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# THE INFLUENCE OF TEACHER AND STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS ON STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF TURKISH EFL TEACHERS' INTERPERSONAL BEHAVIOR

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**Abstract:**
Research shows that different student and teacher characteristics affect students' perceptions of teachers' interpersonal behavior to varying degrees. Studies on interpersonal teacher behavior mostly refer to such student and teacher characteristics as gender, work experience, age, socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, as well as school affiliations and academic achievements. This study investigates several teacher and student characteristics in terms of their influence on students' perceptions of interpersonal behavior of Turkish teachers of English as a foreign language. The variables investigated are teacher experience, teacher gender, teacher age, student gender and birthplace, and student educational background and academic achievement. In addition to insights drawn from the mean scores of student perceptions, the study found significant correlations for such characteristics as teacher experience and student gender.

**Keywords:** interpersonal teacher behavior, teacher and student characteristics, QTI, MITB

## 1. Introduction

Teachers might not be aware of how diverse the make-up of their classrooms may be in terms of different teacher and student characteristics such as educational backgrounds, gender, age, ethnic identity, country of origin, academic outcomes etc. Teachers' awareness of the diversity of classrooms is very important for professional development purposes (Pantic & Wubbels, 2012). Student characteristics are relevant in terms of how they relate to interpersonal aspects of student-teacher communication due to possible implications on learning outcomes. When teachers develop interpersonal relationships with students from a multiple perspective, they are more likely to show concern, sensibility, and caring attitude to the diversity of their students' backgrounds as opposed

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to assuming homogeneity. It can be inferred that teacher-student relations are predictive of intercultural competence of teachers.

Although some studies on teaching effectiveness from the perspective of teacher-student relationships indicate different results (Roache & Lewis, 2011), it would be erroneous to assume that interpersonal teacher behavior has no impact on student outcomes and has no value for teacher training and teacher education. Appropriate teacher-student relationships are defined as one of the most important aspects of teaching profession, not a bonus teacher quality, as they can be rewarding in terms of their additive value to the instructional teacher behavior. The famous e*nds-justify-the means* aphorism is no longer viable in the modern world, even less so in educational environments where teaching and learning processes attract more and more attention of researchers into social climates of classrooms. Teachers are often reluctant to let outside observers see what goes on in their classrooms. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that what students learn in a classroom goes way beyond the subject matter. What they learn is about developing and improving social abilities and life skills while building healthy relationships with their environment. Also, they learn the importance of "internal control", empathy, trust and respect for others (Wubbels, 2011, 116). What is more, they learn internal motivation, self-confidence (Samuelsson & Samuelsson, 2017, 647), and sense of accountability (Lewis et al., 2012, 872).

Schools and classrooms, as higher-order social systems, enroll students and teachers from different socio-cultural backgrounds with their own expectations and beliefs about schools, teachers, students, and subjects taught at schools (Levy et al., 2003, 6). Just as there might be expectations of student behaviors, there are expectations of teacher behaviors. With teachers seen as role models, teacher actions, hence teaching effectiveness, are measured "*to the degree that students interpret these*" (Wubbels et al., 2015, 363). Students and teachers individually represent different social systems which are described as "*specific classroom social system(s)"* and "*also individual systems within other systems*" – schools they attend, family background, gender identity, experience, etc. (Pennings & Mainhard, 2016, 5). These "other systems" play an important role in determining how they develop perceptions of others' behaviors.

Sun et al. (2019, 1) point out that most of the studies on teacher-student interpersonal relationship have been implemented in Western cultural and educational contexts. In Turkey, interpersonal teacher behavior was researched mostly on science teachers and only a few studies targeted Turkish EFL teachers (Telli et al., 2008; Telli et al. 2007). One study on EFL teachers' interpersonal behavior revealed that, compared to other subjects, teachers were perceived to be less demanding and controlling on students (Jailani & Abdullah, 2019, 90). Another study (Telli, 2016) also found less controlling behaviors in language teachers. As for Turkish teachers across different subjects in general, researchers suggest that, compared to teachers from other cultural contexts, Turkish teachers have highly dominant and cooperative behaviors, which they attribute to the fact that Turkey is "*a high contact culture, showing more power distance and being more collectivist*" (Den Brok et al., 2009, 95). Studies investigating the relevance of various

teacher and student characteristics such as age, gender, experience, academic achievement, and socio-cultural background in terms of student perceptions of EFL teachers' interpersonal behavior are almost nonexistent.

