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## **AUTONOMY IN THE WORKPLACE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study aimed to determine the job autonomy perceptions of secondary school teachers working in public and private schools. The universe of the study composed of secondary school teachers working at private and public schools in Gaziantep city center during the academic year of 2016-2017. The sample group was determined through a random sampling method. The respondents included 500 teachers working at 16 distinct schools, half of which were private schools and the other half were public ones. The research data were collected through the Work Autonomy Scales. Descriptive statistics, t-test and ANOVA analyses were applied to the data set. According to research results, teachers working at both types of schools had similar autonomy perceptions except for taking initiative pertaining to work and doing specific work activities. The comparisons indicated that the difference between the two was in favor of private ones. Additionally, while there was a high level of significant difference between teachers' opinions at both types of schools based on the variable of gender, no statistical difference was detected by the variable of age. A high level of significant difference was found in favor of public ones for the variable of professional seniority.

**Keywords:** Job autonomy, public school, private school, survey model.

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, self-determination theory and cognitive evaluation theory have become prominent among those related to motivation. Deci & Ryan (2008) stated that motivation is what moves individuals to think, act, and develop. According to self-determination theory, when an individual is intrinsically motivated, he or she is energized and passionate about the task being performed, and the individual feels a sense of satisfaction or fulfillment after the task is accomplished. As intrinsic motivation has as an inherent quality, the maintenance and enhancement of this motivation are dependent on social and environmental conditions surrounding the individual (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In their Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET), they specifically address the social and environmental factors that facilitate versus undermine intrinsic motivation and point to three significant psychological needs that must be present in the individual in order to foster self-motivation. These needs are competence, autonomy, and relatedness. The sense of competence derives from successful experiences and overall positive feelings about an activity (Deci & Ryan 1985), and foster the development of intrinsic motivation. Autonomy is necessary to flourish intrinsic motivation and defined as a feeling of independence, freedom, and self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2000). When an individual is given a sense of choice, an acknowledgment of feelings or an opportunity for self-direction, feelings of intrinsic satisfaction are enhanced. In terms of relatedness, according to Deci & Ryan (1985), it is a feeling of connection and support and is based upon "interpersonal affiliation, authentic care and the sharing of enriching experiences" (Deci & Ryan 2009). From this perspective, the concept of job autonomy has recently been explained on the basis of self-determination theory in that it is described in terms of freedom at work, being independent, being able to make someone's own business planning, deciding on the work to be done, and setting the employees free in decision-making process (Kuratko, Hornsby & Goldsby, 2007). The perception of having job autonomy is quite significant since it is a notion that affects work outcomes. Benson (2001) states that employees who feel autonomous in the work environment are highly motivated, methodical, well-disciplined, self-confident and self-evaluating individuals who are aware of their learning characteristics. Hackman & Oldham (1976) point out that employees who feel autonomous in their work will attain a high level of intrinsic motivation as they will be free and independent with discretionary power in determining the work procedures be done. Montgomery & Pratiz (2011), on the other hand, claim that job autonomy is an important part of professional ethics and professionalism, as well as providing with personal decision-making power pertaining to the work to be done. Due to the fact that job autonomy is not only for individual pragmatism but also an organizational behavior that provides institutional advantages, it is observed to be associated with certain work outcomes in the literature. Naqvi, Ishtiaq, Kanwal & Ali (2013) indicate that the work performance of the employees who feel autonomous in their work will increase and they will feel reliable in performing the task, and thus, intrinsic motivation develops and work activities boost. Job autonomy has a negative impact on work-family conflict scores as well as on business life. In other words, the more the job autonomy of individuals increases, the more the level of work-family conflict decrease. While Kauffeld (2006) & Smith et al. (2003) argue that there is also an important relationship between innovative behaviors, commitment and competence of employees with job autonomy, Halaby & Weakliem (1989) emphasize the need for job autonomy to be increased in order to

