

## The mediating role of emotion regulation in the relationship between teachers' personality traits and levels of vulnerable narcissism

Öğretmenlerin kişilik özellikleri ile kırılabilir narsisizm düzeyleri arasındaki ilişkide duygu düzenlemenin aracı rolü

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### Abstract

Personality traits largely determine differences in behaviour and attitudes among individuals. Vulnerable narcissism, a sub-dimension of narcissistic personality disorder, is characterised by excessive vulnerability in response to perceived criticism and rejection due to low self-esteem and feelings of inadequacy. Narcissistic expectations play a significant role in the decision to choose teaching as a profession. Therefore, examining the relationship between vulnerable narcissism and personality traits through teachers may yield different results from the existing literature. The purpose of this research is to examine the mediating role of emotion regulation in the relationship between personality traits and the levels of vulnerable narcissism. The research was designed as a cross-sectional study in a quantitative correlational design. The research sample comprises 306 teachers from public schools in Kastamonu. The ten-item personality inventory, vulnerable narcissism scale, and emotion regulation scale were used to collect data. The study's findings revealed that emotion regulation mediates the relationship between personality traits and vulnerable narcissism, and emotion regulation is a predictor of this relationship. The results indicate that emotion regulation mediates the positive association between personality traits and vulnerable narcissism levels. It was understood that the narcissistic levels of the participants were weakened to the extent that they could regulate their emotions.

**Keywords:** Personality, Personality Traits, Traits Approach, Vulnerable Narcissism, Emotion Regulation

**Jel Codes:** D23, M10, M12, L20

### Öz

İnsanlar arasındaki davranış ve tutum farklılıklarının temeli kişilik özelliklerine dayandırılmaktadır. Narsistik kişilik bozukluğunun bir alt türü olan kırılabilir narsisizm, düşük benlik saygısının ve yetersizlik hissinden kaynaklanan eleştirilmeye ve reddedilmeye karşı gösterilen aşırı kırılabilirlik haliyle karakterize edilmektedir. Öğretmenliğin meslek olarak tercih edilmesinde kişilerin narsistik beklentileri belirleyici rol oynadığı düşünülmektedir. Bu nedenle kırılabilir narsisizmin kişilik özellikleri ile ilişkisinin öğretmenler üzerinden incelenmesi mevcut literatürden farklı sonuçlar verebilir. Bu araştırmanın amacı kişilik özellikleri ile kırılabilir narsisizm düzeyi arasındaki ilişkide duygu düzenlemenin aracılık rolünü incelemektir. Araştırma niceliksel korelasyonel desende kesitsel bir çalışma olarak tasarlanmıştır. Araştırmanın örneklemini Kastamonu devlet okullarında görev yapan 336 öğretmen oluşturmaktadır. Verilerin toplanmasında On-Madde kişilik ölçeği, kırılabilir narsisizm ölçeği ve duygu düzenleme ölçeği kullanılmıştır. Araştırmanın bulguları, kişilik özellikleri ile kırılabilir narsisizm arasındaki ilişkiye duygu düzenlemenin aracılık ettiğini, duygu düzenlemenin ise söz konusu ilişkinin yordayıcısı olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Kişilik özellikleri ile kırılabilir narsisizm düzeyi arasındaki pozitif yönlü ilişkide, duygu düzenlemenin aracı bir değişken olarak görev yaptığı anlaşılmıştır. Katılımcıların narsistik algılarının duyularını düzenleyebilecekleri ölçüde zayıfladığı anlaşılmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kişilik, Kişilik Özellikleri, Özellikler Yaklaşımı, Kırılabilir Narsisizm, Duygu Düzenleme

**JEL Kodları:** D23, M10, M12, L20

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## Introduction

Personality is an essential element in understanding and recognising people. People follow developments in their environment, evaluate them, and behave differently accordingly. The reasons for the consistency and differences in individuals' behaviour are their personalities. Personality is the consistency and unique features of an individual's behaviour (Caligiuri, 2000; Purnamaningsih, 2017). Personality traits underlie variations in individuals' levels, attitudes, and behaviours. Personality traits are distinctive indicators that distinguish individuals from others. The characteristics of individuals, such as optimism or pessimism, anxiety, and activity or passivity, play an essential role in shaping their attitudes and behaviours (Hawi & Samaha, 2019; Cheng & Xie, 2018). The general personality structure is directly related to his levels of narcissism, being introverted or social, selfish or selfless, having an internal or external locus of control, and features such as emotion regulation.

Studies have demonstrated that personality traits are related to personality disorders (Deary et al., 1998; Widiger & Costa, 1994). Narcissism, defined as a personality disorder, is associated with excessive self-esteem, lack of empathy, underestimation of others, overestimation of their abilities and feelings of jealousy. Literature on narcissism distinguishes between grandiose and vulnerable narcissism (Eldoğan, 2016; Miller et al., 2018). While grandiose narcissism includes features such as high self-esteem, boasting, aggression, assertiveness, and dominance, vulnerable narcissism is defined by a sense of inadequacy, low self-esteem, and includes features such as hiding negative emotions, shyness, defensiveness, and insecurity (Derry et al., 2020; Rogoza, 2016). Most of the existing research associates personality traits with the grandiose dimension of narcissism (Cain et al., 2008; Miller et al., 2013). In this study, it is hypothesised that personality traits are predictors of vulnerable narcissism. In addition, most past studies used students as the unit of analysis (Skues et al., 2012; Allroggen et al., 2018). The unit of analysis in this study is teachers. This is because individuals' narcissistic tendencies are accepted as motivating factors in the decision to enter the teaching profession (Friedman, 2016; Schmitt, 2021).

Narcissistic tendencies of teachers who perform a social profession may affect their behaviours in the field of duty (Friedman, 2016; Schmitt, 2021). It is assumed that to the extent that people can control their emotions, they can control their narcissistic tendencies (Di Pierro et al., 2017). Emotion regulation encompasses internal and external processes, involving the comprehension, interpretation, and modification of emotional responses as needed to attain one's objectives (Garnefski et al., 2001; Taxer & Gross, 2018). Emotion regulation is the process of keeping a person's positive and negative emotions within acceptable limits (Gross, 2015; Jiang et al., 2016). Emotion regulation is the ability to keep emotions within acceptable limits for oneself and society. Thanks to emotional regulation, a person monitors their emotions, understands them, and works to change them positively. The individual uses basic strategies to regulate his emotions. These strategies can reduce or increase the intensity, duration, or severity of positive or negative emotions. Individuals' emotion regulation strategies are directly related to their personality traits (Zhang et al., 2017). Studies show that personality traits are instrumental in regulating and shaping individuals' emotions (Hughes et al., 2020; Kotov et al., 2010; Krueger & Markon, 2014). Additionally, emotion regulation can be assumed to be a mediating variable in the relationship between individuals' personality traits and vulnerable narcissism levels.