The current study investigates the effect of teacher and student variables on teacher-student relationship with the help of the Questionnaire on Teacher Interaction (QTI) based on the Model of Interpersonal Teacher Behavior (MITB; Wubbels et al. *Discipline problems*). The interpersonal theory behind the MITB stipulates that teacher-student interpersonal relations are premised on two major behavioral dimensions, Influence and Proximity, which underline eight typical interpersonal teacher behaviors (*leadership, helpful/friendly, understanding, student freedom/responsibility, uncertain, dissatisfied, and strict*). The two dimensions are held to be fundamental modalities (Bakan, 1966) and universal descriptors (Fisher et al., 2006, 5) of all human interaction, easily transferrable to educational contexts and key to the maintenance of a healthy social climate in classrooms. In the following sections, the theoretical framework of the QTI and MITB will be presented in detail, followed by literature review on the findings of previous studies exploring interpersonal teacher behavior in terms of teacher and student characteristics, and finally, reporting on the present study's investigation of which teacher and student characteristics can meaningfully relate to students' perceptions of interpersonal behavior of Turkish EFL teachers. It hopes to provide useful insights for the professional development of teachers and for research into interpersonal domain of English language learning.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Interpersonal Theory

Gurtman (2009, 1) states that "*humans live within an interpersonal context in which our patterns of social behavior and relating – captured by words such as dependent, hostile, shy, and warm – help to define who we are as individuals*". With regard to various patterns of social relations, the Interpersonal theory (Horowitz & Strack, 2011) stipulates that communicative interactions between humans are characterized by two major dimensions: Influence and Proximity. When applied to the teaching context, the Influence dimension points to the extent of authority, power, dominance and control that teachers have over communication with students, while Proximity underscores the extent to which teachers demonstrate friendly, cooperative and helpful behavior towards students. A specific combination of these dimensions and their relevant subscales is indicative of the communicative style of teacher. According to the interpersonal theory, both dimensions are structured on a circular model that maps out interpersonal teacher behaviors "*along the circumference of the circle*" (Wubbels et al., 2015, 366). The interpersonal circle (also called *circumplex*) is a model used to explore interpersonal aspect of personality. Figure 1 presents a graphical representation of the theoretical model of Interpersonal Circle (Horowitz & Strack, 2011; Wubbels et al., 1985) with both dimensions and eight behaviors (subscales/sectors) represented in a Cartesian coordinate

system. Thus, the eight subscales represent eight typical interpersonal teacher behaviors: *leadership, helpful/friendly, understanding, student freedom/responsibility, uncertain, dissatisfied, and strict*. Teacher-student interpersonal relationship is therefore studied "*in the circular way*" (Gurtman, 2009, 9). The model describes teacher-student relationships as "*summarized perceptions of the interaction history between teachers and students*" (Sun et al., 2019, 2).

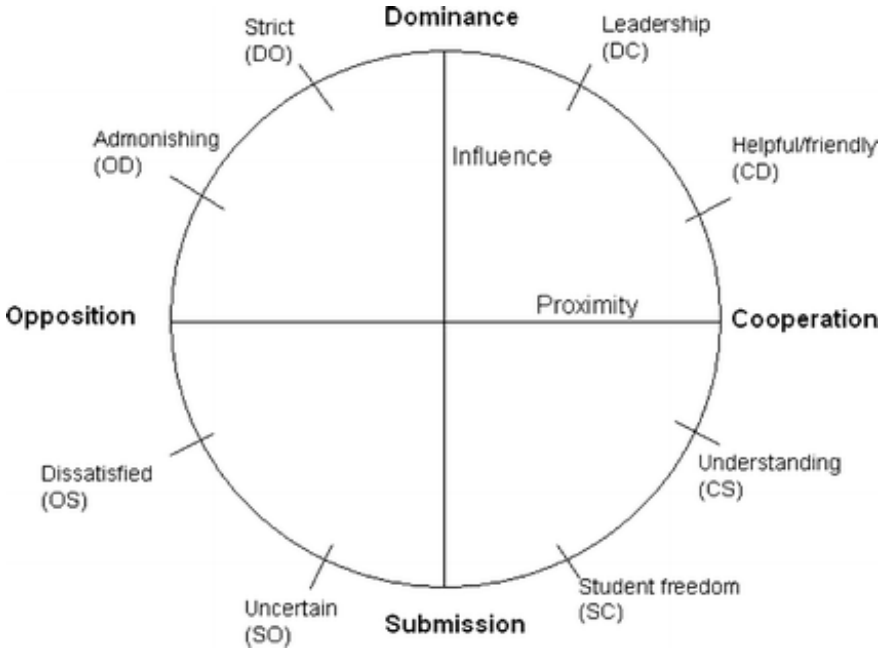


**Figure 1:** The Interpersonal Circle for Interpersonal Teacher Behavior (Den Brok, 2018, 8)

Research indicates that teacher-student interpersonal behavior translated by high amounts of Influence and Proximity positively contributes to students' cognitive and affective outcomes (Den Brok et al., 2006, 80; Telli et al., 2007, 116). Also, students and teachers seem to share a common ground on the view that Influence and Proximity are the most optimal measures of interpersonal relationship for describing communicative interactions.