improve the organizational commitment perceptions of employees. Job autonomy has a three-dimensional structure, namely method autonomy, program autonomy and criterion autonomy (Halaby & Weakliem, 1989; Kauffeld, 2006). While method autonomy is the level of freedom created by employees in work procedures or methods, program autonomy is the degree of authority that employees have in regulating the order of their work activities. Moreover, criterion autonomy is defined as the ability to choose the standards or criteria to measure the performance of employees (Breugh, 1985, 1989; Breugh & Becker, 1987). Considering the fact that the individuals with job autonomy have the freedom to be creative in performing their duties owing to the effect of increasing work performance (Saragih, 2011), it increases the teachers' competence of making a difference and being authentic as being among the most important cornerstones of educational organizations. That is why job autonomy contributes to the reduction of the senses of pressure and insecurity on the aspects of the individuals' exposure to stress, limitations on work activities and the free decision-making process, and the emergence of positive coping behaviors (Lim, Yee, Yan & Lin, 2014). Similarly, Friedman (1999) claimed that when teachers have a voice in the issues related to their studies and schools; in other words, when they have job autonomy in matters pertaining to their work, their work stress will decrease while their job satisfaction increases. Moreover, teachers who feel autonomous about the work they do can provide significant benefits to themselves, to the students and to the school and take risks related to the instructional processes (Friedman, 1999). In this way, while the teachers' in-class communication skills increase, they can establish a closer connection with their students and be more effective in their teaching (O'Hara, 2006). In short, job autonomy, which is a relatively newer concept for educational organizations, can be regarded as an important indicator of the educational staff's level of having the traits of freedom, decision-making, motivation, self-confidence, and responsibility. Job autonomy is also an important concept in terms of decreasing work-life conflicts, increasing creative thinking skills together with freedom and the individual's feeling of oneself as a reliable person. According to the relevant literature, job autonomy has been regarded as one of the factors determining the quality of education in the International Student Assessment Program (PISA) research conducted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and some part of the recent international conferences on job autonomy has been devoted to the autonomy of educational staff (Ayal, Özdemir, Türedi, Yılmaz, Büyükgöze, Demirezen, Özarlsen & Tahirbegi, 2014; Ramos, 2006). It is believed that the study will contribute to the relevant working area in that there are very few studies in the literature of education on job autonomy which has positive effects on the organizational outcomes. Based on all this, the aim of this study was to determine the job autonomy perceptions of secondary school teachers working in public and private schools. With this purpose in mind, the following questions were sought:

- What is the level of job autonomy of teachers working in public and private schools?
- Do the job autonomy perceptions of teachers working at public schools differ by the variables of gender, age, and professional seniority?
- Do the job autonomy perceptions of teachers working at private schools differ by the variables of gender, age, and professional seniority?

- Is there a significant difference between the job autonomy perceptions of teachers working at public and private schools?

## METHODOLOGY

The study was designed as descriptive research in the survey model in order to describe the past or present situations as they are (Karasar, 2012). In this context, the study aimed to reveal the job autonomy levels of teachers and their perceptions in comparison with independent variables.

### The working group of the study

The universe of the study composed of secondary school teachers working at private and public schools in Gaziantep city center during the academic year of 2016-2017. There are 8,873 teachers in 285 public secondary schools and 656 teachers in the secondary parts of 30 private schools. The sample group of the study was determined by a random sampling method. The respondents included 500 secondary school teachers working at 16 distinct schools, half of which were private schools and the other half were public ones. The sample is defined as a small cluster that is formed by the rule-governed selection of a certain number of units of a designated universe according to the study area. Moreover, it is considered to represent the universe adequately (Karasar, 2012). In the study, a simple random sampling method was used to ensure the possibility for each individual in the universe to be equal and independent during the sampling procedure. Among the participating teachers, 42% of whom work at private schools and 58% of whom at public ones; 46.6% of whom are male and 53.4% of whom are female. Among the participants, 38.2% are between the ages of 26-34, 34.8% are between 35-45, 14.8% are 25 years or younger, and 12.2% are over 46 years and older. Moreover, according to the distribution of the teachers by the professional seniority, 37.6% of the participants have professional seniority between 6-10 years, 34.2% between 11-15 years, 15% between 1-5 years, and 13.2% 16 years and over.

