

According to the results of an independent sample t-test conducted to determine whether positive teacher characteristics differed according to gender, it was found that positive teacher characteristics did not show a difference in terms of gender (t = .91, df = 369, p > .05). Meanwhile, a significant relationship was found between positive characteristics in teachers and tenure (r=.012, p<.05). Since the teacher positivity scores of the sample were found to be significantly related to tenure, we took this as a control variable in the structural models tested.

Before testing the proposed model, the measurement model was examined (Figure 1 below). Goodness of fit values for the measurement model were found as CMIN / df = 3.309, GFI = .94, IFI = .93, TLI = .91, CFI = .93, SRMR = .04 and RMSEA = .079. Standardised regression weights of the measurement model were between .27-.79 (p<.05). The measurement model covariances between the variables were found statistically significant (p<.05). The proposed and alternative models were tested after the verification of the measurement model.



*Opt=Optimism, Res=Resilience, SE=Self-efficacy, Intra=Intrapersonal mindfulness in teaching, Inter=Interpersonal mindfulness in teaching, Extra=Extraverted personality, Conc=Concretizing the subject that taught, Part=Increasing students' participation in the class, PosRel=Establish positive relationship with students).

Figure 1. The Measurement Model

The proposed model, in which tenure was used as a control variable, tested the partial mediation of mindfulness in teaching in the relationship between psychological capital and positive characteristics in teachers. This model was revised because the standardized path coefficient value between psychological capital and positive characteristics in teachers was not statistically significant. The revised model tested the full mediation of mindfulness in teaching (Figure 2 below). In this model, goodness of fit values was found to be CMIN/df = 2.757, GFI= .94, IFI= .93, TLI= .91, CFI= .93, SRMR= .043 and RMSEA= .069.

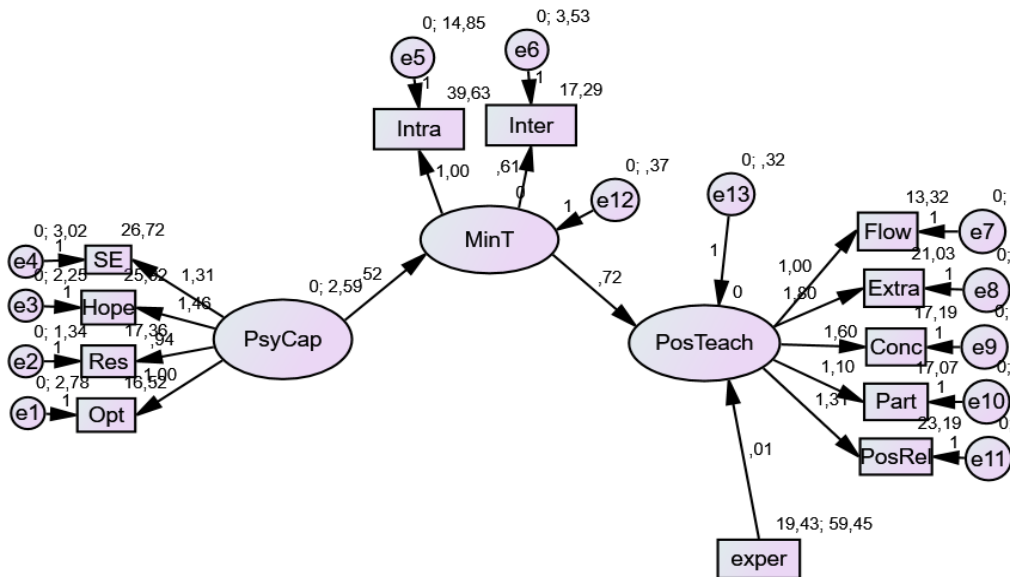


Figure 2. Revised Proposed Model

After testing the proposed model, an alternative model was developed in which psychological capital was considered a mediator in the relationship between mindfulness in teaching and positive characteristics in

teachers. According to this model, the standardised path coefficients between variables were not found statistically significant.