The QTI (Questionnaire on Teacher Interaction) has been designed to measure interpersonal teacher behavior based on student perceptions of teacher Influence and Proximity, as well as the eight underlying teacher behaviors (Fisher et al., 1995; Wubbels et al., 1985). It helps to uncover, through the eyes of students, the key features of interpersonal space. The patterns revealed are used to indicate teachers' "*predominant interpersonal themes*" (Gurtman, 2009, 11) which further point to potential problematic areas of teacher behavior that need correction. Table 1 presents sample QTI items for the eight typical behaviors from the interpersonal circle.

**Table 1:** Sample Items for Eight QTI Scales

| Label | Sector/subscale | Sample items |
|---|---|---|
| DC | Leadership | This teacher is a good leader. |
| CD | Helpful/friendly | This teacher is friendly. |
| CS | Understanding | This teacher trusts us. |
| SC | Student freedom | We can influence this teacher. |
| SO | Uncertain | This teacher seems uncertain. |
| OS | Dissatisfied | This teacher seems dissatisfied. |
| OD | Admonishing | This teacher gets angry quickly. |
| DO | Strict | This teacher is strict. |

**Source:** adapted from Fisher et al. (1995, 17)

## 2.2 Teacher and Student Characteristics

Students and teachers having different goals, feelings, needs, and behaviors are major stakeholders of classroom communicative processes as they are likely to have an impact on the quality of classroom relationships (Pianta, 2006). Nurmi (2012, 177-197) emphasizes that alongside with individual student differences the make-up of a classroom as a whole determines the teaching context. Research indicates that in the interpersonal space these differences are "*systematic*" and follow "*a different conceptual structure than those between classes or teachers*" (Levy et al., 2003, 6). The causes of differences are partly linked to student and teacher characteristics such as age, gender, experience, socio-cultural backgrounds, educational qualifications and cognitive outcomes (Charalampous & Kokkinos, 2013, 199-202). The study found that immigrant students "*describe more proximity and less strictness*" in teachers, attributing this to "*the effects of culture on interpersonal communication*". This "*subgroup minority*" students were hence suggested to have their own "*social realities [interpreting] the classroom interaction differently compared to the non-minority students*" (200-201).

On student gender, research appears to provide sufficient evidence. Boys and girls develop different interpersonal relations with teachers due to different mechanisms they apply in dealing with interpersonal domain. According to some culture-designated gender roles, women are expected to behave in a more submissive, docile manner compared to men and hence create less problematic situations in interactions with others. Similarly, studies on classroom environment suggest that while low levels of conflict and high levels of closeness can be characteristic of females (Hamre & Pianta, 2001, 634-636), males are more prone to reveal disruptive and aggressive behaviors (e.g., verbal disrespect, violence) (Koles et al., 2013, 65). Females perceive their teachers as more dominant and cooperative than male students (Fisher et al., 2006, 18; Wubbels & Levy, 1993, 38). Levy et al. (2003, 17) suggest that female students perceive more Proximity behaviors, like helpful/friendly and understanding, while male students perceive teachers as "*more uncertain, dissatisfied, admonishing and strict*". Similar conclusions are made by Jailani and Abdullah (2019, 96), who find male students perceiving teachers as more "*uncertain, reprimanding, accommodating and dissatisfied*".

Research on interpersonal teacher behavior in terms of students' academic achievement provides inconsistent results. While some studies indicate important

