The Meaning of Teacher Enthusiasm through the Lens of Pre-service Teachers

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine how teacher enthusiasm is evaluated from the perspective of pre-service teachers. Based on a qualitative research design, this study was conducted with 20 pre-service teachers studying at the faculty of education of a state university. The students were selected as five from each grade level (1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th grade) and maximum diversity sampling was used. A semi-structured interview form structured around three main themes was used as a data collection tool. The data obtained after the interviews were analysed by descriptive analysis method. The research findings were organized around three main themes: description, experience and inference. Pre-service teachers stated that enthusiastic teachers establish a strong bond with their students, are enthusiastic about learning and create a positive energy in the classroom environment. Enthusiasm was defined by the pre-service teachers as teachers' ability to motivate their students, create a positive atmosphere in the classroom and their love for the content of the lesson. The pre-service teachers stated that lecturing to students especially during teaching practices, feedback during the process of developing teaching skills and positive interactions with students were among the experiences that created enthusiasm. Students emphasized that an enthusiastic teacher positively shaped their attitudes towards the course, increased their desire to learn and strengthened their interactions in the classroom. They also stated that enthusiastic teachers contribute to students' lives outside of school, give them a zest for life, strengthen their family and friend ties, and increase their motivation. The findings of the research show that teacher enthusiasm positively affects students' attitudes towards the course and their general behaviours, and that enthusiastic teachers also contribute to students' lives outside of school. In this context, it was concluded that enthusiastic teacher behaviours should be emphasized more in teacher training programs.

Keywords: Pre-service teachers, enthusiasm, teacher enthusiasm.

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Introduction

The concept of enthusiasm refers to a deep and intense emotional experience. This feeling has the potential to increase the quality of social relationships. In this context, it can be considered as a meaningful indicator to analyse the emotional interactions between teachers and students (Scheer, 2020). The teaching profession is not only a role that conveys information, but also involves multidimensional responsibilities such as inspiring, and emotionally engaging students to learn. In this context, teacher enthusiasm in the classroom is considered as a factor that directly affects student motivation, engagement in learning and academic achievement. In the related literature, teacher enthusiasm is defined as professional commitment, desire to teach and positive affect reflected in the classroom environment and is considered as one of the important components of effective teaching (Frenzel et al., 2009).

Teacher enthusiasm is also defined as the reflection of the teacher's positive emotions, motivation and energetic attitude towards the teaching process in the classroom environment (Kunter et al., 2008). Teacher enthusiasm is related to the positive emotions and excitement that teachers experience in the teaching process and in their experiences of interacting with students in the classroom. This concept is defined as the experienced aspect of joy related to teaching and is seen as an important component of teachers' emotional presence in the classroom (Keller et al., 2014). This experiential dimension of enthusiasm is not only an intrinsic source of motivation for the teacher, but also a behavioural manifestation that creates an emotional impact in the classroom environment. Indeed, teachers may consciously exhibit enthusiastic behaviours in order to present a positive emotional image to students (Sutton, 2004). These behaviours are not only limited to the emotional state of the teacher, but also have a contagious effect on students, positively influencing their motivational tendencies towards learning and their attitudes towards the classroom (Lazarides, et al., 2019).

Oprea (2013) states that teachers do not only have a role limited to guiding students' processes of exploring, understanding and analysing scientific and vital phenomena. Teachers should also support students to pursue these goals with enthusiasm. In this context, teacher enthusiasm stands out as one of the key elements of effective teaching; it attracts students' attention and motivates them to the learning process. Research shows that teachers' energy and passion in the classroom significantly increase students' academic achievement, class participation and interest in learning (Kunter et al., 2011). Teacher enthusiasm reduces students' boredom in the classroom (Cui et al., 2017) and increases student motivation (Patrick et al., 2000). Enthusiastic teachers inspire and nurture students' curiosity and make the classroom environment more dynamic. Moreover, this attitude strengthens students' self-efficacy perceptions and encourages their active participation in the learning process (Schiefele et al., 2013). As a result of an experimental study conducted by Mastin (1963), it was observed that students' interest in the subject and motivation to learn increased significantly after an enthusiastic lesson. In addition, Wenström et al. (2018) stated that teacher enthusiasm is tangibly manifested in individuals' desire and efforts to improve their professional knowledge and skills.