### The instrument of the study

In the study, the Work Autonomy Scales developed by James A. Breugh (1989) was used. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of the original scale was found to be .97. The scale consists of 9 items in one dimension. The items are evaluated through a 5-point Likert type rating scale (1: Never, 5: Always). English and Turkish language peer-review of the scale was conducted through translations from English to Turkish and then back from Turkish to English. After the evaluation of field experts, the validity studies of the scale that accepted to have language and meaning equivalence were conducted through a pre-application with 150 respondents. As a result of KMO and Bartlett's Tests performed for the adequacy of the sample size of the pre-application data, KMO value was found to be .77 and Bartlett Sphericity test value as  $\chi^2= 345.495$  ( $p=.000$ ;  $p<.001$ ;  $df=36$ ). Field (2009) suggests that the KMO values between 0.5 and 0.7 are considered to be moderate; those between 0.7 and 0.8 are good; those between 0.8 and 0.9 are very good, and those above 0.9 are excellent. Since the

analysis result is  $.77 > .50$ , it can be claimed that the data set is suitable for factor analysis (Field, 2009). In order to test the reliability of the scale, Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient was estimated to be  $\alpha = .74$ . The instrument is regarded to be highly reliable in case the reliability coefficient is  $.70$  and higher (Büyüköztürk et al., 2011). Exploratory factor analysis was applied to the data obtained from pre-application through Varimax rotation. As a result of the analysis, the scale was found to have a one-dimensional structure as in the original form. Following this procedure, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed using Lisrel 8.80 software to verify the factor structure of the scale. The goodness of fit of the model is given in Table 1.

**Table 1.** The Comparison of Goodness of Fit Indices and Model Fit Results

<i>Goodness of Fit Indices</i>	<i>Perfect Model Fit</i>	<i>Acceptable Model Fit</i>	<i>Model Fit</i>
<b>RMSEA</b>	$0 \leq \text{RMSEA} \leq 0.05$	$0.05 \leq \text{RMSEA} \leq 0.08$	0.052
<b>NFI</b>	$0.95 \leq \text{NFI} \leq 1.00$	$0.90 \leq \text{NFI} \leq 0.94$	0.92
<b>NNFI</b>	$0.95 \leq \text{NNFI} \leq 1.00$	$0.95 \leq \text{NNFI} \leq 0.96$	0.96
<b>CFI</b>	$0.95 \leq \text{CFI} \leq 1.00$	$0.95 \leq \text{CFI} \leq 0.96$	0.96
<b>GFI</b>	$0.95 \leq \text{GFI} \leq 1.00$	$0.90 \leq \text{GFI} \leq 0.94$	0.90
<b>AGFI</b>	$0.90 \leq \text{AGFI} \leq 1.00$	$0.85 \leq \text{AGFI} \leq 0.90$	0.91
<b>RFI</b>	$0.90 < \text{RFI} \leq 1.00$	$0.85 < \text{RFI} \leq 0.90$	0.92
<b>SRMR</b>	$0 \leq \text{SRMR} \leq 0.05$	$0.05 < \text{SRMR} \leq 0.10$	0.042
<b><math>\chi^2/df</math></b>	$0 < \chi^2/df \leq 2$	$2 \leq \chi^2/df \leq 3$	2.53

As seen in Table 1, the RMSEA value below 0.008 and the CFI, AGFI, and GFI values above 0.90 indicate that the goodness of fit of the scale under investigation is above the acceptable threshold estimates (Gürbüz & Şahin, 2014). The pre-applied scale was distributed to 605 respondents excluding the pre-application group, and 500 forms among the returned ones were taken into consideration. Based on data analysis, (KMO value  $.86$ ; Barlett Sphericity test value  $\chi^2 = 1621.190$ ;  $p = .000$ ;  $df = 36$ ) data set was proved to be suitable for further analysis. The Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale was found to be  $\alpha = .84$  for a group of 500 respondents.

### Data analysis

The research data were analyzed through SPSS 22.0 software package. Descriptive statistics were performed for demographic variables due to their categorical nature. Skewness and kurtosis were estimated to determine whether the data distributed normally. As a result of the analysis, skewness was found to be  $-0.054$  and kurtosis was to be  $-0.076$ . The examination of skewness and kurtosis ascertained that the data were normally distributed as the values were between  $\pm 1$  (Büyüköztürk, 2010; Morga, Leech, Gloeckner & Barret, 2004). Parametric tests were used in the analyzes since the data was normally distributed. While a t-test was used to determine the significant differences for the variable of gender by average scores of different schools, one-way analysis of variance test (ANOVA) was performed to determine the significant differences for the variables of age and professional seniority. T-test was also used to compare the general average scores by the type of school.