positive and strong associations on Influence, Proximity, and the eight subscales (Brekelmans et al., 2002; Maulana et al., 2012; Wubbels et al., 2006), others point out that students are indifferent in their perceptions, even though they frequently describe teachers as exhibiting "*friendly, understanding, steering and enforcing behaviors*" (Jailani & Abdullah, 2019, 91-92). Passini et al. (2015, 554-555) suggest negative correlations between strict, uncertain, dissatisfied, admonishing behaviors and academic achievement; and positive correlations for leadership, helpful/friendly, understanding, and student responsibility/freedom behaviors. Likewise, there are indications of significant correlations between uncertain, reprimanding, and dissatisfied behaviors of English language teachers and students' academic scores (Jailani & Abdullah, 2019, 91-96;). Wei et al. (2009, 167) point out at important positive associations between Proximity and academic achievement. Levy et al. (2003, 23) reveal rather surprising results that better-achieving students perceive their teachers rather on the negative side of both dimensions, displaying such behaviors as "*uncertain, dissatisfied, admonishing and strict", and less on positive behaviors as "leadership, helpful/friendly, understanding and student responsibility/freedom*". The fact that the negative side of the interpersonal domain is positively related to students' academic achievement has been supported by studies that teachers with high amounts of strictness, bordering on repressiveness, enjoy the highest number of highly proficient students in their classrooms (Wubbels et al., 2006).

While teacher experience seems to have no significant impact on students' views of Proximity, it was found to have noticeable effects on student perceptions of Influence. More experienced teachers are reported to be more admonishing and stricter than less experienced teachers (Brekelmans et al., 2005; Levy et al., 2003). Levy et al. (1992, 25-26) indicate that with growing teacher experience, students perceive more Influence in terms of leadership and strictness but suggest no significant effects on Proximity perceptions. Wubbels et al. (2006, 15-17) also support the view that teacher Influence grows with experience. As for Proximity, students are believed to perceive less experienced teachers to be more cooperative and friendly.

Socio-cultural causes of perceptual differences have been reported to affect not only individual perceptions but also perceptions of whole groups. According to one of the most influential studies on intercultural cooperation (Hofstede et al., 2010), cultural organizations differ in their interpretations of the notion of subordination to legal power and authority, and also respect for hierarchical order (power distance) which are said to be individualistic and collectivistic features of a culture (Sun et al., 2019, 3). Thus, Wei et al.'s study (2015, 134) suggests that students from Asian cultures perceive teachers as strict, authoritative and dominant. Teachers of similar cultural background would be likewise expected to share a collectivist idea of a relationship where each participant is identified as a member of whole group rather than as a single individual. While collectivist approach is more specific to Eastern and Asian cultures, individualistic approach is presumed to be defining characteristic of Western cultures (Hofstede et al., 2010). Although strong cultural bonds defining people as groups, communities, and nations, are present across all cultural contexts, there might be differences in perspective.

In Eastern cultures, teachers, seen as role models and authority figures, are expected to treat their students with more motherly or fatherly affection as members of the family (Chang et al., 2011, 108, 113, 115-124), while in the West, teachers are more expected to treat students as unique individuals (Hofstede et al., 2010), with whom they can be friends and put aside formalities. Despite differences in socio-cultural situations of teachers and students, studies consistently emphasize the importance of teacher awareness of students' diversity, and their ability to act upon accordingly (Pantic & Wubbels, 2012, 451-460).

## 3. Research Questions

This study seeks to provide answers to the following research questions:

1) Are there any significant differences in students' perceptions of teachers' interpersonal behavior with respect to teachers' age, gender, educational background and experience?
2) Are there any significant differences in students' perceptions of teachers' interpersonal behavior with respect to student characteristics such as age, gender, birthplace, education, and academic achievement?

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1 Participants

After obtaining the necessary permissions to conduct the study, the QTI instrument was administered to 206 English class students of a foreign languages school at a state university in Ankara. The Turkish translation was delivered to the students for the convenience purposes in case they might not understand some of the original wordings. Quantitative methods to analyze QTI measures based on a five-point Likert scale were applied for the assessment of thirteen EFL teachers' interpersonal behaviors.

Data on student demographics such as gender, place of birth, previous education, and the higher education department to which they applied were collected. Student demographics frequencies are presented in Table 2.

During the administration of the instrument the names of the thirteen teachers investigated were kept anonymous to the researcher and coded with letters. Most of teachers were females aged between 24 – 46. Teachers' educational backgrounds were diverse with some holding bachelor degrees, others master degrees, and one holding a PhD degree. Teachers also had various degrees of experience in teaching starting from 2 years to the maximum of 20 years.