Enthusiasm, by its very nature, is not only an emotion experienced at the individual level, but also has a contagious quality that shows its effect in the environmental context. In this framework, teacher enthusiasm is not only limited to the subjective experience of the teacher, but when it is expressed behaviourally, it turns into a collective source of energy and motivation that spreads throughout the general atmosphere of the school. This is reflected in various school practices such as teaching processes, professional development activities and pedagogical interactions, creating a dynamic structure that mobilizes the entire educational community (Wenström & Kuortti, 2022). Indeed, it has been found in the literature that enthusiastic teachers experience lower levels of burnout (Keller et al., 2016). Similarly, teachers with high self-efficacy perceptions were found to use a wider range of teaching strategies, be more flexible in adapting their teaching approaches to student needs, and show a higher level of sensitivity to classroom cues (Thoonen et al., 2011). In this context, there are numerous studies that address the relationship between teacher enthusiasm and internal cognitive and affective constructs such as teacher self-efficacy, perseverance, and psychological well-being (Burić & Moè, 2020; Kalinowski et al., 2024; Shao, 2023). On the other hand, several studies have

shown that teacher enthusiasm has important repercussions not only at the individual level but also in the context of organizational outcomes; it is significantly associated with positive outcomes such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and instructional performance (Dewaele & Li, 2021).

However, how teacher enthusiasm is perceived not only by in-service teachers but also by pre-service teachers plays a decisive role in shaping attitudes and expectations towards the profession. In particular, there is a research gap on how pre-service teachers define teacher enthusiasm, how they experience it, and how they make inferences in this context. In this respect, studies aimed at understanding how teacher enthusiasm is evaluated from the perspective of pre-service teachers are important both in terms of improving the quality of teacher training programs and developing emotionally strong teacher profiles. In this context, the aim of this study is to examine how teacher enthusiasm is evaluated from the perspective of pre-service teachers. In this context, the sub-objectives are;

1. How is teacher enthusiasm defined by pre-service teachers?

2. How is teacher enthusiasm experienced by pre-service teachers?

3. What inferences are drawn about teacher enthusiasm by pre-service teachers?

Method

Research Model

In this study, qualitative research method was preferred to examine teacher enthusiasm based on the views of pre-service teachers (Patton, 2015). This method enabled an in-depth understanding of pre-service teachers' perceptions, feelings and experiences of teacher enthusiasm. In addition, in line with the descriptive phenomenology approach, (Van Manen, 1990) the real-life experiences of the participants were focused on and these experiences were analysed in a comprehensive and detailed manner (Glesne, 2020). Descriptive phenomenology aims to directly reveal the subjective experiences of the individual and to witness the expression of these experiences. It is an understanding that considers the human being as a creature conscious of its own experiences and capable of describing them with awareness (Stolz, 2023; Van Manen, 1990). Thus, the study provides rich and contextualized data on how teacher enthusiasm is perceived by pre-service teachers.

Participant group

In this study, criterion sampling technique, which is one of the purposeful sampling methods, and maximum diversity sampling were applied and the opinions of a total of 20 pre-service teachers were consulted. First of all, the criterion of studying at the faculty of education was determined as purposive sampling. In addition, maximum diversity sampling was applied to reach 5 pre-service teachers from each of the different grade levels and the opinions of a total of 20 pre-service teachers were reached. Five5 pre-service teachers volunteered to participate in the study. Criterion sampling allows for obtaining rich information by providing a detailed examination of situations that meet predetermined criteria (Büyüköztürk et al., 2014). With maximum diversity sampling, various and different samples are selected and the similarities that emerge within this diversity are found, thus providing a broader and deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 2015). Participant information is given in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Information

Participant	Gender	Level of Class	
S1	Female	2	
S2	Female	2	
S3	Female	1	

S4	Female	1
S5	Male	2
S6	Male	4
S7	Female	3
S8	Male	4
S9	Male	4
S10	Female	3
S11	Male	1
S12	Male	2
S13	Female	1
S14	Male	4
S15	Female	3
S16	Female	3
S17	Male	2
S18	Female	4
S19	Female	3
S20	Male	1

As seen in Table 1, a total of 20 pre-service teachers participated in the study. Eleven of the participants were female and nine were male. There were 5 pre-service teachers from each grade level.

Data Collection Tools

In this study, a semi-structured interview form developed by the researcher was used as a data collection tool. The interview form was developed after a comprehensive literature review in order to examine the phenomenon of teacher enthusiasm from the perspective of pre-service teachers. A total of eight open-ended questions were prepared in order to reveal the experiences and perceptions of the participants in detail.