## FINDINGS

Table 2 demonstrates the means and standard deviation values of the responses of the teachers at public and private schools to the scale items in order to determine the levels of job autonomy perception.

**Table 2.** Means and Standard Deviation Values of Public and Private School Teachers' Scores on Job Autonomy

Item No	Public Schools			Job Autonomy	Private Schools		
	$\bar{X}$	Sd	Level of Agreement	Items	$\bar{X}$	Sd	Level of Agreement
1	1,75	,930	Very low	I am allowed to decide how to go about getting my job done (the methods to use).	3,43	1,14	High
2	3,50	1,38	High	I am able to choose the way to go about my job (the procedures to utilize).	3,91	1,32	High
3	3,63	1,39	High	I am able to choose the method(s) to use in carrying out my work.	3,90	1,29	High
4	3,53	1,32	High	I have control over the scheduling of my work.	3,81	1,26	High
5	3,51	1,33	High	I have some control over the sequencing of my work activities (when I do what).	3,81	1,29	High
6	2,27	1,35	Low	My job is such that I can decide when to do particular work activities.	4,24	1,41	Very high
7	2,82	1,19	Moderate	My job allows me to modify the normal way I am evaluated so that I can emphasize some aspects of my job and play down others.	3,09	1,21	Moderate
8	2,60	1,25	Moderate	I am able to modify what my job objectives are (what I am supposed to accomplish).	2,97	1,37	Moderate
9	3,42	1,32	High	I have some control over what I am supposed to accomplish (what my supervisor sees as my job objectives).	3,47	1,33	High

As shown in Table 2, the Likert equivalents of the means of the answers given to each item by the participants at both types of schools on feeling autonomous at work are close to each other except for the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 6<sup>th</sup> items. The job autonomy perceptions of private schools teachers were higher than those at public schools for the first question ( $\bar{X}=3,43-\bar{X}=1,75$ ) and the sixth one ( $\bar{X}=4,24-\bar{X}=2,27$ ).

Table 3 presents whether the teachers' job autonomy opinions in two types of schools differ by the variable of gender.

**Table 3.** T-Test Results of Public and Private School Teachers' Scores on Job Autonomy by the Variable of Gender

Type of School	Gender	n	$\bar{X}$	Sd	df	t	p	d
Public school	Male	112	3,56	,663	288	11,853	,000*	1,43
	Female	178	2,62	,648				
Private school	Male	121	4,11	,577	208	12,594	,000*	1,73
	Female	89	2,97	,731				

\*p<0,05

According to Table 3, there is a significant difference between the job autonomy scores of public ( $t_{(288)}=11,853$ ,  $p<,05$ ) and private ( $t_{(208)}=12,594$ ,  $p<,05$ ) school teachers by the variable of gender. It is observed that there is a significant difference in favor of male teachers according to the gender variable in both types of schools ( $\bar{X}=3,56$ ,  $\bar{X}=4,11$ ). Although this result shows that there is a statistical difference, it does not give any information about the magnitude of the difference. The effect size for the independent sample t-test was calculated through Cohen's  $d$  formula. Green & Salkind (2005) purported that  $d$  value between .02-.05 points to a small level of effect size while those between .05 and .08 to medium level and .08 and above to the high level of effect sizes. Based on this, it was concluded that the available effect is at a higher level for the public ( $d = 1.43$ ) and private schools ( $d = 1.73$ ) [26].

Table 4 submits whether the teachers' job autonomy opinions in two types of schools differ by the variable of age.