**Table 2:** Student Demographics

| Type | Sub-type | N | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Female | 106 | 51.5 |
| | Male | 100 | 48.5 |
| Birth region | Inner Anatolian | 95 | 46.3 |
| | Marmara | 28 | 13.7 |
| | Black Sea | 27 | 13.2 |
| | Mediterranean | 18 | 8.8 |
| | Aegean | 14 | 6.8 |
| | Southeast Anatolian | 5 | 2.4 |
| | East Anatolian | 9 | 4.4 |
| | Abroad | 9 | 4.4 |
| High school | Anatolian | 107 | 56.9 |
| | Private | 36 | 19.1 |
| | Science | 25 | 13.3 |
| | Basic High School | 10 | 5.4 |
| | Abroad | 7 | 3.8 |
| | Arts and Sports | 1 | 0.5 |
| | Religious | 1 | 0.5 |
| | Vocational | 1 | 0.5 |
| University department | Engineering | 124 | 61.7 |
| | Architecture | 31 | 15.4 |
| | Medical | 26 | 12.9 |
| | Education | 19 | 9.5 |
| | Equal weight | 1 | 0.5 |

### 4.2 Instrument

This study has administered the economical 48-item version of the QTI which is based on the Model for Interpersonal Teacher Behavior (MITB) developed by Wubbels et al. (1985) in the adaptation of the Leary's model (Fisher et al., 1993). Studies using the QTI to assess interpersonal teacher behavior have largely confirmed its validity and reliability across countries, including Turkey (Telli, 2016). The current study conducted psychometric data checks such as means reliabilities, discriminant validity (ICC; intra-class correlations), factor analysis and inter-scale correlations to make sure that the data aligned with the theoretical model discussed above (Leary, 1957; Wiggins, 1991). Student perception scores were aggregated into means to represent a combined view of all the students on interpersonal behavior of teachers involved in the study.

The instrument's construct validity was checked with factor analyses on scale scores to verify the independence of two dimensions, Influence and Proximity which were also tested for possible correlations. The tests confirmed the presence of a two-dimension structure for the eight scales, however, a weak negative correlation ($r$ = -.12, $p$ = .09) was also found. Factor loadings on the QTI scales are presented in Table 3. Because each class had two different teachers (the first and the second teacher), scores were computed separately.

**Table 3:** QTI Scales Factor Loadings

| | Teacher 1 | | Teacher 2 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Scale** | **Factor 1** | **Factor 2** | **Factor 1** | **Factor 2** |
| DC – Leadership | .79 | -.21 | -.89 | -.02 |
| CD – Helpful/friendly | .86 | .14 | -.83 | -.28 |
| CS – Understanding | .90 | .02 | -.83 | -.33 |
| SC – Student freedom | .33 | .73 | .36 | -.56 |
| SO – Uncertain | -.53 | .71 | .87 | -.04 |
| OS – Dissatisfied | -.80 | -.09 | .59 | .61 |
| OD – Admonishing | -.81 | -.18 | .58 | .61 |
| DO – Strict | -.63 | -.43 | .23 | .81 |

Bivariate scale correlations were calculated (Table 4) to indicate the applicability of the data to the circular structure of the QTI. The results showed that the data had the characteristic patterns fit to the circular matrix in which the neighboring scales are expected to be highly and positively correlated, with correlations growing weaker and weaker as scales move apart until high and negative correlations are reached between the opposite scales of the interpersonal circle (Gurtman & Pincus, 2000).

**Table 4:** Bivariate Scales Correlations

| **Scale** | **DC** | **CD** | **CS** | **SC** | **SO** | **OS** | **OD** | **DO** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DC – Leadership | - | | | | | | | |
| CD – Helpful/friendly | .72** | - | | | | | | |
| CS – Understanding | .75** | .78** | - | | | | | |
| SC – Student freedom | .22** | .39** | .36** | - | | | | |
| SO – Uncertain | -.46** | -.29** | -.40** | .18** | - | | | |
| OS – Dissatisfied | -.44** | -.60** | -.63** | -.19** | .34** | - | | |
| OD – Admonishing | -.46** | -.61** | -.70** | -.27** | .29** | .68** | - | |
| DO – Strict | -.28** | -.50** | -.45** | -.31** | .10 | .61** | .62** | - |

**Note:** n = 206. ** p < .01.

Discriminant validity of the data was verified on the variance percentages at the class level in order to check how well the scales discriminated between classes (Table 5). The findings confirmed the discriminant ability of the scales to distinguish between classes with correlations ranging between 0.12 – 0.43. The coefficients of the Intra-class correlations (Snijders & Bosker, 1999) pointed at "*the amount of variance at the class level compared to the total amount of variance present*". Cronbach's alpha coefficients of internal consistency were from medium strong (DO=0.76; SC=0.79) to strong (CD=0.91; CS=0.90) (Table 5).

