



## Preschool teachers' ability to manage problem behaviours in their classroom: can it be predicted by teacher self-efficacy and emotional literacy

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### Article Info

### ABSTRACT

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**Objective:** Management of problematic behaviours (MPB) in the classroom is one of the important components of the teaching process. It is among the issues that teachers worry about in the education process. Preschool teachers often encounter problematic behaviours as children's cognitive, emotional, and behavioural development processes in their classrooms are still incomplete. Therefore, it is important to examine preschool teachers' ability to MPB and determine the related factors. This descriptive study aims to determine the relationship of preschool teachers' ability to MPB in their classrooms to teacher self-efficacy and emotional literacy.

**Method:** The study sample consists of 381 preschool teachers (working in schools affiliated with the Ministry of National Education in different cities of Turkey). Preschool Classroom Management Scale, Emotional Literacy Scale and Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale was used to collect data. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis techniques were used to analyse the data.

**Results:** This study confirms that preschool teachers' ability in MPB in their classrooms is moderately related to emotional literacy skills. In addition, it was determined that there is a moderate relationship between the ability of preschool teachers to MPB in their classrooms and their teacher self-efficacy.

**Conclusion:** The findings draw our attention to the importance of teachers' efficacies and emotional abilities in improving schools and the general teaching environment.

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## INTRODUCTION

Teaching is a complex and multi-dimensional profession that requires many skills such as getting to know each child in the class closely, supporting them accordingly, structuring the educational environment in accordance with the characteristics of the classroom, and planning, implementing and evaluating education at the same time. A good teacher must have some competencies related to his/her field as well as some professional competencies (Akar et al., 2010). One of these professional competencies is positive classroom management skills. Classroom management skills are important in terms of both maintaining educational activities without interruption and creating a positive social and emotional atmosphere. In order to create an efficient educational environment, classroom management requires making decisions on many issues such as seating plan, determining activity times, preparing materials, setting classroom rules, and ensuring each student's participation (Emmer & Gerwels, 2005). In classroom management processes, teachers sometimes encounter problematic student behaviours in their classrooms that may negatively affect the education process. In the literature, all disturbing student behaviours that are not suitable for the classroom environment, that prevent educational activities, that negatively affect the course flow and other individuals in the classroom, and that prevent the effective use of time are defined as undesirable or problematic behaviours (Akçadağ, 2006; Başar, 2008).

Successful MPB by teachers is of great importance for the healthy execution of educational activities without interruption. However, educational studies show that MPB in the classroom is one of the most challenging tasks for teachers (Ataman, 2005; Beaudoin & Skocic-Mihic, 2018; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). The MPB in preschool classrooms appears to be a challenging and complex process for preschool teachers (Arbuckle & Little, 2004) since children continue to develop socially and emotionally; preschool classrooms are the first formal environments for children, and the frequency of behavioural problems (between 10-25% on average) is high in preschool children (Powell et al., 2003; Powell et al., 2007; Qu & Kaiser, 2003). For this reason, preschool teachers' ability to MPB is among the issues that have recently attracted researchers' attention (Carter & Van Norman, 2010; Filcheck et al., 2004). In addition, considering the fact that childhood problem behaviours may have adverse effects in the future, such as peer rejection (Carter & Van Norman, 2010; Sprague & Perkins, 2009), social behaviour problems (Uyanık Balat et al., 2008), academic failure (Dunlap et al., 2006; Powell et al., 2007; Sayal et al., 2015), an increase in the rate of involvement in crime (McCabe & Frede, 1997; Sprague & Perkins, 2009), and psychological problems (Emond et al., 2007), it becomes even more important to understand teachers' skills to manage these problematic behaviours in their classes. The prosocial classroom model developed by Jennings and Greenberg (2009) argues that teachers' social-emotional well-being and competencies have an important place in the formation of a positive classroom environment. Teacher self-efficacy is the first variable whose relationship with teachers' MPB is investigated in the study.

### *Teacher Self-Efficacy*

Bandura (1997) defined the concept of self-efficacy, which he frequently included in his social cognitive theory studies, as beliefs about what an individual can do in certain situations with what he has. The social cognitive theory argues that it determines how much effort an individual will make in a subject where self-efficacy beliefs are challenged (Usher & Pajares, 2008). Their beliefs significantly influence teachers' efforts in the teaching process about what they can do (Bandura, 1997). In fact, creating a classroom environment in which effective learning can take place largely depends on teachers' abilities and self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1993), which makes self-efficacy belief an important concept for the teaching profession. Individuals with high self-efficacy beliefs about their abilities are loyal to their goals and make sufficient effort to achieve successful results. They also view hard tasks as struggles to be accomplished, not threats to be avoided. This allows them to continue their efforts even in difficult and unclear situations. Even when they face failure in their work, they continue to struggle without giving up. They experience less stress when faced with difficulties. They achieve more successful results in their