The interview form was presented to five academicians (one academic specializing in measurement and evaluation, three academics specializing in educational management, and one academic specializing in Turkish language education) who are experts in their fields in order to ensure content validity, and the final version of the form was created by making the necessary arrangements in line with the feedback from the experts. In addition, pilot interviews were conducted with two pre-service teachers to evaluate the comprehensibility of the questions and the functionality of the application process. Pilot interviews were conducted with pre-service teachers who were different from those participating in the data collection process. As a result of the pilot application, there were no incomprehensible expressions, and thus the interview form was made applicable for the data collection process. The questions in this interview form, which was structured to serve the three main purposes of the research, are given in detail in Table 2.

Table 2

Alignment Between Research Questions and Interview Questions

Research Questions		Interview Questions
How is teacher enthusiasm defined by pre-service teachers?		What do you think teacher enthusiasm means? How would you define this concept?
		How can we tell if a teacher has enthusiasm?
How is teacher enthusiasm experienced by pre-service teachers?		What were the experiences that made you the most enthusiastic during your teacher training? Can you

	describe how these moments left a mark on you?
	How did the enthusiasm (or lack of it) of the teachers you interned or observed affect you?
What inferences are drawn about teacher enthusiasm by pre-service teachers?	How do you think teacher enthusiasm affects students' motivation and success?
	What is the place of this enthusiasm in the student-teacher relationship?
	How do you intend to maintain your own enthusiasm as a teacher in the future? What are the factors that will motivate you in this regard?
	Which situations do you think can reduce teachers' enthusiasm? How can these situations be dealt with?

Data Collection and Data Analysis

The data collection tool was carried out using a semi-structured interview form developed by the researcher. The interviews were conducted in the researcher's office when the pre-service teachers were at school and did not have classes and felt comfortable. Necessary precautions were taken to prevent interruptions during the interviews. Care was taken to ensure that the pre-service teachers were present outside of class hours. A notice was posted on the door stating, "There is a meeting in the researcher's office, please do not disturb." The interviews lasted an average of 20-30 minutes. The views of the pre-service teachers who did not want to provide audio recordings were personally noted by the researcher. The data were analysed with descriptive analysis, summarized and interpreted according to previously determined themes. In this study, the themes were determined in advance according to the research questions created. The views discussed under the determined sub-themes were re-evaluated by a different expert. Sub-themes were determined under three main themes in the research. The main themes were identified as "description", "experience", and "outcome". In each main theme, codes were first determined, then similar codes were categorized and placed within the main themes.

Validity and Reliability

The participant verification process was carefully conducted to ensure the reliability of the research. The collected data was shared with the participants and their feedback confirmed the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the statements. In addition, in-depth and focused data collection methods were used to obtain detailed and diverse information about the phenomenon under study. This strategy strengthened the validity of the study by reflecting different perspectives (Kumar, 2011). To ensure the objectivity and verifiability of the research, the data were rigorously grounded in a theoretical framework and the analysis processes were managed transparently. This approach ensured that the findings were grounded in the data independent of the researcher's subjective judgments. In addition, reflective notes were taken throughout the study and analysis decisions were documented; these practices supported the objectivity and accuracy of the research (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013).

Findings

In this part of the study, the findings and interpretations that emerged as a result of the analysis of the data obtained from the structured interviews in order to understand the thoughts of pre-service teachers about teacher enthusiasm are presented. The data obtained from the study were analysed, the findings obtained were interpreted and thus the problem and sub-problems of the research were tried to be answered. The first question of the semi-structured interview form created within the scope of the

research questions is aimed at determining pre-service teachers' definitions of teacher enthusiasm. Table 1 presents the findings of the pre-service teachers' definitions of teacher enthusiasm.

Table 3

Pre-service teachers' views on the theme of defining teacher enthusiasm

Theme	Category	Code	f
Description	Emotional	Enthusiastic	16
		Love	12
		Excitement	10
		Passion	7
		Sincere	3
		Empathetic	4
		Patient	3
	Cognitive	Guiding	5
		Attention	2
		Investigative	3
		Understanding	4
	Behavioural	Continuously developing	3
		Conscious	3
		Preparing for life	4
		Motivating	12
		Making the lesson enjoyable	10
		Using new methods	5
		Energetic	16
		Smiling	4
		Going with the flow	2
		Role model	6
		Fun	8
		Interactive	12
		Inspiring	10
		Active	11
		Positive body language	10

Three categories belonging to the theme of defining preservice teachers' teacher enthusiasm were formed. The most repeated codes in these categories are enthusiasm (f:16) and energetic (f:16). The opinions of pre-service teachers on this theme are as follows:

> *It is a teacher's attempt to prepare his/her students for life and to give them something of himself/herself. It is doing this with a positive attitude (S1).*

