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EFL Instructors' Perceptions of Work-Related Flow

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Abstract: Teachers with a highly positive perception of their professional life are likely to perform their job better. The present study investigates EFL instructors' perceptions ofwork-related flow. It focuses on the effect of gender and teaching experience on work-related flow. 120 English language instructors working at three different universities took part in the study. The Work-related Flow Inventorywas administered to the instructors to collect data about their perceptions of work-related flow in their work place. This inventory is composed of 12 7-point items in two subscales; that is, motivation for work-relatedflow and motivation for seeking work-related enjoyment. The subscale of motivation for work-related flow consisted of 6 items and motivation for seeking work-related enjoyment consisted of 6 items. The overall Inventorywas found to be highly reliable (12 items; $\alpha = .92$). The mean score for the participants was calculated to be 55,43. An independent samples t-test was conducted to examine whether there was a statistically significant difference between males and females in relation to their overall work-related flow. There was not a significant difference between the mean scoreof the males (M=55,70, SD=13,60) and females (M=54,60, SD=15,40); $t(106) = .390$, $p = .698$. Similarly, an analysis of variance showed that the participants' overall scores did not differ with respect to their experience, $F(105) = .114$, $p = .892$. These results imply that teachers might experience work flow at any period during their professional life.

Key words: Work-Related Flow · Motivation · EFL Instructors · Gender · Teaching Experience

INTRODUCTION

As a significant stakeholder of educational activities, teachers are highly influential in educational settings. Therefore, their well-being while they are performing their jobs is extremely important. Flow is one of the factors that can create some sort of well-being in work settings. Flow experiences occur in situations characterized by challenges and matching skills. When this is applied to professional contexts, it means that employees can experience flow when their job challenges match their professional skills. In addition, job resources make positive contributions to motivation and performance [1]. In the broadest sense, when teachers experience flow, they are often motivated to work, absorbed in and enjoy their teaching. Elliot [2] states that flow experience among teachers can result in self-growth and self-knowledge. Similarly, learners might also experience flow. Those learners who experience flow at school enjoy their work and experience a sense of achievement when they perform tasks [3]. Experiencing flow also helps learners boost their motivation [4].

Quite a few researchers have studied flow in teachers and learners in educational environments (Windberg and Hedman [5], Bakker, [1]; Garland,[6]; Kopacevic, Rogulja, [7] and Tomic, Lori, [8], Smith, Lloyd and Smith, [9]; Beard and Hoy, MacNeill and Cavanagh, [10]). However, these studies focused on fields other than language teaching. Since there have been very few attempts to study work-related flow in foreign language teaching contexts (Tardy and Snyder, 2004; Senturk, 2012), our knowledge of work-related flow in foreign language education with respect to teachers is largely based on very limited data. Therefore, the present study aims to investigate EFL instructors' experience of flow in their workplace. With this aim in mind, the researchers tried to investigate how EFL teachers perceive flow in their work place. Before elaborating on methodological

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issues, the paper deals with the concept of flow in the next section and gives a brief outline of the studies carried out in educational settings in general and foreign language teaching contexts in particular.

Background to the Study: The level of involvement in what people are doing and whether they seek enjoyment in what they do might be influential in how that activity is perceived. This is closely related with what psychologists call "work-related flow." Csikszentmihalyi [11] defined "flow" as "the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of it" (p. 4). Flow is a peak experience that can emerge in a situation in which there is activity (Csikszentmihalyi,) [12]. That kind of experience merges action and awarenessand "people become so involved in what they are doing that the activity becomes spontaneous, almost automatic" (Csikszentmihalyi), [11]. Bakker [12] defines flow as "a state of consciousness where people become totally immersed in an activity and enjoy it intensely. Similarly, Fagerlind, Gustavvson, Johansson and Ekberg define flow as "an experience of enjoyment, intrinsic motivation and absorption, which may occur in situations involving high challenges and high skill utilization."