work (Çolak et al., 2017). However, individuals with low self-efficacy tend to give up their efforts in a short time in the face of challenges and have difficulties motivating themselves. These individuals avoid challenging work and do not feel confident that they can do what is necessary for success (Bandura, 1993, 1997; Stajkovic & Luthans, 2003). The literature shows that the MPB in the classroom is among the challenging tasks for preschool teachers (Arbuckle & Little, 2004; Oliver et al., 2011). Therefore, whether preschool teachers' self-efficacy beliefs can predict their ability to deal with problem behaviours in the classroom was examined in this study.

### ***Emotional Literacy of Teachers***

Emotional literacy is an important concept within the social-emotional competence of teachers. This concept, which was first used by Steiner in the 1970s, is defined as the individual's ability to understand his/her emotions in a way that can improve his/her personal power, quality of life, as well as the quality of life of the people around him/her (Steiner, 2003, p.11). Emotional literacy skill is accepted as a source of strength that a person has in overcoming challenges (Alemdar, 2014). Emotional literacy gives the individual the ability to understand, perceive, interpret, manage, cope, and appropriately express life's social and emotional aspects. It is a collection of skills that includes social and emotional components (Weare, 2004). Although there are different categorisations of skills that emotional literacy includes in different models (Fraupel, 2003; Kandemir & Dündar, 2008; Weare, 2004, etc.), the five commonly accepted components are motivation, empathy, emotional awareness, self-regulation and social skills. These components are thought to be effective in an individual's learning, communicating, and structuring relationships in a healthy way (Alemdar, 2019). Studies show that people with high emotional literacy are those who can get along well with others, motivate themselves, empathise with other people, overcome the problems they encounter easily, and achieve success in life (Rae et al., 2005). Teaching is a profession that requires establishing intense human relations at different levels, such as students, parents, colleagues and administrators. Teachers are faced with challenging situations from time to time in these intense human relationships. MPB is one of these challenging situations. For this reason, this study examines whether preschool teachers' emotional literacy skills can predict their ability to MPB in the classroom.

This study addresses the following research question based on the information given above: "Does teacher self-efficacy and emotional literacy predict preschool teachers' ability to MPB? The sub-research questions are as follows.

- Is there a relationship between preschool teachers' ability to MPB in their classrooms, teacher self-efficacy and emotional literacy?
- Is preschool teachers' teaching self-efficacy a significant predictor of their ability to MPB in their classroom?
- Is the emotional literacy of preschool teachers a significant predictor of their ability to MPB in their classroom?

## **METHOD**

### **Study Design**

This study assumed preschool teachers' teaching self-efficacy and emotional literacy might be related to their MPB in the classroom. Although the relationships that emerge through the scales are not cause-effect relationships, the scales provide results that could be useful in predicting various situations related to one variable using another variable (Karasar, 2005). Therefore, the relational survey model used in cross-sectional studies was considered a suitable model for this study. Turkish preschool teachers' ability of MPB in the classroom was considered the outcome variable while teaching self-efficacy and emotional literacy skills were determined as predictive variables.

## Participants

The necessary application permits for the research were obtained from the Ordu Provincial Directorate of National Education with a permit numbered 18802389-44-E.26107481. In addition, firstly, teachers were informed about the research and those who volunteered to participate were included in the study. Teachers were asked to read and mark the part on the form in that they were informed about the research and voluntarily participated before proceeding with the filling of the measurement tools. Research participants' rights have been protected in accordance with the principle of confidentiality. According to the Turkish Ministry of Education 2019-2020 statistics, the number of preschool teachers working in public and private schools is 56218. In determining the sample size of the study, the sample size calculation method based on the target population prepared by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) was taken as a basis. In accordance with this method, the sufficient sample size that can represent the target population of 50.000 and over is 381 participants. The study sample consisted of 381 teachers working in any state-owned or private preschools in Turkey based on this criterion. 68 of the preschool teachers participating in the study are male (17.8%) and 313 (82.2%) are female. Their average age is 36.38 (SD = 5.72).

## Instruments

The Classroom Management Scale for Preschool Teachers (Uyanık Balat et al., 2011), Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (Gedik, 2015), and Emotional Literacy Scale (Alemdar, 2019) were used to collect data.