**Table 5:** QTI Scale Reliabilities and Intra-Class Correlation

| Scales | $\alpha$ Reliability | ICC |
|---|---|---|
| DC – Leadership | .86 | .26 |
| CD – Helpful/friendly | .91 | .43 |
| CS – Understanding | .90 | .40 |
| SC – Student freedom | .79 | .12 |
| SO – Uncertain | .82 | .25 |
| OS – Dissatisfied | .86 | .29 |
| OD – Admonishing | .86 | .33 |
| DO – Strict | .76 | .13 |

**Note:** The $\alpha$ values under .1 were suppressed.

Despite the weak correlation between the two dimensions, the study proceeded with the analyses based on its reliability, discriminant validity and bivariate correlation results.

### 4.3 Analyses

In answer to the two research questions, a series of statistical tests were run based on students' perceptions of interpersonal teacher behavior. Thus, the checks were conducted on the bivariate correlations among the demographic information of teachers such as gender, age, educational background and experience, and the scale scores of student perceptions. Likewise, bivariate correlations were computed between the demographic information of students and the scale scores of student perceptions. Next, multiple regression analyses were carried out with student achievement as the dependent variable and the two dimensions and eight behaviors as predictors. To get better description of the variables, eight scales mean scores and dimension mean scores based on students' birthplace, educational backgrounds, and university department were computed. The scores were scaled from 0-1.

The coding of different categories was conducted in the following manner. Students' birthplace: BS = Black Sea region, MR = Marmara region, AE = Aegean region, MD = Mediterranean region, IA = Inner Anatolian region, EA = Eastern Anatolian region, SA = Southeastern Anatolian region, and AB = Abroad (students from foreign countries). All birthplace regions, except AB = Abroad, stand among seven major administrative regions of Turkey. Students' educational background: AN = Anatolian high school, RL = Religious high school, SC = Science high school, VO = Vocational high school, AS = Arts/Sports high school, PR = Private high school, BS = Basic high school, and AB = Abroad (high schools attended in other countries). All educational background data, except AB = Abroad, is based on different high school systems registered with the Turkish national system of education. Higher education departments to which students applied: ED = Educational sciences department, AR = Architecture department, EN = Engineering department, ME = Medical school, and EW = Equal Weight (selective orientation).

## 5. Findings

### Research Question 1

Table 6 gives an overview of teacher variables such as gender, age, degree, and experience, analyzed for effects on student perceptions of interpersonal teacher behavior.

**Table 6:** Bivariate Correlations Among Demographic Information of Teachers and Scale Scores Based on Student Perceptions

| Demographics/Scale | G | A | D | E |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | - | | | |
| Age | .00 | - | | |
| Degree | .36 | .10 | - | |
| Experience | .07 | .92** | .34 | - |
| DC – Leadership | .34 | -.54 | .24 | -.51 |
| CD – Helpful/friendly | .13 | -.31 | .18 | -.32 |
| CS – Understanding | .30 | -.34 | .23 | -.34 |
| SC – Student freedom | -.01 | .05 | .42 | -15 |
| SO – Uncertain | -.23 | .59 | .32 | .57 |
| OS – Dissatisfied | -.20 | .46 | .19 | .47 |
| OD – Admonishing | -.15 | .49 | .17 | .56 |
| DO – Strict | .06 | .58 | .35 | .69* |

**Note:** * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. G = gender, A = age, D = degree, E = experience. Gender was dummy-coded (0 = males, 1 = females), Degree was coded 1-3 (1 = Bachelor's, 2 = Master's, 3 = PhD).

Two statistically significant correlations were found in terms of teacher variables. The first correlation between age and experience is of no research value, as it was expected that with age experience will grow too. As for the second significant correlation, it was found that teacher experience is strongly correlated with teacher strictness (DO). In other words, with growing teacher experience, student perceptions of teacher strictness also increase. This is in keeping with previous research that more experienced teachers are perceived to be stricter and even repressive in interpersonal relations with students.

### Research Question 2

In response to the second research question, differences in perceptions were explored with respect to such student variables as birthplace, gender, educational background and higher education departments. Table 7 reports on the multiple regression analysis run to predict student achievements in terms of Influence (DS) and Proximity (CO), with academic achievement taken as the dependent variable and dimensions as predictors. Looking at the results, predictors DS and CO failed to statistically predict the student achievement, $F(2, 200) = 1.76$, $p = .17$, $R^2 = .02$.