> *A teacher should be lively and full of life. A teacher's enthusiasm is when his/her eyes light up when he/she sees his/her students and is filled with energy. This feeling is part of the teaching profession. Because they need to be enthusiastic in order to do their profession well and to leave a good mark in the lives of their students (T3).*

> *In my opinion, the individual who teaches should be energetic towards students and in still this in them. I think this feeling is a sine qua non of the teaching profession. Because if the teacher does not have a certain level of enthusiasm, the students will get bored with the lesson and the lesson will become unworkable (T5)*

> *If the teacher speaks with a low voice level in the lesson, makes very heavy movements and does not transfer his energy to the class, this teacher does not have enthusiasm. The teacher should adjust his/her tone of voice in a way to*

attract the attention of all students, move fast at a certain level, be fun and reflect this to his/her students (T18).

The fact that the teacher comes to the lesson and only explains the information and does not communicate and chat with the student shows that he/she lacks enthusiasm. The teacher should come to the class energetic, happy and smiling, talk and chat with the students and explain the lesson(T9).

The second question of the semi-structured interview form created within the scope of the research questions was aimed at determining the experiences of pre-service teachers regarding teacher enthusiasm. Table 4 presents the findings of pre-service teachers' experiences of teacher enthusiasm.

Table 4
Findings on pre-service teachers' experiences of teacher enthusiasm

Theme	Category	Code	f
Experience	Application	Making presentations	12
		Introducing materials	6
		Laboratory applications	5
	Participation	Class participation	8
		Participation in activities	7
		Drama	4
		Community service	3
		Symposium	3
	Information	Deep knowledge	5
		New knowledge	3

In the theme of pre-service teachers' experiences of teacher enthusiasm, 3 categories were identified according to the participants' views. The most frequently recurring code in this theme was determined as making a presentation (f:12). Some of the statements of pre-service teachers about this theme are as follows:

I was enthusiastic about the station system in the class. It left a positive and instructive mark. I still tell it with excitement and feel happy." (S12)

The presentations I made in the lesson increased my enthusiasm. During a lecture, when my friends did not participate in the lesson and I wanted to include them in the lesson, our teacher said that in the future you will include your students in the lesson like this. I believed that I could do it for the first time there. I felt like a teacher (S13.

Going to the school environment, talking to students, volunteering to the community made me enthusiastic (S14).

We went to a provincial school as part of an activity. We distributed books to the students and played games. This made me very enthusiastic. I said this is my job and I should do this (S15).

The experiences that excited me the most were the symposiums I attended. When teachers who had been in a good place before talked about their experiences, I was excited to see what I would encounter after becoming a teacher (S16).

The third question of the semi-structured interview form created within the scope of the research questions is aimed at determining the inferences of the pre-service teachers about teacher

enthusiasm. Table 1 presents the findings of the pre-service teachers' inferences about teacher enthusiasm.

Table 5

Findings regarding the inferences of pre-service teachers about teacher enthusiasm

Theme	Category	Code	f
Outcome	Development	Cognitive	19
		Social	6
		Emotional	3
		Skill	3
	Contact	Positive	8
		Common bond	3
		Empathy	4
		Language of love	2
	Motivation	Interest in the lesson	6
		Enthusiasm for new learning	3
		Motivation for success	4
		Permanent learning	2

Three categories were identified in the theme of pre-service teachers' inferences about teacher enthusiasm. The most frequently repeated code belonging to these categories is cognitive (f=19). Some of the statements of pre-service teachers about this code are as follows:

Affect students' motivation and success. They listen to the lesson more willingly. My history teacher was so loving, enthusiastic and eager to teach that we used to listen to the lesson very much. He was making us live it and our success level was very high in that lesson. We used to eagerly wait for the history lesson to come (S14)

I think that a teacher's enthusiasm has an indescribable effect on his/her students. A teacher's touch on one student can change the fate of a whole country. Motivation, respect is the place of enthusiasm (S12)

It increases students' enthusiasm for the lesson. The lesson becomes more remarkable for the students (S5).

A teacher with good communication shows the student the belief that the student will be successful. Teacher enthusiasm always increases success (S16)

With enthusiastic teachers, I can be more eager and active in the lesson. Thus, the subject covered in the lesson stays in my mind more. When I see these behaviours, I question myself about what kind of classroom atmosphere I can provide in the future. I think I should increase my enthusiasm (S20).

Teacher enthusiasm positively affects student motivation and success. Teachers have a place to mobilize their students in a positive way. It can leave impressions that the student will never forget throughout his/her life (S18).

It contributes a lot to the student. First of all, the student becomes more open and willing to the lesson. His/her interest in the lesson becomes very high. The lesson is taught in an active way. The overall atmosphere of the classroom is very positive for learning. The research and inquiry skills of all students in the class are developed (S4).