***Classroom Management Scale for Preschool Teachers:*** It was used to measure preschool teachers' ability to MPB in the classroom. This scale is a self-assessment tool through which teachers evaluate their classroom management skills. The scale was developed by Uyanık Balat et al. (2011). It consists of five subscales. Within the scope of this study, only the sub-scale of "ability to MPB in the classroom" was used. The scale is a 5-point Likert type scale and the items are scored between 1 and 5 (5- I agree, 1- I disagree). This sub-scale includes four items. The Cronbach's alpha of the scale was calculated as .78 in this study.

***Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale:*** In determining the teaching self-efficacy of preschool teachers, the "Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale", which was adapted into Turkish by Çapa et al. (2005) and whose psychometric properties were evaluated by Gedik (2015), was used. There are a total of 24 questions on the scale. The responses are scored on a 5-point Likert type scale ranging from 'never' to 'always'. The total score that can be obtained from the scale ranges from 24 to 120. High scores indicate high self-efficacy. In the study conducted by Gedik (2015), the Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale was calculated as .89.

***Emotional Literacy Scale:*** The scale, which was developed by Alemdar in 2019, was used to determine the emotional literacy levels of preschool teachers. It consists of 31 questions scored on a 5-point Likert scale (1-Not Suitable for me, 5 = Completely suitable for me). The scale includes five sub-scales: motivation, empathy, self-regulation, emotional awareness and social skills. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients of the sub-scales calculated according to the reliability analysis results of the scale conducted by Alemdar (2019) are as follows: .70 for motivation, .60 for empathy, .70 for self-regulation, .71 for emotional awareness, and .77 for social skills.

## Procedure

The data were collected by the researcher during the seminar periods when teachers from preschool teachers working in schools affiliated with the Ministry of National Education come together according to their branches and receive in-service training. The researcher gave information about the purpose of the research and explained to the participants that participation was voluntary. Five hundred scales were distributed in total and 381 were filled in and returned, with a response rate of about 76.2%. It took 25

min on average to complete the scales. All the participants were assured that the data would be kept confidential and used only for research purposes.

### Ethics committee approval

The necessary ethics committee permissions for the research were obtained from the Girne American University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee with the decision numbered 5.21.83.

### Statistical Analysis

This study examined the relationships between the variables using the Pearson correlation analysis. In relational analyses, according to Cohen (1992), correlation coefficients  $\geq .10$  indicate low,  $\geq .30$  a medium, and  $\geq .50$  a large association. Multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the predictive power of preschool teachers' teaching self-efficacy and emotional literacy of the ability to MPB in their classroom. Prior to this analysis, the data were evaluated in terms of the assumptions required for regression analysis. First, extreme values among the data were evaluated according to Cook's distance criterion. The criterion had a value less than 1 (Cook, 1977). It was seen that all the values were below 1 and thus, there was no extreme value in the data. Then, the Skewness and Kurtosis values were examined to determine whether the data showed normal distribution. It was required that the skewness and kurtosis values of the data should be between  $+1.96$  and  $-1.96$  (Büyüköztürk, 2006), which is the criteria for normal distribution. In the data set, the skewness values were between  $-0.951$  and  $0.322$ , and the kurtosis values were between  $-0.769$  and  $0.738$ , which both point to normal distribution. In addition, the tolerance and VIF values of the data were examined for the multicollinearity problem. When the VIF value is equal to or greater than 10 and the tolerance values are less than 0.2, the model has a multicollinearity problem (Pallant, 2005). The VIF (values between 1.281-1.859) and tolerance values (values between 0.538-0.781) examined in the data set within the scope of the study showed that there was no multicollinearity problem. Then, multiple regression analysis was employed. IBM statistics 21.0 package program was used for the calculations.

### FINDINGS

The descriptive analysis results and the Cronbach's alpha values showing the reliability results for the measurement tools are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics

	Number of Items	Score range	Mean	SD	Alpha coefficient
1. Teaching self-efficacy (TSE)	24	24-120	106.48	9.23	.74
2. Emotional literacy (EL)					
<i>Motivation (M)</i>	7	7-35	29.98	3.17	.72
<i>Empathy (E)</i>	4	4-20	15.52	1.74	.69
<i>Self-regulation (SR)</i>	6	6-30	25.52	2.42	.76
<i>Emotional awareness (EA)</i>	6	6-30	24.34	2.77	.73
<i>Social skills (SS)</i>	8	8-40	31.61	3.89	.79
3. Ability to MPB in their classroom	4	4-20	16.14	2.31	.81

Abbreviations: MPB= Manage problem behaviours

When Table 1 is examined, it is seen that preschool teachers' mean teaching self-efficacy score is 106.48 (Sd = 9.23). As far as emotional literacy skills are concerned, their mean motivation score was found to be 29.98 (Sd = 3.17) and their mean empathy score was found as 15.52 (Sd = 1.74). On the other hand, the emotional awareness mean score was 24.34 (Sd = 2.77) and the social skills mean score was 31.61 (Sd = 3.89). The teachers' ability to MPB in their classroom was found to be 16.14 (Sd = 2.31). Considering the number of items and the minimum and maximum possible scores of the measurement tools, it was seen that the scores of preschool teachers' self-efficacy, emotional literacy and ability to MPB in their classroom were high. The Cronbach's alpha values of the measurement tools calculated within the scope of this study are between .69 and .81, indicating that the measurement tools are reliable.