A bootstrapping analysis was used for the proposed model. The bootstrapping process was carried out to fully mediate mindfulness in teaching in the relationship between teachers' psychological capital and positive characteristics. The direct and indirect path coefficients and confidence intervals in this model are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. *Bootstrapping Results for the Proposed Model*

Path	Bootstrapping		Bias %95 CL	
	Estimate	SE	Lower Limit	Upper Limit
<i>Direct</i>				
PsyCap → MinT	.52	.13	.27	.79
MinT → PTS	.72	.25	.47	1.35
<i>Indirect</i>				
PsyCap → MinT → PTS	.38	.04	.30	.63

According to the findings presented in Table 2, the direct effects between the variables were significant. The effect of psychological capital on mindfulness in teaching ($\beta=.52$) and mindfulness in teaching on positive characteristics of the teacher ($\beta=.72$) were also found to be significant. Furthermore, how psychological capital indirectly affects positive characteristics in teachers was significant ($\beta=.38$, bootstrap coefficient = .04, 95% C.I. = .30-.63). These findings show that mindfulness in teaching has a fully mediating role in the relationship between teachers' psychological capital and their positive characteristics.

4. Conclusion and Discussion

This study tested two different models to understand the roles of mindfulness in teaching and psychological capital on the positive characteristics of primary school teachers. Before testing the models, we examined whether positive teacher scores differ according to gender and tenure to determine any possible control variable in the model. The analyses indicated that positive characteristics in primary school teachers did not differ according to gender but related positively to tenure. Although there was no study reporting a relationship between tenure and positive characteristics in teachers, it was discovered that tenure is related to student participation (Garet et al., 2001), teachers' professional performance, and stress (Hanif et al., 2011).

The proposed model tested the mediating role of mindfulness in teaching in the relationship between psychological capital and positive characteristics in primary school. The first finding of this model was that psychological capital significantly predicted mindfulness in teaching. Psychological capital includes a high self-efficacy, contribution to positive choices, motivational effort, patience, and positive thinking. It is thus asserted that this feature facilitates effective coping with stress (Luthans & Church, 2002). According to Luthans (2002), an individual's self-efficacy is closely related to (1) performance gains or mastery; (2) learning for someone else; (3) feedback on progress; and (4) psychological or physiological arousal. The effect of self-efficacy on mindfulness in teaching can be addressed at the intrapersonal and interpersonal levels. Namely, since high self-efficacy includes psychological and physiological stimulation, it ensures that teachers are more careful and focused on the present moment (intrapersonal speaking) during teaching activities. Teachers naturally receive feedback from students about performance gains, mastery of work, progress, and learning from others. Each of these factors brings acceptance, receptivity, and open communication into the teacher-student relationship. A teacher with high self-efficacy would possibly develop a more open and receptive approach to the feedback from students, who are the target audience of the teaching activity.

In terms of psychological capital, hope refers to the ability to conceive approaches to achieve desired goals and gain intrinsic motivation by considering these approaches (Snyder, 2002). Research also shows that high levels of hope and optimism are positively associated with maintaining attention to positive stimuli and negatively associated with maintaining attention to negative stimuli (Kelberer et al., 2018). Teachers with high levels of hope and optimism are prone to experience less stress and focus on positive components rather than negativities in the classroom, which may increase mindfulness in teaching.

With evidence that resilient individuals tend to be more effective in life, the same effect can also be expected reasonably at work. Resilience includes the need for improvisation and adaptation in uncertain times (Youssef & Luthans 2007). Teachers confront many stimuli in the context of the classroom and face challenging tasks such as directing students' attention to the teaching process and the classroom environment. Due to students' distractions or differing emotional states, teachers may have difficulty directing students' attention to the teaching material. At this point, flexibility plays an important role in recovering the teachers' attention when distracted and in continuing to the tasks they are working with.

We also found that mindfulness in teaching significantly predicted positive characteristics among primary school teachers. Bulger et al. (2002, p. 3) state that "teachers can start actively establishing a positive learning environment by demonstrating their passion for the subject, using student names, reinforcing student participation during the lesson, and moving between students." Similarly, Eryilmaz and Bek (2018) define the characteristics of positive teachers as having an extroverted personality and the ability to concretise the subject taught, establish positive relationships with the student, increase students' engagement in the class, and boost students' flow experience. Frank et al. (2016) address mindfulness in teaching at intrapersonal (mindfulness, awareness, focus on present) and interpersonal (an open, accepting, and receptive trend in teacher-student interaction) levels. An examination of the definitions and studies on mindfulness pointed to the relationship of this construct with extraversion (Baer et al., 2004; Brown & Ryan 2003; Van den Hurk 2010). Understandably, mindfulness in teaching creates positive effects on the teacher-student relationship since it involves awareness, open and accepting communication. The literature confirms that mindfulness can be associated with teacher-student interaction (Jennings 2015) and teachers' emotional supportiveness (Molroy-Elreda et al., 2018). Mindfulness in teaching involves open, understandable, and acceptance-based communication, attention and awareness in the teacher-student relationship. When we look at concretisation, a sub-component of teacher positivity, we can define it as organising targeted information at the level and content the other party can receive. Thus, explaining a subject by concretising it involves carefully monitoring variables such as the target students' structure, expectations, and learning characteristics. This requires teachers' awareness and acceptance – that is, mindfulness – in teaching. Alternatively, one can say that mindfulness in education affects the explanation of a given subject by concretising it. According to Skinner and Belmont (1993), a teacher's use of concrete statements about a subject increases the behavioural participation of the students.