**Table 4.** Variance Analysis (ANOVA) Results of the Public and Private School Teachers' Scores on Job Autonomy by the Variable of Age

Type of School	Age	n	$\bar{X}$	Sd	Source of variance	KT	df	KO	F	p
Public school	25 or younger	60	2,96	,760	Between groups	3,17	4	,793	1,25	,289
	Between 26-34	113	3,04	,789						
	Between 35-45	79	2,85	,798						
	Between 46-54	18	3,25	,777	Within group	180,4	285	,663		
	55 and older	20	3,06	,933						
<b>Toplam</b>		<b>290</b>	<b>2,99</b>	<b>,797</b>		<b>183,6</b>	<b>289</b>			
Private school	25 or younger	14	3,65	,901	Between groups	1,80	3	,497	,705	,550
	Between 26-34	78	3,63	,863						
	Between 35-45	95	3,67	,977	Within group	175,4	206	,739		
	Between 46-54	23	3,25	,896						
<b>Total</b>		<b>210</b>	<b>3,50</b>	<b>,921</b>		<b>177,2</b>	<b>209</b>			

\* $p<0,05$

According to Table 4, there is no significant difference between the job autonomy scores of public ( $F_{(4-285)}=1,25$ ;  $p>,05$ ) and private school ( $F_{(4-205)}=,672$ ;  $p>,05$ ) teachers by the variable of age. In other words, the difference between the school types does not vary according to the age variable.

Table 5 shows whether the teachers' job autonomy opinions in two types of schools differ by the variable of professional seniority.

**Table 5.** Variance Analysis (ANOVA) Results of the Public and Private School Teachers' Scores on Job Autonomy by the Variable of Professional Seniority

Type of School	Seniority	n	$\bar{X}$	Sd	Source of variance	KT	df	KO	F	p	Scheffe	$\eta^2$
Public school	1-5 years	34	3,25	,882							1-5-11-15, 1-5-16 and over	
	6-10 years	117	3,20	,785								
	11-15 years	111	2,76	,718	Between groups	17,42	3	5,80	9,99	,000	6-10-11-15, 6-10-16 and over	.095
	16 and over	26	2,61	,651	Within group	166,2	286	,581				
	<b>Total</b>	<b>290</b>	<b>2,99</b>	<b>,797</b>		183,6	289					
Private school	1-5 years	41	3,63	,893								
	6-10 years	69	3,61	,883								
	11-15 years	60	3,60	,871	Between groups	,244	3	,081	,109	,955		
	16 and over	40	3,69	,775	Within group	153,2	206	,744				
	<b>Total</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>3,63</b>	<b>,856</b>		153,4	209					

\*p<0,05

According to Table 5, while there is a significant difference between the job autonomy scores of public ( $F_{(3-286)}=9,99$ ;  $p<.05$ ) school teachers by the variable of professional seniority, this is not the case for private school teachers ( $F_{(3-206)}=,109$ ;  $p>.05$ ). Based on Scheffe test results to find the source of the difference between the opinions of teachers at public schools, it was observed that the difference stemmed from teachers working at public schools and having professional seniority between 1-5 years-11-15 years, between 1-5 years-16 years and over, between 6-10 years-11-15 years, and between 6-10 years-16 years and over. The effect size of the difference in one-way analysis of variance was estimated through the formula of eta-square ( $\eta^2$ ). The available effect size implies that this difference is at a higher level ( $\eta^2=.095$ ).

Table 6 exhibits whether there is a difference between the teachers' job autonomy opinions according to the type of school.

**Table 6.** T-Test Results for the Comparison of Job Autonomy Scores of Public and Private School Teachers

Type of School	n	$\bar{X}$	Sd	df	t	p	d
Public school	290	2,99	,797	498	8,59	,000*	0,77
Private school	210	3,63	,856				

\*p<0,05

According to Table 6, it can be observed that there is a significant difference between the job autonomy scores of public and private school teachers ( $t_{(498)}=8,59$ ,  $p<.05$ ), and private school teachers' job autonomy scores ( $\bar{X}=3,63$ ) are higher than those at public ones ( $\bar{X}=2,99$ ). The effect size of the existing difference is at a moderate level ( $d=0.77$ ) based on Cohen's  $d$  formula.

## CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION and SUGGESTIONS

The concept of job autonomy, originating from self-determination theory of the work design literature of Hackman & Oldman (1975), contributes to greater motivation of employees, increased job satisfaction and sense of responsibility, and reduced absenteeism. As a matter of fact, autonomy is considered to be one of the numerous basic work design features used by a great number of people (Smith, Kot & Leat, 2003). In this study, it was aimed to examine the job autonomy perceptions of secondary school teachers working at public and private schools. According to the means of the answers given to the scale items by the participants from both types of schools, the job autonomy perceptions are close to each other by and large. Based on means, teachers working at private schools feel more autonomous than those working at public ones on the issues of taking initiative on how to do the job and feeling free to do specific work activities. Similarly, Lim, Yee, Yan & Lin (2014) also found in their study on private school teachers in Malaysia that teachers feel free to take initiative on how to do the job and do specific work activities. This result indicates that while teachers working at private schools do not feel restricted in how to do their work, public school teachers feel less of job control in their hands under the necessity of fulfilling the job description of the centralized management as required by their bureaucratic structure. Marchese & Ryan (2001); Morgeson, Delaney-Klinger & Hemingway (2005) also stated that job autonomy is the job's degree of offering freedom for employees to a great extent and it should provide the individual with the right to be free in business planning and to make choices.

Various results were obtained in terms of the variables of gender, age, and seniority in both types of schools. It was concluded that the participating teachers' opinions at public and private schools differed statistically according to the variable of gender and it emerged as a high-level effect. In support of this finding, Dude (2012) concluded in his study that men are more autonomous than women. Unlikely, Pekdemir, Koçoğlu & Gürkan (2014) found that there was no significant relationship between the gender of the employees and their autonomy perceptions in their study including participants working at different companies. The main difference between the two studies may be caused by the difference in the way they perceive and interpret based on the personality types of the research participants. In support of this discourse, McClure (1993: 40) expressed that personality has an impact on the perception of individuals, the interpretation of what is happening around them and the performance of the individual in various activities.

The job autonomy perceptions of the participants in both types of schools did not show a significant difference by the variable of age. In other words, the job autonomy scores of the participants in different ranges of age did not make a statistical difference. The findings of Pekdemir, Koçoğlu & Gürkan's (2014) study are in a similar vein with our finding.

According to the findings of the study, while there is a significant difference with a high level of effect between the opinions of public school teachers by the variable of professional seniority, the opinions of teachers at private ones were not significantly differed by professional seniority. In other words, as the professional seniority of the teachers working at public schools increases, their autonomy perception decreases. Similarly,

Çolak, Altinkurt & Yılmaz (2017) concluded in their study that teachers' autonomy perceptions decreased if their level of seniority increased. Ahuja, Chudoba, Kacmar & McKnight (2007) have also reached a similar conclusion. According to the results of their study, there is no significant difference between marital status and age and autonomy, but between professional seniority and autonomy perceptions. According to the findings of the study, it can be asserted that the employees in the first years of their working life feel more autonomous because of the energy generating from a fresh start to work and the idea of creating a difference in their work. On the other hand, as their professional seniority increases, the reduction of job energy and the job satisfaction and the pressure arising from the constraints of legislation may have led to a decrease in their autonomy perceptions.

In addition, the comparison of the two types of schools by the scores obtained from the overall scale yielded that the job autonomy perceptions differed in favor of teachers at private schools. This may be due to the fact that public school teachers' feeling themselves within a more authoritative structure in terms of working conditions and the decisiveness of the system in shaping how to work. The private schools' giving the teachers more autonomy in taking risks to benefit from the creativity of employees and to do good things depending on this kind of schools' latent objectives to make a profit may have caused teachers to feel more autonomous.

In general, whether they work at public or private schools, teachers regarding themselves as professionals for their jobs, working with high motivation and having the freedom of decision making are important for both individual and organizational development. Dude (2012) emphasized that individuals with high job autonomy perception also have higher perceptions of organizational commitment and organizational trust and added that individuals who feel autonomous themselves will exhibit positive organizational behaviors more frequently. In addition to in-class autonomy, Sentovich (2004) indicates that teachers' having school-level autonomy to contribute to the achievement of school objectives will increase their job satisfaction.

On the basis of research results obtained from the findings, it can be alleged that public school teachers need to be supported more in terms of taking initiatives on what they do. As this study is limited to the results obtained from the quantitative data and the responses of the working group, the concerning researchers may conduct different studies through combining it with qualitative data or the organizational behaviors influenced by job autonomy on a larger working group with the participants from the different geographical regions of Turkey.

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