According to Csikszentmihalyi, flow experiences can emerge in situations that are characterized by "clear goals, immediate feedback, challenges, matching skills, concentration and focus, control, loss of self-consciousness, transformation of time and the perception that an activity is worth doing for its own sake" (Cited in Windberg and Hedman, p. 271). These definitions of flow highlight some concepts such as enjoyment, peak experience, absorption and intrinsic motivation. Therefore, flow can be defined as a peak experience that requires enjoyment, absorption and intrinsic motivation (Bakker).

There are three significant indicators of flow. First, work enjoyment requires an "autotelic personality", which is the ability to create flow experiences even in hihgly barren environments (Csikszentmihalyi) and 'autotelic activity' which is a self-contained activity, in which the activity of doing it is the reward rather than an expectation of any future benefit (Warren). In an autotelic experience or flow, alienation gives way to involvement and enjoyment replaces boredom (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992). Second, absorption refers to a total immersion in an activity. It is a state of total concentration on the work (Bakker) [1]. The final predictor of work-related flow is intrinsic motivation which refers to the need to perform a work-related activity with a purpose of satisfaction and pleasure (Deci and Ryan, cited in Salanova [13], Bakker and Llorens).

Besides these three core components, there are other requirements for flow, such as challenges and matching skills. The findings of a study on flow by Eisenberger, Jones, Stinglhamber, Shanock and Randall (2005) suggest that experience of high skill and challenge among employees lead to a greater positive mood, task interest; in others words, flow. Similarly, employees involved in active tasks are more likely to experience work-related flow (Fagerlind, Gustavsson, Johansson and Ekberg, 2013).

Demerouti, Bakker, Sonnentag and Fullagar found that some characteristics of flow were significantly associated with energy after work. Csikszentmihalyi expresses the importance of flow at work as "if one finds flow at work and in relations with other people, one is well on the way toward improving the quality of life as a whole" (p. 144). Csikszentmihalyi states that flow experience that is adapted to work settings can be explained by "channel model" (Cited in Salanova, Rodrigues-Sanchez, Schaufeli and Cifre). The core components of flow; that is, enjoyment, absorption and intrinsic motivation are channeled to work settings as work enjoyment, absorption and intrinsic work motivation, respectively (Bakker). In a research study with online learners, Shin found that online learners' perceptions of their level of skill and challenge are important in determining their levels of flow and flow is an indicator of their satisfaction with the course. In another study on flow, Bakker found that job resources had a positive relationship with the balance between challenges and skills and this balance was a predictor of the frequency of flow among music teachers. Similarly, another research carried out by Salanova, Bakker and Llorens on secondary school teachers suggest that personal and organizational resources facilitate work-related flow and work-related flow has a positive effect on these resources. Fagerlind [14] *et al.*, investigated work-related flow in nine Swedish organizations and found that the number of women who experienced flow was higher than that of men and that there was a positive correlation between flow and age. In contrast to this finding, Brinkhuis found that age and gender had no impact upon flow.

Several researchers studied on work-related flow in foreign language learning settings. In a research study conducted with teachers of English, Tardyand Snyder found that the concept of flow provides a tool for understanding more about teachers' practices, beliefs and values in their teaching. They also suggest that when teachers are interested in the subject matter they are teaching, they can arouse interest among students as well, which lends support to Csikszentmihalyi's argument that interests are interrelated. Egbert [15] also studied the existence of flow in foreign language classrooms, with four dimensions of flow; that is, challenge and skills, attention, interest and control. She found that flow exists in foreign languageclassrooms and teachers can facilitate flow experiences among students by developing tasks that might lead to flow.

A similar research study on these four dimensions of flow in translation in different genres (Mirlohi, Egbert and Ghonsooly) suggests that if the text to be translated provides opportunities to experience flow on the four dimensions, it is more likely that translators experience flow. Another research study carried out in an EFL setting investigated flow in speaking activities (Senturk), [16]. She found thatlearners might experience flow in speaking classes. However, students' and teachers' perceptions of flow vary according to the type of activity. Another finding of this research is that teachers can create flow experiences among students by developing tasks and activities that lead to flow.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study is a survey utilizing a scale that is composed of 12 Likert items. The Work-related Flow Inventory was administered to the instructors to collect data about their perceptions of work-related flow in their work place. The researchers hypothesized that;

- The participants flow scores will differ significantly across genders.
- The participants' flow scores will differ significantly across groups of instructors with different levels of teaching experience.