To examine the first research question, we examined intercorrelations between the ability of preschool teachers to MPB in their classroom, self-efficacy and emotional literacy skills as presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Relations between variables (n=381)

	M	E	SR	EA	SS	MPB
1. Teaching self-efficacy (TSE)	.58**	.39*	.42*	.35*	.40*	.41*
2. Emotional literacy (EL)						
<i>Motivation (M)</i>	1.000	.34*	.52**	.28	.22	.42*
<i>Empathy (E)</i>		1.000	.21	.34*	.29	.35*
<i>Self-regulation (SR)</i>			1.000	.30*	.35*	.42*
<i>Emotional awareness (EA)</i>				1.000	.63**	.36*
<i>Social skills (SS)</i>					1.000	.34*
3. Ability to MPB in their classroom						1.000

Abbreviations: MPB= Manage problem behaviours; \*low level of relationship and \*\*moderate relationship

When Table 2 is examined, a moderate positive significant relationship (.41) was found between the ability of preschool teachers to MPB in their classroom and their self-efficacy. The relationships between preschool teachers' ability to MPB in their classroom and emotional literacy skills of motivation, empathy, self-regulation, emotional awareness and social skills are .42, .35, .42, .36 and .34, respectively. All the relationships are moderate and positive (p<.05 for all).

**Table 3.** Predictors of preschool teachers' ability of MPB in their classroom

	Unstandardised		Bootstrapping BCa %95 CI		Standardised	
	B	SE	Lower	Upper	Beta	T
Constant	-2.105	1.410	-5.061	.743		-1.492*
1. Teaching self-efficacy (TSE)	.028	.014	.019	.078	.112	2.011*
2. Emotional literacy (EL)						
<i>Motivation (M)</i>	.118	.041	.013	.174	.162	2.885**
<i>Empathy (E)</i>	.205	.064	.030	.296	.154	3.179**
<i>Self-regulation (SR)</i>	.186	.050	.015	.237	.194	3.702**
<i>Emotional awareness (EA)</i>	.097	.048	.001	.206	.116	2.033*
<i>Social skills (SS)</i>	.045	.035	.007	.151	.076	1.312
R=.564      R <sup>2</sup> adj=.307      F <sub>(6,374)</sub> =29.089;p= 0.000			*p<0.05		**p<0.01	

Abbreviations: MPB= Manage problem behaviors

When the regression model in Table 3 is examined in terms of significance, it is seen that the model established to reveal how much teaching self-efficacy and emotional literacy skills can explain preschool teachers' ability to MPB in class is significant (R= 0.56; R<sup>2</sup>adj=0.31; p<0.001). Preschool teachers' teaching self-efficacy and emotional literacy skills account for 31% of the variance related to their ability to MPB in class.

When the t-test results regarding the significance of the regression coefficients are examined, it is seen that teaching self-efficacy and emotional literacy skills of motivation, empathy, self-regulation and emotional awareness are significant predictors of preschool teachers' ability to MPB in class, while teachers' social skills are not a significant predictor of this ability. According to the standardised regression coefficient, the relative order of importance of predictor variables in terms of preschool teachers' ability to MPB in their classroom is as follows; (1) self-regulation, (2) motivation, (3) emotional awareness, (4) empathy, (5) teaching self-efficacy. According to the multiple regression analysis results, the mathematical model for preschool teachers' ability to MPB in class is as follows.

$$\text{Ability to MPB in their classroom} = -2.105 + 0.205 * \text{Empathy} + 0.186 * \text{Self-regulation} + 0.118 * \text{Motivation} + 0.097 * \text{Emotional awareness} + 0.028 * \text{Teaching self-efficacy}$$

## DISCUSSION

In the present study, it has been hypothesised that preschool teachers' ability to MPB in the classroom can be related to teacher self-efficacy and emotional literacy. Some major findings emerged from this study. Firstly, correlation analysis showed that teachers' ability to MPB in the classroom was related to their emotional literacy and teacher self-efficacy. Additionally, the results of multiple regression analysis revealed that preschool teachers' emotional literacy and teacher self-efficacy could be used to predict their ability to MPB in the classroom.