The existing literature contains numerous empirical studies investigating the bivariate relationships between personality traits and vulnerable narcissism (Di Blasi et al., 2020; Dåderman & Kajonius, 2024; Gubler et al., 2025), as well as between emotion regulation and vulnerable narcissism (Di Pierro et al., 2017; Loeffler et al., 2020; Blay et al., 2024; Voulgaridou, 2025). In contrast, there is a notable lack of research directly examining the mediating role of emotion regulation in the relationship between personality traits and vulnerable narcissism. Therefore, the present study is expected to fill this theoretical gap and provide an original contribution to the literature. It is anticipated that this research will offer significant insights into the specific processes through which personality traits are transformed into vulnerable narcissistic tendencies.

## Literature review

### Personality and personality traits

Personality traits are pivotal in individual differences. Although people are partially similar biologically, they show significant differences in personality structures, and the concept of personality explains these differences. While various theories attempt to elucidate the concept of personality, it is essential to note that there is no universally agreed-upon definition (Diener & Lucas, 2019; Horwood et al., 2020; Cheng & Xie, 2018). Allport (1952) analysed personality into two categories, biophysical and biosocial, and defined personality as the capacity of the individual to adapt to the environment in which

he interacts, following his current physical and psychological state. Personality is essentially the set of characteristics that distinguish the individual from others and are relatively permanent, including his intellectual, psychological, and physical characteristics, as well as his social interactions.

To understand personality traits, some approaches have been developed, such as the Motive Approach, the Evolutionary Approach, the Biological Process Approach, the Psychoanalytic Approach, the Social Learning Approach, the Self-Realisation Approach, the Self-Regulation Approach and the Cognitive Approach (Horwood et al., 2020; Matthews et al., 2003). Among these approaches, the Traits Approach emphasises relatively stable personality traits in different situations. The trait approach assumes that people have highly stable traits that are displayed across many settings and are deeply embedded in the person. The trait approach is the fixed patterns of an individual's behaviour, emotions, and thoughts (Pervin & John, 2001; Horwood et al., 2020). In research, the trait approach has been associated with accurate measurement. These measures include a quantitative approach that emphasises how an individual differs from the mean. Among all approaches to studying personality, the Trait Approach is better suited to statistical analysis because it emphasises quantity (Larsen et al., 2020). Most researchers using this approach rely on quantitative factors to determine the essential characteristics of an individual's personality (Pervin & John, 2001). The study relies on the Traits Approach, which emphasises the consistency of a stable personality across diverse situations.

The "Five Factor Model," based on the traits approach, has demonstrated validity and consistency across Western and Eastern cultures and is the leading model in personality research (Çiçek & Aslan, 2020; McCrae & Terracciano, 2005). The model emphasises that personality has five characteristics: Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Responsibility, Neuroticism and Openness to Experience (Costa & McCrae, 1992; McCrae & John, 1992). Extroverts are characterised by being more communicative, sociable, lively, and exciting than introverts. Agreeable individuals are characterised by being compatible with others, respectful, caring, compassionate, flexible, kind, and secure, compared to maladjusted individuals. Responsible individuals are characterised by striving for success, competence, task orientation, organisation, and self-discipline, whereas the opposite characterises irresponsible individuals. Emotionally unstable individuals are characterised by being more anxious, pessimistic and insecure than balanced individuals. Finally, individuals who are open to experience are associated with characteristics such as being more curious, open to innovations, analytical, creative and original compared to individuals who are not open (Costa & McCrae, 1992; McCrae & John, 1992). According to this model, a good description of a person's personality can be obtained by determining the person's level of these traits (Fleeson & Jayawickreme, 2015). In line with these explanations, the Five-Factor Personality Model was used in this study to assess teachers' personality traits. There is a growing body of research linking the Five-Factor Model of Personality to narcissism (Allroggen et al., 2018; Meng & Leung, 2021) and emotion regulation strategies (Barańczuk, 2019; Hughes et al., 2020). Accordingly, it can be assumed that personality traits are related to vulnerable narcissism and emotion regulation mediates this relationship. Accordingly, it can be assumed that personality traits are related to vulnerable narcissism and emotion regulation mediates this relationship.

### **Narcissism and vulnerable narcissism**

The examination of narcissism has been explored by early psychoanalytic and self-theorists. Currently, studies on narcissism are widely discussed in the realms of clinical psychology, psychiatry, and social and personality psychology (Eldoğan, 2016; Pincus & Lukowitsky, 2010). While clinical psychology and psychiatry emphasise the pathological or maladaptive aspects of narcissism, primary social or personality literature emphasises potential aspects of narcissism (Edershile & Wright, 2019; De Wet, 2010). From a clinical perspective, narcissism is identified as a psychological disorder marked by "pervasive grandiosity, self-admiration, and lack of empathy (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The social personality perspective approaches narcissism as a personality trait and does not take into account its pathological dimension (Miller & Campbell, 2008).

However, social-personality literature associates narcissism with feelings of self-overvaluation, lack of empathy, devaluation of others, and jealousy resulting from overestimating one's abilities (Di Blasi et al., 2020). Narcissism refers to the dark side of inflated and exaggerated self-esteem. To care too much about oneself is to underestimate others. Narcissism is also associated with ignoring others and, therefore, with problems in interpersonal relationships (Kealy & Rasmussen, 2012; Brummelman & Sedikides, 2020). Despite the widespread view in the literature that associates narcissism with excessively high self-esteem, Kernberg (1975) sees narcissism as a defence mechanism against low self-esteem. Kernberg's expression of the narcissist's individual as hypersensitive, socially silent, and anxious is related to the vulnerability dimension of narcissism (Derry et al., 2020; Zeigler-Hill et al., 2010).