Another dimension of teacher positivity is the flow of the lesson. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) define the characteristics of the flow as the degree of a person's attention to the activity they are involved in, the coordinated progress of the action and awareness, loss of reflective self-consciousness, the belief that the person can control their actions, the distortion of temporal experiences, and the internal reward of performed activity/action – although the flow is an individual experience. Therefore, flow calls to the importance of future goals, self-confidence, and the desire for pleasure and effectiveness (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi 2000). Several studies reveal that mindfulness and flow experience are interrelated (Bervoets 2013; Diaz 2011; Moore 2012).

We examined the mediating role of mindfulness in teaching in the relationship between psychological capital and positive characteristics in primary school teachers, finding that mindfulness in teaching is a full mediator between these variables. In other words, teachers with high psychological capital also have a high mindfulness level in teaching, which contributes to the degree of their positive characteristics. According to the proposed model, psychological capital does not have a significant predictive role on positive characteristics in primary school teachers. Although the psychological capital of teachers has a positive effect on professional performance, professional satisfaction, professional passion, and creative teaching (Cheung et al., 2011; Fu 2015; Viseu et al., 2016), it seems that it does not show the same effect for positive characteristics in this study.

Research on dispositional mindfulness and psychological capital has shown that dispositional mindfulness predicts psychological capital (Bajaj & Pande 2016; Kotze 2018; Malinowski & Lim 2015; Roche et al., 2014). However, the alternative model of this study showed that the path coefficients of mindfulness in teaching psychological capital is not significant. This result supports the findings of other studies in that dispositional mindfulness and interpersonal mindfulness are related, but they are different concepts than each other (Aslan-Gördesli et al., 2019; Frank et al., 2016; McCaffrey et al., 2017).

5. Recommendations

This study showed that psychological capital has an indirect effect on positive teacher characteristics through mindfulness in teaching among Turkish primary school teachers. Although several studies pointed out strong direct relationships between psychological capital and job-related outcomes in Turkey (Demir, 2018; Kurt & Demirbolat, 2019) and worldwide (Adil & Kamal, 2019; Cheung et al., 2012; Viseu et al., 2018); this study further showed that mindfulness in teaching would have a key role in this strong relationship. With this in mind, we recommend that mindfulness in teaching can be a part of teacher education programs of the candidate teachers, and this skill can also be cultivated in teachers working in the field.

Given the more specific implications of this study, researchers should consider examining the relationships between positive characteristics in teachers, related variables, and psychological capital through different measurement tools to develop a better understanding of positive characteristics in teachers and their relationship with psychological capital. This study was carried out in a sample consisting of primary school teachers who work in Turkey. Therefore, it is considered important to renew the study in different levels of education, institutions, and cultures. Teachers, without doubt, have a significant impact on children's lives, especially in the first years of schooling. Therefore, teacher positivity should be studied further, and the characteristics of this concept should be better defined. Although this study explored the effect of mindfulness on teacher positivity processes in education, studies on the impact of students' emotional and behavioural processes will be important for the future. It is hoped that research on the effectiveness of education programs to develop mindfulness in teaching will contribute to the literature on interpersonal mindfulness.

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Appendix: Positive Teacher Scale Items (Translated from Turkish form)

1. I give lessons to a level that my students can understand
2. I prevent my students from being cut off in class by making the lesson interesting
3. I keep my students' curiosity about the lesson alive
4. I am a social person
5. I am a friendly person
6. I am a cheerful person
7. I am a talkative person
8. I am a person who radiates enthusiasm around him/her
9. I explain the subject with examples from daily life
10. I share different stories/anecdotes during the lesson
11. I give lessons by giving examples from my own life
12. I give interesting examples
13. I get my students to participate in class
14. When my students do not listen to the lesson, I warn them once in a while
15. In the lesson, I use sentences like "Listen here very carefully"
16. I solve questions at the board
17. I inquire after my students' health
18. I take care of my students' problems
19. I know my students' names
20. I guide my students
21. I support my students for their future lives