**Table 7:** Multiple Regression Analysis for Student Achievement and Two Dimensions

| Variable | B | SE | R | $R^2$ | $SE_{est}$ | β |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (Constant) | 81.31 | (2.22) | | | | |
| DS – Influence | 10.69 | (7.30) | | | | .11 |
| CO – Proximity | -4.29 | (2.99) | .13 | .02 | 9.11 | -.10 |

**Note:** Adjusted $R^2$ = .01. $F(2, 200) = 1.76$, $p = .17$.

With students' academic achievement taken as the dependent variable and eight behavior scales as predictors, the analysis also failed to statistically predict student achievement on the eight subscales (Table 8).

**Table 8:** Multiple Regression Analysis for Student Achievement and Eight Behavior Scales

| Variable | *B* | *SE* | *R* | $R^2$ | $SE_{est}$ | *β* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (Constant) | 81.37 | 7.53 | | | | |
| DC – Leadership | 5.21 | 9.02 | | | | .08 |
| CD – Helpful/friendly | 8.49 | 7.31 | | | | .15 |
| CS – Understanding | -15.77 | 9.95 | | | | -.25 |
| SC – Student freedom | -.76 | 4.87 | | | | -.01 |
| SO – Uncertain | -.88 | 9.17 | | | | -.01 |
| OS – Dissatisfied | -14.50 | 8.10 | | | | -.21 |
| OD – Admonishing | 9.88 | 8.03 | | | | .15 |
| DO – Strict | 10.93 | 6.68 | .23 | .05 | 9.09 | .16 |

**Note:** Adjusted $R^2$ = .01. F(8, 194) = 1.33, p = .23.

Table 9 presents bivariate correlations for such student demographics as gender and age. No correlations were found for the age variable which is considered normal since students' ages were rather similar. As for the gender, it revealed some significant statistical correlations. It was found that female students scored higher EFL teachers on leadership and helpful/friendly scales than male students, which is in keeping with previous research that girls perceive teachers as more dominant and cooperative than boys. Another statistically significant correlation was found with females perceiving less uncertainty in teachers. This finding makes sense considering that uncertainty is located on the opposite side of the leadership scale.

**Table 9:** Bivariate Correlations Between Student Demographics and Scale Scores

| Demographics/Scale | G | A |
|---|---|---|
| Gender | - | |
| Age | -.16* | - |
| DC – Leadership | .15* | -.01 |
| CD – Helpful/friendly | .14* | -.03 |
| CS – Understanding | .07 | -.01 |
| SC – Student freedom | -.08 | -.10 |
| SO – Uncertain | -.20** | -.10 |
| OS – Dissatisfied | .04 | -.06 |
| OD – Admonishing | -.06 | -.05 |
| DO – Strict | .04 | -.00 |

**Note:** * p < .05. ** p < .01. G = gender, A = age. Gender was dummy-coded (0 = males, 1 = females).

As for students' birthplace, education background and higher education department, the study explored these variables in terms of their mean scores. Table 10 reports scale and dimension mean scores based on students' birthplace.

**Table 10:** Scale and Dimension Mean Scores Based on Students' Birthplace

| Scale/Dimension | BS | MR | AE | MD | IA | EA | SA | AB |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DC – Leadership | .83 | .81 | .83 | .80 | .80 | .87 | .90 | .85 |
| CD – Helpful/friendly | .85 | .82 | .82 | .84 | .80 | .82 | .88 | .81 |
| CS – Understanding | .86 | .85 | .85 | .86 | .85 | .90 | .94 | .85 |
| SC – Student freedom | .38 | .38 | .33 | .43 | .39 | .43 | .37 | .47 |
| SO – Uncertain | .07 | .11 | .06 | .13 | .10 | .09 | .05 | .12 |
| OS – Dissatisfied | .13 | .15 | .16 | .13 | .14 | .14 | .13 | .18 |
| OD – Admonishing | .12 | .13 | .13 | .14 | .13 | .12 | .03 | .18 |
| DO – Strict | .25 | .30 | .25 | .28 | .27 | .31 | .18 | .38 |
| DS – Influence | .22 | .21 | .24 | .18 | .19 | .22 | .21 | .22 |
| CO – Proximity | .65 | .60 | .61 | .63 | .61 | .65 | .74 | .58 |

**Note:** The scores are scaled from 0-1. Birthplaces: BS = Black Sea, MR = Marmara, AE = Aegean, MD = Mediterranean, IA = Inner Anatolian, EA = Eastern Anatolian, SA = Southeastern Anatolian, AB = Abroad.