Historically, psychological theorists have categorised narcissism into two types: grandiose narcissism and vulnerable narcissism (Eldoğan, 2016; Miller et al., 2018). The partially emphasised characteristics of grandiose narcissism are sociability, exhibitionism, high self-esteem and assertiveness. Characterised by low self-esteem, negative emotionality, and social withdrawal, vulnerable narcissism is linked to traits such as intense desire for approval, hypersensitivity to the opinions of others, and extreme vulnerability (Casale & Banchi, 2020; Crowe et al., 2019). Features such as arrogance, aggression, and dominance are associated. Vulnerable narcissism results from interpersonal hostility, low socialisation, and persistent negative mood. Individuals with vulnerable narcissistic traits have retrospectively reported a series of adverse events, encompassing experiences of abuse and maltreatment during their childhood, including instances involving parental figures (Miller et al., 2018; Miller et al., 2011). Additionally, low self-esteem, heightened anxiety levels, tendencies toward neuroticism, and feelings of depression are linked to vulnerable narcissism (Krizan & Herlache, 2018; Kaufman et al., 2020). The reserved nature of individuals with vulnerable narcissistic traits may result in diverse communication and interaction challenges within their social environment (Krizan & Herlache, 2018; Loeffler et al., 2020; Pincus & Lukowitsky, 2010).

### Emotion regulation

Teaching is a challenging profession that requires complex social and emotional competence. Like other professionals in the service sector, teachers need to express emotions that evoke certain feelings in the people they interact with in their field of work (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Hochschild, 1983; Reyhanoglu & Balıkcıoğlu, 2019). Teachers are therefore expected to use emotional labour to portray, and ideally experience, emotions that conform to professional norms (Bodenheimer & Shuster, S. 2020). Hochschild (1983) defined emotional labour as "the management of emotions to create a publicly observable face and body image". In this approach, there are two ways of regulating emotions. Surface acting, in which one regulates one's emotional expressions, and deep acting, in which one consciously changes one's emotions to show the desired emotion. These two methods of managing emotions broadly correspond to emotion regulation (Grandey, 2000). In this study, teachers' emotion regulation was examined using emotion regulation theory.

The importance of adequately regulating emotions for psychological health has been emphasised (Gross, 1998; Aldao et al., 2010; Werner & Gross, 2010). Emotion regulation refers to the ability to change one's levels, thoughts, or feelings about events (Cheshure et al., 2020; Taxer & Gross, 2018). Emotion regulation is an individual's effort to strengthen desired moods and reduce undesirable moods (Salovey & Birnbaum, 1989; Jiang et al., 2016). Emotion regulation includes strategies for increasing, decreasing, or maintaining the intensity and duration of one's positive and negative emotions (Young et al., 2019). Emotion regulation strategies are an individual's efforts to change their emotions to achieve their goals by meeting environmental demands (Campbell-Sills & Barlow, 2007).

Individuals employ various emotion regulation strategies to achieve their goals. For this reason, many emotion regulation strategy models have been developed in the literature. This study used cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression as emotion regulation strategies. Cognitive reassessment refers to changing the emotional impact by changing the person's assessment of the situation (Gross, 2015). Reappraisal stands out as the most frequently scrutinised form of cognitive change. In this strategy, the individual changes how he perceives, understands, and interprets the event to reduce the emotional impact he experiences (Taxer & Gross, 2018). Expressive suppression involves attempts to restrain the outward expression of experienced emotions and to alter the physiological, experiential, or behavioural aspects of the emotional response (Koole, 2009; Gross, 2002; Niven et al., 2011). However, the fact that individuals use emotion regulation strategies effectively does not indicate that they can avoid unwanted negative emotional experiences. Effectively employing emotion regulation strategies allows individuals to maintain their emotional states at an acceptable level when confronted with situations that trigger intense emotions (Cheshure et al., 2020; Taxer & Gross, 2018). There is a strong relationship between emotion regulation, the flexibility of the individual across different situations, and the ability to adapt to new emotional states (Cole, Michel & Teti, 1994). Emotion regulation strategies (John & Gross, 2004; Wang et al., 2009) and levels of vulnerable narcissism (Allroggen et al., 2018; Miller et al., 2018; Miller & Campbell, 2008) differ according to personality traits.

Research indicates that there is a positive relationship between emotion regulation and vulnerable narcissism (Zhang et al., 2017; Cheshure et al., 2020). Similarly, studies have found a significant relationship between emotion regulation strategies and vulnerable narcissism (Altmann, 2017; Di Pierro et al., 2017). Additionally, studies show that personality traits predict emotion regulation, and there is a significant relationship between personality traits and emotion regulation strategies (Barańczuk, 2019; Kahya & Gençöz, 2020). In this context, focusing on the mediating role of emotion regulation, which is

related to both personality traits and vulnerable narcissism, can make significant contributions to the literature in understanding the relationships among these variables. Building on this point, this study examines the mediating role of emotion regulation in the relationship between personality traits and vulnerable narcissism. For this purpose, the following hypotheses have been tested.

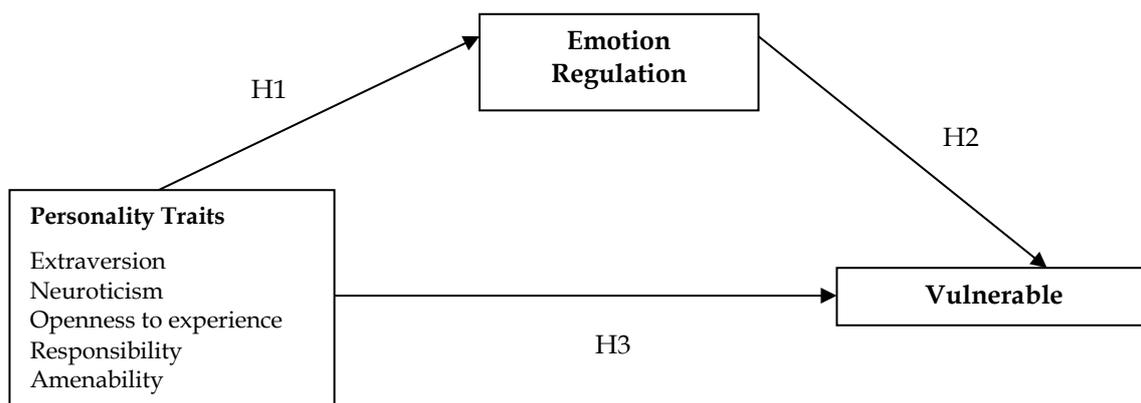
**H<sub>1</sub>:** Participants' personality traits have a significant and positive effect on their emotion regulation.