This study examines teacher enthusiasm using a descriptive phenomenological approach based on the subjective experience narratives of pre-service teachers. During the analysis, participant statements were described while remaining true to the nature of the experience; the data were organized under three main themes: definitions, experiences, and inferences. To make visible the meaning patterns that constitute teacher enthusiasm within the framework of these themes, relevant categories and codes were created. The findings reveal, in a descriptive framework, how pre-service teachers define an enthusiastic teacher, how this enthusiasm is experienced in classroom settings, and what kinds of meanings are generated from these experiences.

Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

In this study, the concept of teacher enthusiasm was analysed based on the views of pre-service teachers. In this context, the themes of definition of the concept, pre-service teachers' experiences and inferences were determined. The definition theme was analysed in three categories as emotional, cognitive and actional. In the research conducted by Huang et al. (2022), there are findings that cognitive abilities are the antecedents of teacher enthusiasm. The most repeated codes in these categories were enthusiasm and being energetic. This finding was also found in the study conducted by Savaş and Dolapçı (2024), who provided evidence that more passionate and energetic teachers are enthusiastic. As a matter of fact, the findings of the study conducted by Collins (1978) also support being energetic. In their study, Palmer et al. (2019) defined the teacher's being passionate, energetic and uplifting as enthusiasm and stated that this situation is contagious in the classroom. This situation increased students' motivation towards the lesson and aroused their curiosity about the subject. When the findings of the study conducted by Gabryś-Barker (2014) are considered, they overlap with the current study. In the study, the participants defined the enthusiastic teacher as a teacher who makes the lesson enjoyable, inspires, motivates students to learn in a lively manner.

For the second sub-objective of the study, which was to determine the experiences of pre-service teachers regarding teacher enthusiasm, three categories were created: implementation, participation and knowledge. The most frequently recurring code in this theme was making a presentation. This finding is in line with a study conducted by Branda (2023) who found that experiences in the classroom affect their enthusiasm for teaching and thus their performance. Palmer et al. (2019) found that she felt an ongoing enthusiasm for teacher education and this enthusiasm remained strong even after teaching the course for several years. Gehrke (1979) states that teaching methods, classroom organization or student-oriented approaches can increase enthusiasm. Gabryś-Barker (2014) suggests that teacher enthusiasm is also very strongly evident here in the perception of the teacher's professional competencies. Bruinsma and Jansen (2010) state that core competencies can determine enthusiasm in the teaching profession in teacher education preparation.

In order to determine the third sub-objective of the study, which was to determine the inferences of pre-service teachers about teacher enthusiasm, three categories were formed: development, communication and motivation. The most frequently repeated code belonging to these categories was cognitive. The most frequently expressed emphasis in the code identified as cognitive is student success. As a matter of fact, many studies show that teacher enthusiasm increases achievement (Burić, 2019; Moè, 2016; Valentín et al., 2022). In addition, according to the results of the research conducted by Öngel and Tabancalı, (2022), teacher enthusiasm contributes to the formation of a positive school environment by improving cooperation at school. Palmer et al. (2019) showed that teacher enthusiasm is perceived by students in four main ways: first, through her voice and gestures; second, through her willingness to interact with students; third, through clear statements of her own positive dispositions; and fourth, through sharing her personal experiences and artifacts. Minor et al. (2002) reported enthusiastic teachers as effective teachers.

In this context, suggestions can be made for both practitioners and researchers based on the results of the study. Teacher training programs should include more activities (e.g., in-class practice, micro-teaching, motivational feedback) to develop teacher enthusiasm. Guidance and mentoring systems should be strengthened in pre-service education to support pre-service teachers emotionally, cognitively and action-oriented. In order to sustain teacher enthusiasm, professional development opportunities should be planned in an individualized and motivational way. The concept of teacher enthusiasm should be examined more comprehensively through quantitative research with different variables (e.g. professional satisfaction, teacher self-efficacy, student motivation). How teacher enthusiasm changes throughout the professional development process can be monitored through longitudinal studies. Comparative studies can be conducted on teacher enthusiasm perceptions of pre-service teachers from different branches and levels.

Disclosure Statements

Contribution rate statement of the researchers:

The author conducted the whole study.

Conflict of interest statement:

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

CRediT Authorship Contribution Statement

Behiye DAĞDEVİREN ERTAŞ: Conceptualization, methodology, data collection, data analysis, writing – review & editing.

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Ethical Declaration and Committee Approval

In this research, the principles of scientific research and publication ethics were followed.