Scores reveal that in general EFL teachers are perceived as moderately dominant and strongly cooperative. However, a closer look at scores reveals that students from South Eastern Anatolian region of Turkey rated teachers the highest on leadership, helpful/friendly and understanding behavior, and the lowest on uncertain, admonishing and strict behaviors. As for dimension scores, although ratings on Influence are similar to the rest of the sample, Proximity perceptions were the highest for this particular group of students. Also, it was found that, compared to students born in Turkey, students born abroad, who came to study in Turkey, perceived Turkish teachers of English as slightly more dissatisfied, admonishing and strict. The Proximity score they gave to teachers is relatively the lowest in the sample.

In terms of students' educational backgrounds, different categories of previously attended high schools were taken and used as a variable to see for any effects on students' perceptions of interpersonal teacher behavior. However, the study could not proceed with the analysis since the distribution among the sample was very unequal and much of the data was missing in this respect. Likewise, no differences in students' perceptions of teachers' interpersonal behavior were noticed in terms of higher education department since most of scores were very similar.

## 6. Discussion

This study aimed to find noteworthy associations between student perceptions of Turkish EFL teachers' interpersonal behavior and a number of teacher/student characteristics. Although the tests failed to find significant correlations on a number of scales, two variables such as teacher experience and student gender were on the contrary found to reveal statistically significant correlations. Together with the insights based on

mean scores data, these results are considered valuable as they contribute to the overall understanding of interpersonal domain of EFL teachers in Turkey.

Teacher experience was found to have statistically significant impact on students' views of teacher strictness behavior. This is consistent with earlier research pointing out at more rigid relations between more experienced teachers and students in contrast with less experienced teachers. As for the rest of scales, it appears that on the basis of mean scores the more teachers are experienced the less students perceive leadership, helpful/friendly, understanding and student freedom behaviors. Students appear to give higher values to younger and less experienced teachers on all these scales. Studies usually identify these teacher behaviors as optimal behaviors for maintaining healthy teacher-student relationships. The fact that younger teachers appear to give students more freedom and responsibility and are perceived as more caring and close to them is also in keeping with earlier studies. This is probably due to their being in similar age range with their students. As to the gender variable, although no significant differences were found in terms of teacher characteristics, which is normal considering that female teachers were predominant in the sample, it seems students perceive more dominant and cooperative behavior in female teachers than in male teachers whom they perceived with slightly higher amounts of negative behaviors such as uncertain (SO), dissatisfied (OS) and admonishing (OD).

Failing to predict interpersonal teacher behavior in terms of students' academic achievement is partly in line with some previous research indicating that both well-achieving and poorly-achieving students remain indifferent in their perceptions of interpersonal teacher behavior. However, analysis of score patterns also leads to suggest that, in comparison to Proximity, the Influence dimension seems to be more relevant to students' academic outcomes. This runs parallel to previous research that student achievement depends rather on teacher controlling behavior than on cooperative behavior. It can be inferred from here that teacher Influence is more critical than teacher Proximity in terms of students' cognitive outcomes. In this respect, teachers can be consulted and trained on the best strategies they might need to adopt in order to appear more dominant in their relations with students. It will help them give the necessary impression that everything is under control and they can effectively handle classroom management issues.

The student gender characteristic was found to have statistical significance in terms of its impact on such teacher behaviors as leadership, helpful/friendly and uncertain. This finding aligns well with previous research indicating that female students perceive teachers as more dominant and cooperative than male students. This finding is important in that it helps draw attention to the need to organize classes with an even distribution of students in terms of gender.

Another important takeaway from this study concerns foreign students. It seems that compared to Turkish citizen students, foreign students perceive Turkish EFL teachers to be slightly more demanding, disapproving and criticizing in interpersonal relations with them. Considering the close range of scores, no safe conclusions can be

made in this regard and also because student perceptions might have been influenced by other factors, like student needs, attitudes, motivation, ethnic backgrounds, which were not investigated in this study.

## 7. Conclusion

The results of the current study show that the most important variables explaining differences in student perceptions are teacher experience and student gender. Although this study is limited in scope, it appears that these two characteristics are particularly relevant in interpersonal domain compared to other teacher and student characteristics such as educational background, birthplace, university department, and academic achievement. The study provides thus support to earlier research findings on gender and experience in the interpersonal domain of teacher-student relationship. It differs from earlier works in that it explores interpersonal behavior of Turkish teachers of English as a foreign language in attempt to bridge the gap in the studies on this subject.

The insights from this study can be used in teacher education and professional development programs in the field of English language teaching in hope it will bring positive change in teachers' interpersonal behavior and highlight the importance of different student characteristics affecting student perceptions of them. To this end, it is vital that teachers develop awareness of the interpersonal realities in their classrooms as it will help them develop adequate strategies for adjusting themselves interpersonally in the best interests of their students.

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The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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