**H<sub>2</sub>:** Participants' emotion regulation has a significant and positive effect on their levels of vulnerable narcissism.

**H<sub>3</sub>:** Participants' personality traits have a significant and positive effect on their levels of vulnerable narcissism.

**H<sub>4</sub>:** Emotion regulation has a significant mediating role in the effect of participants' personality traits on their levels of vulnerable narcissism.

The following hypothetical model was developed to be tested in line with the research's purpose and the literature.



H4: Indirect effect of Personality Traits on Vulnerable Narcissism through Emotion Regulation (H1xH2)

**Figure 1:** Hypothetical Model of The Research

## Materials and methods

### Research design

The research is correlational and uses quantitative research designs. The research was designed as a cross-sectional, correlational study.

### Working group

The study's universe consists of teachers working in high schools in Kastamonu city centre. According to the 2019–2023 strategic plan of the Kastamonu Provincial Directorate of National Education, the number of teachers in high schools is 1453. To determine the study sample, convenience sampling was preferred. The data were collected via face-to-face surveys, and a total of 329 completed surveys were collected. Upon reviewing the collected forms, 23 surveys identified as incorrectly or incompletely filled were excluded from the analysis; consequently, the study sample consisted of 306 voluntary participants. To determine the study's sample size, the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table, widely accepted in the social sciences literature, was used as a reference. For a population size of N = 1453, the recommended sample size of 306 was reached within the limits of a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. Before the commencement of the study, ethical approval was obtained from the Kastamonu University Ethics Committee with decision number 12-65 dated 08.11.2023.

### Data collection tools

The Ten-Item Personality Inventory (TIPI), introduced by Gosling et al. (2003), is a succinct psychometric tool employed to quantify the five core dimensions of personality: Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Emotional Stability. In this seven-point Likert-type scale, there are two items in each sub-dimension. The Turkish adaptation of the scale was made by Atak (2013). Example items include, "I see myself as extraverted, enthusiastic" (Extraversion) and "I see myself as dependable, self-disciplined" (Conscientiousness). In the original

scale, the total score is not calculated; instead, it is computed separately for each sub-dimension. The Cronbach's Alpha values for each sub-dimension of the adaptation of the scale into Turkish ranged from 0.81 to 0.86 (Atak, 2013).

The Vulnerable Narcissism Scale: The Vulnerable Narcissism Scale, developed by Hendin and Cheek (1997), was used to measure the participants' levels of vulnerable narcissism. This scale is designed to measure the vulnerability and hypersensitivity dimension of narcissism. The original scale is a five-point Likert-type scale consisting of 10 items. In the original version of the scale, the reliability coefficient was 0.629. Scale Sengül et al. (2015) adapted to Turkish. Since two of the original 10 items did not conform to the simple factor structure, they were removed, reducing the Turkish version to 8 items. The scale consists of a single dimension, expressed as hypersensitivity, and increases in scale scores reflect the participants' vulnerable narcissism level. In the Turkish adaptation of the scale, Cronbach's alpha was 0.66.

The Emotion Regulation Scale, developed by Gross and John (2003), is a psychometric instrument comprising 10 items, each rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale. The internal consistency of the original measure was reported to be acceptable, evidenced by a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.79. The scale was adapted to Turkish by Yurtsever (2008). The scale consists of two sub-dimensions: Cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. The scores on the cognitive reappraisal sub-dimension of the scale indicate that participants tend to use cognitive reappraisal strategies in emotion regulation. High scores on emotion suppression indicate the ability to suppress emotions. In this study, Cronbach's Alpha values for the scales were 0.808, 0.718, and 0.679, respectively (Table 2).

**Analysis of data**

AMOS24, SPSS 26 and PROCESS macro for SPSS v4.0 were used to analyse the data. It was determined that the skewness and kurtosis values for the data were within the range of -1 to +1 and met the normal distribution requirement (Hair et al., 2013). Descriptive statistics and Pearson Correlation analysis were used in SPSS 26.0. The internal consistency of the scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The construct validity of the scales was tested using AMOS 24. PROCESS Macro (Model 4) was used to conduct the mediation analysis. The results were evaluated using bootstrap confidence intervals (5000 bootstrap samples). The confidence interval was set at 95% and was found to be zero-free. The statistical significance level was set at P<0.05.

**Results**

**Socio-demographic characteristics**

Socio-demographic characteristics of the teachers are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Socio-demographic characteristics		N	%
Gender	Female	175	57.2
	Male	131	42.8
Marital Status	Married	227	74.2
	Single	79	25.8
Age	22-26 years old	48	15.7
	27-31 years old	56	18.3
	32-36 years old	71	23.2
	37-41 years old	64	20.9
	42 years old and above	67	21.9
Education	Undergraduate	252	82.4
	Master's degree	54	17.6
Total years of professional experience	1-5 years	68	22.2
	6-10years	75	24.5
	11-20years	101	33
	21-30 years	52	17
	30 years and above	10	3.2

Among the teachers who participated in the study, 57.2% were female, 74.2% were married, 23.2% were between the ages of 32-36, 82.4% had bachelor's degrees, and 24.5% had 6-10 years of professional service.

**Descriptive findings regarding the research variables**

Mean score statistics for personality traits, vulnerable narcissism and emotion regulation are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Mean Score Statistics

Variables	Min-Max	$\bar{x}\pm ss$	Skewness	Kurtosis	Cronbach Alpha
Extraversion	1-5	2.58±1.12	0.417	-0.801	0.745
Neuroticism	1-5	2.55±0.92	0.153	-0.665	0.721
Openness to experience	1-5	2.03±1.01	0.773	-0.391	0.786
Responsibility	1-5	2.69±1.08	0.215	-0.797	0.715
Amenability	1-5	2.18±0.93	0.459	-0.576	0.798
Personality Traits	1-5	2.27±0.85	0.209	-0.437	0.808
Vulnerable Narcissism	1-5	2.85±0.68	0.180	-0.557	0.718
Emotion Regulation	1-7	4.21±0.86	-0.164	-0.157	0.679

When Table 2 is analysed, it shows that the mean score for participants' personality traits is 2.91±0.85, the mean score for their levels of vulnerable narcissism is 2.85±0.68, and the mean score for emotion regulation is 4.21±0.86 (Table 2).