The first result of the study is that there are moderate positive relationships between preschool teachers' ability to MPB in their classrooms and emotional literacy skills such as motivation, empathy, self-regulation, emotional awareness and social skills. Besides, there are moderate positive relationships between preschool teachers' ability to MPB in their classrooms and teacher self-efficacy, too. This finding highlights the importance of some skills related to the teacher himself/herself (e.g. self-efficacy skills, emotional literacy) in the MPB experienced in preschool classrooms. For this reason, it is thought that supporting the personal abilities of preschool teachers can be beneficial in classroom MPB.

The second result of the study is that preschool teachers' self-efficacy is a significant predictor of their ability to MPB in class. Studies conducted in the last two decades indicate that teaching self-efficacy can affect teachers' in-class performance and their relationship with students (Gibbs & Powell, 2012; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). However, a limited number of studies have shown the relationship between teacher self-efficacy and MPB in class (Abu-Tineh et al., 2011; Babaođlan & Korkut, 2010). The current studies have not been conducted with preschool teachers. Studies on teaching self-efficacy suggest that teachers with high levels of self-efficacy have improved communication skills (Kesiciođlu & Gűven, 2014) and problem-solving skills (Yenice, 2012) and adopt democratic values in the classroom (Almog & Shechtman, 2007; Shechtman, 2002). On the other hand, teachers with low self-efficacy have been found to set strict rules in the classroom and resort to traditional methods such as punishment when faced with any problem behaviour (Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990). Teaching self-efficacy is a significant predictor of the ability to MPB in class in this study may be the advanced communication and problem-solving skills of teachers with high teaching self-efficacy, their democratic attitudes, and their avoidance of strict rules and punishment. In addition, as stated in the literature, teachers with high teaching self-efficacy establish closer relationships with students (e.g., Hamre et al., 2008; Mashburn et al., 2006), and these close relationships increase the effect of teachers on student behaviours (Hamre et al., 2008; Poulou, 2017). The finding of this study regarding the predictive power of teaching self-efficacy may be attributed to the close relationships established by teachers with high teaching self-efficacy with their students.

The third result of the study is that preschool teachers' self-regulation, motivation, emotional awareness and empathy skills are significant predictors of their ability to MPB in their classroom. The increasing number of students exhibiting problem behaviours in schools (Stoiber, 2011) necessitates research to focus on students who have difficulties and determine which teachers' social and emotional characteristics are related to coping with students' problem behaviours (Poulou, 2017). Teachers' emotions affect their students' cognition, motivation, behaviour and themselves in the educational environment (Goroshit, & Hen, 2016; Poulou & Norwich, 2000; Roorda e al., 2011). Children's problem behaviours are emotionally challenging for teachers and, if not managed well, they can turn the classroom into a chaotic environment (Arbuckle & Little, 2004; Friedman-Krauss et al., 2014). A teacher with a high level of emotional literacy can skilfully establish relationships with students, empathise with them, analyse how to act by controlling their emotions in case of any problem, and make the best decision thanks to the self-regulation, motivation, emotional awareness and empathy skills that emotional literacy includes (McAllister & Irvine, 2000; Rae et al., 2005; Poulou, 2017). The finding that emotional literacy skills of self-regulation, motivation, emotional awareness, and empathy predict preschool teachers' ability to MPB in class may be related to the fact that teachers exhibit these behaviours.

### **Conclusion**

This study is the first study to reveal whether preschool teachers' teaching self-efficacy and emotional literacy can predict their ability to MPB in class. The findings contribute to our understanding of preschool teacher education and in-service training and draw our attention to the importance of teachers' efficacies and emotional abilities in improving schools and the general teaching environment. In the light of the research results, it is believed that organising in-service training to improve preschool teachers' teaching self-efficacy and emotional literacy could develop their ability to MPB in-class. Preparing content that supports teaching self-efficacy and emotional literacy should also be taken into account in programs that train preschool teachers. In addition, the findings revealed that teaching self-efficacy and teachers' emotional literacy account for 31% of the ability of preschool teachers to MPB in the classroom. However, there is still 69% which could not yet be explained. Therefore, there is a need for new studies to determine the factors that may be related to the ability to MPB in their classroom.

### **Limitations**

There are some limitations of this study. The measurement tools used in collecting data in the study are self-assessment tools and include an assessment based on teachers' own statements. This limitation may be eliminated by conducting future studies using different data collection methods and qualitative data.

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### **Conflict of Interests**

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest.

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