Participants: 120 English language instructors working the School of Foreign Languages at three different universities took part in the study. The participants to the study were selected through convenience sampling. That is, almost all of the EFL instructors in three Turkish universities took part in the study. Most of the participants were females (n=72) (Figure 1.). Moreover, nearly half of the participants were less experienced teachers who have taught less than five years (Figure 1). At the time of the study, nearly all of these instructors were teaching English to elementary learners as it is the case with most EFL instructors at most state universities. Though we could not do random sampling, a good majority of instructors in the province of Konya, Turkey took part in the study. That is, the findings can be generalized to the whole province.

Data Collection: An adapted version of the Work-Related Flow Scale, developed by Bakker [17], was administered to the instructors to collect data about their perceptions of work-related flow in their work place. The reduced version of the Work-Related Flow Inventory, adapted into Turkish by Yalçınkaya [18], is composed of 12 Likert items as Yalçınkaya omitted some of the items from the original inventory. Yalçınkaya validated the inventory with 86 bank employees. She carried out confirmatory factor analysis to identify the factors in the scale. Based on the results of factor analysis, there weretwo subscales in the inventory; that is, motivation for work-related flow and motivation for seeking work-related enjoyment. Both of these subscales consisted of 6 items. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of the adapted scale was found to be (12 items; α = .90) in the adaptation process. The Cronbach alpha coefficient for the overall scale was re-calculated in the present study. As it was found by Yalçınkaya (2013), the scale was found to be highly reliable (12 items; α = .92).

Data Analysis: The data were analyzed using SPSS 15.0. Descriptive statistics were calculated for each item in the survey. Moreover, independent samples ttest and one-way ANOVA were used to test whether the participants' responses differed based on gender and teaching experience.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

An independent samples t test was conducted to examine whether there was a statistically significant difference between males and females in relation to their overall work-related flow. There was not a significant difference between the mean score of the males (M=55,70, SD=13,60) and females (M=54,60, SD=15,40); t(106)=. 390, p =. 698 (Table 1).

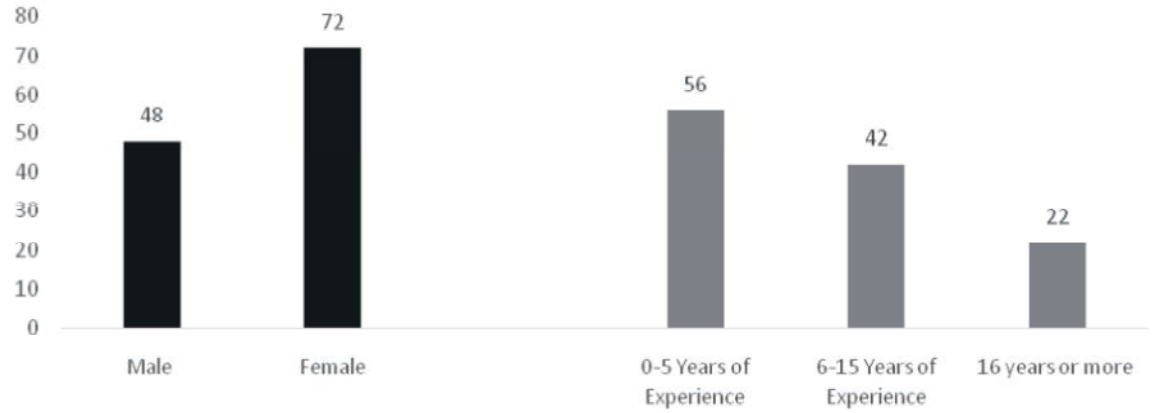

Fig. 1: Gender and the teaching experience of the participants

Table 1.t-test results for gender for the overall scale

	N	x□	*sd*	x□1- x□2	*t*	*p*
Male	44	55,6818	13,54196	1,11932	,390	,698
Female	64	54,5625	15,39210			

Table 2: Descriptive statistics for the items in the subscale ofmotivation for work-related flow

		Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Generally	Often	Almost Always	Always	Mean Out of 7
I do not think of anything apart from my job while working.	Freq.	6	19	15	12	17	32	17	4,52
	%	5,0	15,8	12,5	10,0	14,2	26,7	14,2	
I am entranced by my job.	Freq.	6	16	46	15	22	15	0	3,63
	%	5,0	13,3	38,3	12,5	18,3	12,5	0,0	
I forget everthing around me while I am working.	Freq.	0	14	27	15	28	23	13	4,48
	%	0	11,7	22,5	12,5	23,3	19,2	10,8	
I am totally absorbed in what I do while working.	Freq.	0	12	14	12	38	28	13	4,81
	%	0	10,0	11,7	10,0	31,7	23,3	10,8	
I would this job even if I earned less than I normally do.	Freq.	15	9	18	9	14	14	38	4,64
	%	12,5	7,5	15,0	7,5	11,7	11,7	31,7	
I am motivated by my job itself, rather than the reward that I will gain.	Freq.	2	8	17	21	27	17	28	4,88
	%	1,7	6,7	14,2	17,5	22,5	14,2	23,3	\

(See the appendix for original version of the scale [in Turkish], which was administered to the participants.)

Table 3: Descriptive statistics for the items in the subscale of motivation for seeking work-related enjoyment

		Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Generally	Often	Almost Always	Always	Mean Out of 7
Working makes me feel well.	Freq.	0	6	17	11	21	28	33	5,27
	%		5,0	14,2	9,2	17,5	23,3	27,5	
I feel happy as long as I work.	Freq.	0	6	14	11	25	31	30	5,29
	%		5,0	11,7	9,2	20,8	25,8	25,0	
I am in good spirits while I am working.	Freq.	3	6	12	11	40	27	21	5,03
	%	2,5	5,0	10,0	9,2	33,3	22,5	17,5	
I have recognized that I miss working when I am free.	Freq.	19	17	23	18	14	16	13	3,76
	%	15,8	14,2	19,2	15,0	11,7	13,3	10,8	
I work because I like working.	Freq.	2	7	21	6	30	25	29	5,05
	%	1,7	5,8	17,5	5,0	25,0	20,8	24,2	
When I am working on something, I actually do it for myself.	Freq.	0	6	35	14	23	20	22	4,68
	%	0	5,0	29,2	11,7	19,2	16,7	18,3	

Therefore, the alternate hypothesis "H_1 = The participants flow scores will differ significantly across genders" was rejected. This finding suggests that any teacher might experience flow regardless of gender. Similarly, an analysis of variance showed that the participants' overall scores did not differ with respect to their teaching experience, $F(105) = .114$, $p = .892$. These results imply that teachers might experience work flow at any period during their professional life. These findings correlate well with those of Brinkhuis (2008), who found no correlation between flow and gender or age. However, they do not support those of Fagerlind *et al*., (2013).

Taken together, these findings suggest that a great majority of EFL instructors seem to enjoy doing what they do in a university language teaching context. The mean scores for the first 4 items in Table 2 suggest that instructors experience flow to a certain extent. Moreover,

they generally enjoy what they do as a part of their profession. The responses to the fifth item indicate that instructors place emphasis on their profession itself rather than how much they earn by performing this profession. This might imply that giving teachers lower or higher salaries may not bring about higher performance at school. Moreover, teachers might experience flow regardless of their biological age in work environments with favorable conditions [19-29].

The mean scores for the first 3 items and the fifth item in Table 3 indicate that teachers enjoy what they do in their work place. They seem to have a positive view of their profession. This is thought to be highly influential in boosting intrinsic motivation and self-growth.

CONCLUSIONS

The present study investigated the impact of gender and teaching experience on the level of flow that English teachers experience. No significant difference was found between males and females in terms of their flow scores. The differences between groups of instructors with different teaching experience were not significant, either. The present study clearly has some limitations. For example, our study used opportunistic sampling as we administered the scale to instructors in only three universities. Despite its limitations, this study could be the basis of those that will be undertaken in EFL settings as regards work-related flow.

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