**Findings on the relationships between the research variables**

The results of the Pearson Correlation analysis between personality traits, vulnerable narcissism, and emotion regulation are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Pearson Correlation Analysis Findings

Variables		Extraversion	Neuroticism	Openness to experience	Responsibility	Amenability	Personality Traits	Vulnerable Narcissism	Emotion Regulation
Extraversion	r	1	0.521**	0.536**	0.623**	0.240**	0.715**	0.222**	0.166**
	p		0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.004
Neuroticism	r	0.521**	1	0.564**	0.485**	0.460**	0.794**	0.268**	0.162**
	p	0.000		0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.005
Openness to experience	r	0.536**	0.564**	1	0.482**	0.377**	0.778**	0.241**	0.215**
	p	0.000	0.000		0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Responsibility	r	0.623**	0.485**	0.482**	1	0.275**	0.752**	0.228**	0.225**
	p	0.000	0.000	0.000		0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Amenability	r	0.240**	0.460**	0.377**	0.275**	1	0.645**	0.128*	0.045
	p	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000		0.000	0.025	0.437
Personality Traits	r	0.715**	0.794**	0.778**	0.752**	0.645**	1	0.294**	0.230**
	p	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000		0.000	0.000
Vulnerable Narcissism	r	0.222**	0.268**	0.241**	0.228**	0.128*	0.294**	1	0.292**
	p	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.025	0.000		0.000
Emotion Regulation	r	0.166**	0.162**	0.215**	0.225**	0.045	0.230**	0.292**	1
	p	0.004	0.005	0.000	0.000	0.437	0.000	0.000	

Note: \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01

An examination of Table 3 reveals statistically significant and positive relationships between the sub-dimensions of personality traits, vulnerable narcissism levels, and emotion regulation. Vulnerable narcissism is found to establish its strongest correlations with emotional stability (r = 0.268) and the total personality traits score (r = 0.294). Similarly, while extraversion (r = 0.222), openness to experience (r = 0.241), and responsibility (r = 0.228) each exhibit significant correlations with vulnerable narcissism, it is noteworthy that the relationship with the amenability dimension (r = 0.128) remains at a lower level of significance compared to the others. Regarding emotion regulation, this variable shows a positive, moderate relationship with vulnerable narcissism (r = 0.292). Among personality traits, it shows the highest correlations with responsibility (r = 0.225) and openness to experience (r = 0.215). On the other hand, the relationship between amenability and emotion regulation (r = 0.045) is statistically non-significant.

**Model fit analysis results for the construct validity of the scales**

The construct validity of the scales was tested in AMOS 24. Confirmatory Factor Analysis was used to test the construct validity of the scales, and model fit values were used as the basis (Karaman, 2023).

**Table 4:** Model Fit Values

Criteria	$\chi^2/sd$	RMR	GFI	AGFI	NFI	IFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA
<b>Good Fit</b>	$\leq 3$	$\leq .05$	$\geq .95$	$\leq .05$					
<b>Acceptable</b>	$\leq 5$	$\leq .08$	$\geq .90$	$\leq .08$					
<b>Personality Traits</b>	2.695	0.075	0.945	0.906	0.905	0.932	0.902	0.930	0.075
<b>Vulnerable Narcissism</b>	1.935	0.059	0.969	0.943	0.906	0.936	0.900	0.933	0.055
<b>Emotion Regulation</b>	3.261	0.073	0.938	0.906	0.911	0.937	0.904	0.936	0.076

According to the model fit values in Table 4, the scales showed acceptable and good fit.

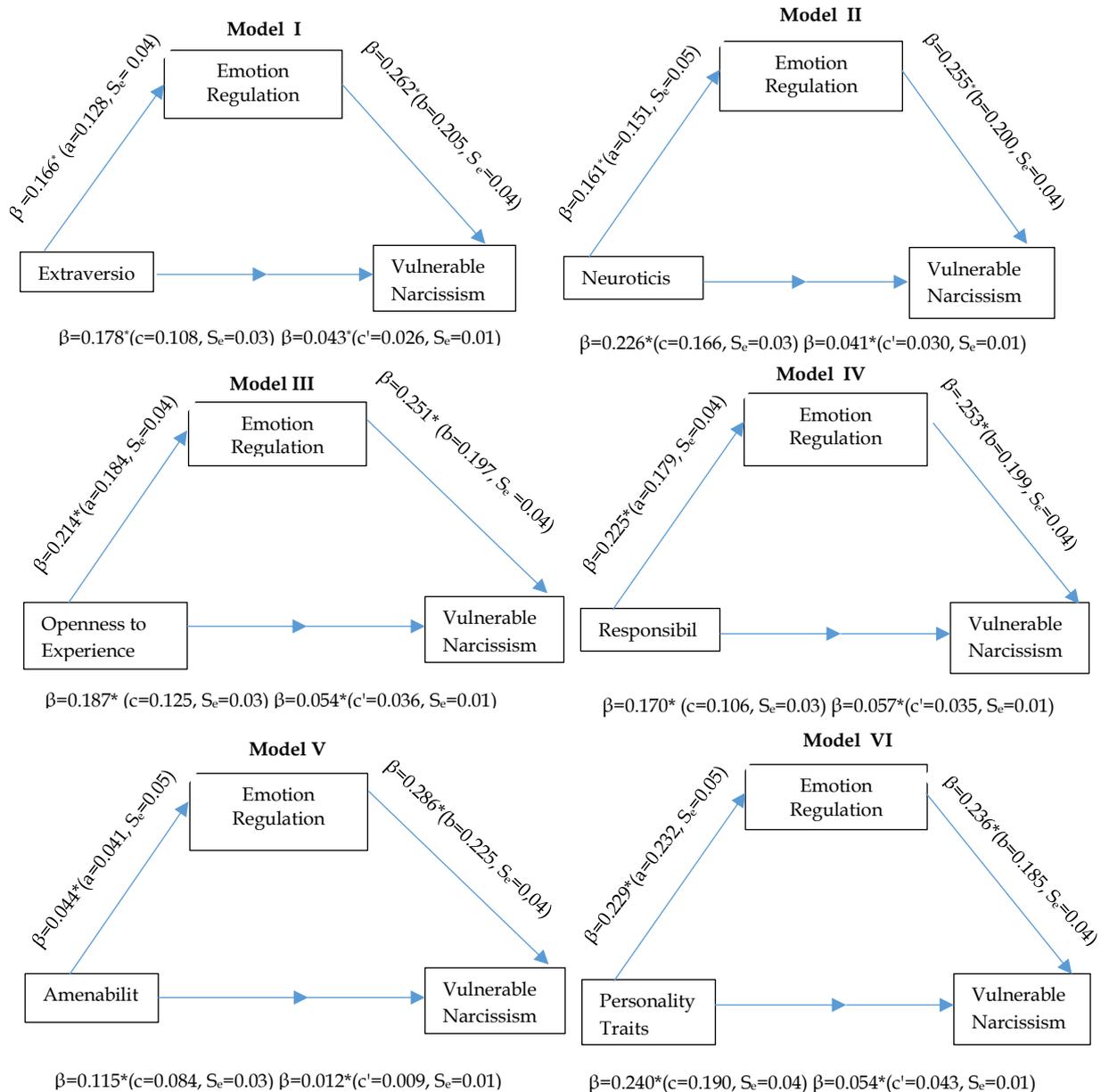
#### **Testing the mediation model between research variables**

Hayes's (2022) approach was used to test the mediating variable hypothesis. The results of the analysis for the mediating effect of emotion regulation on the effect of participants' personality traits on their levels of vulnerable narcissism are presented in Figure 2 and Table 5.

**Table 5:** Mediator Effect Analysis Results Table

Model	Variables			SC	USC	SE	T	P	R <sup>2</sup>	%95 CI	
										LL	UL
Model I	Direct Effect										
	ET	→	ER	0.166	0.128	0.043	2.935	0.003	0.027	0.042	0.214
	ET	→	VN	0.178	0.108	0.033	3.257	0.001	0.116	0.042	0.173
	ER	→	VN	0.262	0.205	0.043	4.790	0.000		0.121	0.290
	Indirect Effect										
	ET	→	VN	0.043	0.026	0.010				0.008	0.049
	Total Effect										
ET	→	VN	0.222	0.134	0.033	3.968	0.000	0.049	0.067	0.201	
Model II	Direct Effect										
	N	→	ER	0.161	0.151	0.052	2.853	0.004	0.026	0.046	0.255
	N	→	VN	0.226	0.166	0.039	4.181	0.000	0.135	0.088	0.244
	ER	→	VN	0.255	0.200	0.042	4.717	0.000		0.116	0.284
	Indirect Effect										
	N	→	VN	0.041	0.030	0.012				0.008	0.056
	Total Effect										
N	→	VN	0.267	0.196	0.040	4.842	0.000	0.071	0.116	0.276	
Model III	Direct Effect										
	OE	→	ER	0.214	0.184	0.048	3.833	0.000	0.046	0.089	0.278
	OE	→	VN	0.187	0.125	0.037	3.388	0.000	0.118	0.052	0.199
	ER	→	VN	0.251	0.197	0.043	4.559	0.000		0.112	0.282
	Indirect Effect										
	OE	→	VN	0.054	0.036	0.011				0.016	0.062
	Total Effect										
OE	→	VN	0.241	0.162	0.037	4.333	0.000		0.088	0.235	
Model IV	Direct Effect										
	RS	→	ER	0.225	0.179	0.044	4.027	0.000	0.050	0.091	0.267
	RS	→	VN	0.170	0.106	0.034	3.070	0.002	0.112	0.038	0.175
	ER	→	VN	0.253	0.199	0.043	4.566	0.000		0.113	0.284
	Indirect Effect										
	RS	→	VN	0.057	0.035	0.017				0.024	0.093
	Total Effect										
RS	→	VN	0.227	0.142	0.035	4.074	0.000	0.051	0.073	0.211	
Model V	Direct Effect										
	AB	→	ER	0.044	0.041	0.053	0.777	0.437	0.002	-0.063	0.146
	AB	→	VN	0.115	.084	0.039	2.113	0.035	0.098	0.005	0.163
	ER	→	VN	0.286	0.225	0.042	5.253	0.000		0.140	0.309
	Indirect Effect										
	AB	→	VN	0.012	0.009	0.012				-0.013	0.034
	Total Effect										
AB	→	VN	0.128	0.093	0.041	2.253	0.024		0.011	0.175	
Model VI	Direct Effect										
	PT	→	ER	0.229	0.232	0.056	4.115	0.000	0.052	0.121	0.343
	PT	→	VN	0.240	0.190	0.043	4.383	0.000	0.139	0.105	0.276
	ER	→	VN	0.236	0.185	0.043	4.326	0.000		0.101	0.270
	Indirect Effect										
	PT	→	VN	0.054	0.043	0.013				0.019	0.071
	Total Effect										
PT	→	VN	0.294	0.234	0.043	5.370	0.000	0.086	0.148	0.319	

Note: SC: Standardized Coefficients; USC: Unstandardized Coefficients; SE: Standard Error; LL: Lower Limit; UL: Upper Limit; CI: Confidence Interval; ET: Extraversion; N: Neuroticism; OE: Openness to Experience RS: Responsibility; AB: Amenability; PT: Personality Traits; VN: Vulnerable Narcissism; ER: Emotion Regulation



**Figure 2:** Research Model Visual Results

In terms of direct effects, extraversion ( $\beta=0.166$ ) significantly and positively influenced emotion regulation, with an explained variance ( $R^2$ ) of 0.027. Furthermore, extraversion ( $\beta=0.178$ ) and emotion regulation ( $\beta=0.262$ ) were found to significantly and positively affect vulnerable narcissism, accounting for an explained variance ( $R^2$ ) of 0.116. Regarding the indirect effect, extraversion had a significant and positive effect ( $\beta=0.043$ ) on vulnerable narcissism. With the inclusion of emotion regulation in the model, both the direct and indirect effects of extraversion on vulnerable narcissism remained significant. In this regard, emotion regulation partially mediated the relationship (Table 5; Model I; Figure 2).

Regarding direct effects, it was determined that neuroticism ( $\beta=0.161$ ) significantly and positively influenced emotion regulation, with an explained variance ( $R^2$ ) of 0.026. It was further established that neuroticism ( $\beta=0.226$ ) and emotion regulation ( $\beta=0.255$ ) significantly and positively affected vulnerable narcissism, with an explained variance ( $R^2$ ) of 0.135. In terms of the indirect effect, neuroticism was found to have a significant and positive effect ( $\beta=0.041$ ) on vulnerable narcissism. Upon the inclusion of emotion regulation in the model, the direct and indirect effects of neuroticism on vulnerable narcissism were significant. Thus, emotion regulation partially mediated the relationship (Table 5; Model II; Figure 2).

In terms of direct effects, openness to experience ( $\beta=0.214$ ) significantly and positively influenced emotion regulation, with an explained variance ( $R^2$ ) of 0.046. It was found that openness to experience

( $\beta=0.187$ ) and emotion regulation ( $\beta=0.251$ ) significantly and positively affected vulnerable narcissism, with an explained variance ( $R^2$ ) of 0.135. Regarding the indirect effect, openness to experience was found to have a significant and positive effect ( $\beta=0.054$ ) on vulnerable narcissism. With the inclusion of emotion regulation in the model, the direct and indirect effects of openness to experience on vulnerable narcissism remained significant. Accordingly, emotion regulation was observed to partially mediate (Table 5; Model III; Figure 2).

In terms of direct effects, responsibility ( $\beta=0.225$ ) significantly and positively influenced emotion regulation, accounting for 5.0% of the variance ( $R^2$ ). It was established that responsibility ( $\beta=0.170$ ) and emotion regulation ( $\beta=0.253$ ) significantly and positively affected vulnerable narcissism, with an explained variance ( $R^2$ ) of 0.112. Regarding the indirect effect, responsibility was found to have a significant and positive effect ( $\beta=0.057$ ) on vulnerable narcissism. Upon the inclusion of emotion regulation in the model, the direct and indirect effects of responsibility on vulnerable narcissism were significant. Accordingly, emotion regulation partially mediated the relationship (Table 5; Model IV; Figure 2).

Regarding direct effects, amenability ( $\beta=0.044$ ) did not significantly influence emotion regulation. It was found that amenability ( $\beta=0.115$ ) and emotion regulation ( $\beta=0.286$ ) significantly and positively affected vulnerable narcissism, with an explained variance ( $R^2$ ) of 0.098. In terms of the indirect effect, it was determined that amenability ( $\beta=0.012$ ) did not significantly influence vulnerable narcissism. In this model, emotion regulation was found not to mediate (Table 5; Model V; Figure 2).

When the direct effects in Table 4 were analysed, it was found that personality traits had a significant and positive effect on emotion regulation ( $\beta =0.229$ ), and the variance explained ( $R^2$ ) was 0.052. It was determined that personality traits ( $\beta=0.240$ ) and emotion regulation ( $\beta=0.236$ ) had a significant, positive effect on participants' levels of vulnerable narcissism, with an explained variance ( $R^2$ ) of 0.139. When the indirect effect was analysed, it was found that personality traits had a significant and positive effect on vulnerable narcissism ( $\beta=0.052$ ). When all the data are evaluated together, it is seen that the direct and indirect effects of personality traits on vulnerable narcissism are significant. Therefore, it can be stated that the inclusion of regulation in the model creates a partial mediation effect (Zhao et al. 2010).

## Conclusion

This study investigated the mediating role of emotion regulation in the relationship between teachers' personality traits and levels of vulnerable narcissism. The research findings revealed statistically significant relationships among the variables. In this section, the tested hypotheses are addressed systematically, in light of the literature, and interpreted within the framework of the research limitations.

The study's first hypothesis (H1), which postulated a relationship between personality traits and emotion regulation, was supported. The literature widely recognises that personality traits are significant determinants of individuals' tendencies to manage emotional processes (Gross & John, 2003). When the relationships between personality sub-dimensions and emotion regulation were examined in this research, it was observed that all dimensions, except amenability, exerted a statistically significant, positive effect on emotion regulation. This finding is consistent with various studies indicating that fundamental traits—such as extraversion, emotional stability, openness to experience, and conscientiousness—are significantly associated with emotion regulation skills (Purnamaningsih, 2017; Barańczuk, 2019).

The absence of a significant correlation between the amenability dimension and emotion regulation tendencies in the current sample aligns with Gross's (2007) theoretical framework. Gross (2007) suggested that individuals characterised by high levels of amenability may prioritise maintaining their current emotional state over actively modifying existing conditions. In this context, it can be inferred that such individuals, motivated by the preservation of social harmony, may tend toward situational acceptance rather than active emotional regulation or environmental modification.

The study's second hypothesis (H2), which examined the effect of emotion regulation on vulnerable narcissism, was supported, indicating that emotion regulation serves as a significant predictor of vulnerable narcissism. This finding aligns with the theoretical framework established by Loeffler et al. (2020), which characterises vulnerable narcissism through general difficulties in emotion regulation. The literature emphasises that individuals experiencing challenges in emotion regulation exhibit heightened sensitivity to criticism and rejection, a condition that may subsequently trigger vulnerable narcissistic defences (Zeigler-Hill & Vonk, 2015; Zhang et al., 2017).

The third hypothesis (H3), which postulated that 'participants' personality traits exert a significant and positive effect on vulnerable narcissism levels,' was supported by the analysis results. The findings indicate that the general personality structures of teachers serve as significant predictors of vulnerable narcissism tendencies. It is widely recognised in the literature that personality traits are fundamental predictors for understanding narcissism (Miller et al., 2011; Zeigler-Hill et al., 2010; Dåderman & Kajonius, 2024). In this context, the results of the present study align with the existing literature. Specifically, Somma et al. (2025) confirm the relationship between personality traits and vulnerable narcissism. Research findings revealed statistically significant and positive correlations between all sub-dimensions of personality traits and vulnerable narcissism. In particular, the strong relationship observed between neuroticism and vulnerable narcissism parallels literature findings that highlight high emotional sensitivity and negative affectivity at the core of vulnerable narcissism (Miller et al., 2018; Rogoza et al., 2018). In this regard, lower levels of emotional stability among participants may trigger vulnerable narcissistic tendencies as a defence mechanism to mask negative perceptions of the past and rejection sensitivity (Zajenkowski et al., 2021). Furthermore, the positive relationship between extraversion, openness to experience, and conscientiousness with narcissism is considered a reflection of individuals' efforts to defend themselves and gain acceptance within their social environments (Zajenkowski & Szymaniak, 2021).

Finally, the fourth hypothesis (H4), regarding the mediating role of emotion regulation in the relationship between personality traits and vulnerable narcissism, was supported. The findings suggest that the influence of personality traits on vulnerable narcissism is partially realised through emotion regulation processes. This result supports the view that personality traits do not directly translate into behaviour but are instead shaped by socio-cognitive and emotional processes. Mediation models established within the scope of the study indicate that extraversion, neuroticism, openness to experience, and conscientiousness significantly and positively influence both emotion regulation skills and vulnerable narcissism levels. Emotion regulation was found to play a partial mediation role in the relationship between these four personality dimensions and vulnerable narcissism. Specifically, the direct effect of neuroticism on vulnerable narcissism is supported by strong evidence in the literature suggesting that vulnerable narcissism is fundamentally a 'disorder of neuroticism' (Miller et al., 2017). Conversely, the lack of a significant effect of the amenability dimension on emotion regulation and its exclusion from the mediation model may be attributed to the tendency of agreeable individuals to maintain their emotional states rather than deploy active emotion regulation strategies, as noted by Gross (2007) and Purnamaningsih (2017). Additionally, the interpersonal distrust and defensive attitudes inherent in vulnerable narcissism may theoretically conflict with the social harmony facilitated by amenability (Rogoza et al., 2018).

Teaching is recognised as a profession where personality traits are directly reflected in professional practice (Chen et al., 2021; Friedman, 2006). Researchers suggest that vulnerable narcissism is characterised by traits such as self-defence, hypersensitivity, and emotional instability (Kaufman et al., 2020; Malesza & Kaczmarek, 2018; Holtzman et al., 2019; Derry et al., 2020; Gök, 2021). Individuals with high levels of vulnerable narcissism often exhibit dominant characteristics such as sensitivity to criticism, high anxiety, and shyness. The current research indicates that the personality structures of vulnerable narcissists may attempt to mask feelings of inadequacy and loss of competence, leading to highly defensive behaviours. Teachers' levels of narcissism may also influence their pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning processes (Güle et al., 2025). This condition suggests that teachers with higher levels of vulnerable narcissism might project negative emotions onto their students or experience difficulties in maintaining patience and understanding during challenging classroom scenarios. Such emotional variability may hinder the establishment of supportive teacher-student relationships, which are fundamental to creating a positive learning climate (Yin et al., 2024).

Studies suggest that individuals may address social issues arising from narcissism through emotion regulation (Voulgaridou, 2025). Furthermore, emotion regulation skills are among the most significant indicators of maturation and personal development (Cludius et al., 2020; Ford & Gross, 2019). The ability to regulate emotions may specifically assist teachers in managing negative affects such as anger, frustration, and anxiety (Taxer & Gross, 2018; Friedman, 2006). In this context, these findings suggest that teachers could be supported through 'Emotional Self-Regulation' training aimed at increasing their general emotion regulation capacities to manage narcissistic sensitivities.

### **Theoretical inferences**

The literature indicates that personality traits significantly influence individuals' responses to environmental demands and their management of emotional states. Research exploring the interaction between personality and emotion regulation consistently reveals that personality traits exert a distinct

influence on the selection and implementation of emotion regulation strategies. Consequently, personality is understood to play a fundamental and formative role in determining how individuals manage their emotions (Nezamipour & Ahadi, 2016; Pollock et al., 2016; Purnamaningsih, 2017). Research results suggest that emotion regulation is not merely a skill but may serve as a bridge in the relationship between personality and narcissistic perception. Theoretically, it can be inferred that teachers' narcissistic vulnerabilities are organised by their capacities to manage emotional processes. This finding aligns with the theory of 'general emotion regulation difficulty' underlying vulnerable narcissism, as emphasised by Loeffler et al. (2020). It supports the perspective that narcissism should be addressed as an emotional regulation disorder.

From a theoretical perspective, this study provides an empirical contribution to the Alternative Model approach (Skodol et al., 2014), which explains narcissism in terms of the level of 'personality functioning' beyond traditional clinical diagnoses. The high level of emotional labour required by the teaching profession (Purper et al., 2023) may render the relationship between personality traits and narcissistic tendencies more vulnerable. A decline in teachers' emotion regulation capacities may lead to the transformation of vulnerable narcissism tendencies into a professional defence mechanism.

### **Practical inferences**

Based on the research findings, several implications can be drawn for practitioners in the field of education. The results indicate that teachers' emotion regulation skills may function as a mechanism in managing potential narcissistic vulnerabilities arising from personality traits. In this context, incorporating modules focused on emotional awareness and regulation strategies into teacher education programs or in-service training may contribute to professional well-being. However, the effectiveness of these recommendations should be further evaluated through longitudinal studies and experimental designs. The results suggest that personality traits significantly and positively predict vulnerable narcissism. This condition indicates that professional development for teachers should focus not only on technical skills but also on guidance services that support overall personality development.

### **Limitations and recommendations for further research**

This study is limited to educators serving in public schools in Türkiye. Future research could use a comparative design to examine differences between public and private educational institutions. As the current study focused exclusively on teachers, replicating the research across diverse professional groups may further clarify the phenomenon. The study utilised a quantitative, cross-sectional design; therefore, longitudinal studies accounting for socio-economic shifts could provide more comprehensive insights. Furthermore, employing qualitative or mixed-method approaches could enhance the understanding of the subject matter. Additionally, the validity of the research findings could be further established through meta-analytical studies. A primary consideration in interpreting the research findings is the limited effect sizes observed. This condition suggests that vulnerable narcissism may be influenced by various unmeasured variables, such as family life, professional experience, or environmental factors, beyond the variables examined in this study.

In conclusion, this study provides an empirical framework for understanding the complex network among personality, emotion, and narcissism. It is recommended that future research deepen these relationships by incorporating additional unmeasured psychological constructs into the model and by employing longitudinal designs with broader sample sizes.

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