

3rd World Conference on Psychology, Counselling and Guidance (WCPCG-2012)

Teacher Well-being: personal and job resources and demands

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the impact of work demands, personal resources and job resources on teacher well-being. Variables were measured with self-reports of Tension, Secondary appraisal of stressful situations (demands), Cognitive and Behavioral Coping (personal resources), Autonomy, Feedback, Variety and Social Support (job resources), Burnout and Engagement (well-being). The empirical study was carried out by structural equation modeling. The independent variables (work demands and resources) showed different significant effects on burnout and engagement. Implications for interventions on teacher well-being are discussed.

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Selection and peer-review under responsibility of Prof. Dr. Huseyin Uzunboylu & Dr. Mukaddes Demirok, Near East University, Cyprus

Keywords: teacher well-being, burnout, engagement, personal resources, proactive coping;

1. Introduction

Nowadays teachers frequently have to cope with stressful situations that can affect their psychological well-being at work. Among the situations they identify as more stressful are mainly: a) Pupils' behavioural problems. Such problems can vary from lack of attention or participation in tasks to severe negative conducts or even aggressions; b) Work overload and lack of time to perform the different tasks and c) The conflict and ambiguity in the teacher's role (Hakanen, Bakker & Schaufeli, 2006; Marqués, Lima & Lopes, 2005; Papastylianou, Kaila & Polychronopoulos, 2009; Pas, Bradshaw, Hershfeldt & Leaf, 2010).

There are not many studies in literature that have been analyzed from positive perspective variables related to teacher work well-being, particularly personal variables such as cognitive or behavioral coping, that could be modified by psychological intervention. Because of that, this study aims to analyze the impact of personal and job variables on teacher well-being, taking as theoretical frame the Lazarus & Folkman Stress Model (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and the Demand-Resource Model (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner & Schaufeli, 2001; Hakanen, Bakker & Schaufeli, 2006). Teacher well-being has been operationalized, not only from its negative aspect, the *burnout syndrome*, but also from *work engagement*, a variable emerged from Positive Psychology.

The aim of this research is to analyze the effect on teacher well-being of following variables: perceived work-demands, personal coping resources and job resources. In this way, we try to give an answer to the following hypotheses:

H₁: Personal resources of coping will modulate the relationship between perceived work demands and teacher well-being.

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H₂: Personal resources of coping as well as job resources will have a significant effect on teacher well-being.

H₃: The effect of perceived work demands, personal resources and job resources will be different on burnout than on engagement.

H₄: Engagement will have a direct negative effect on burnout, and plays a modulating role between perceived work demands and resources towards burnout.

2. Method

The present study is a quasi-experimental and trans-sectional design carried out by structural equation modeling (SEM).

2.1. Subjects

Participants were teachers from kindergarten, primary and secondary school from Madrid (Spain) selected by non-probabilistic convenience sampling. 28.4% of the participants were male and 71.6% were female with a mean age of 40.5 years (*S.D.* = 10.8). 74.7% of the teachers worked in private schools and 25.3% in public schools.

2.2. Variables and Measures

A self-report questionnaire was created including the following variables and psychometric instruments:

2.2.1. Perceived Work Demands

Three typically stressful situations on teachers' work were described in the questionnaire: a) Students' behavioral problems; b) Work overload and c) Role conflict and ambiguity. At each stressful situation teachers had to evaluate their *Tension* level and their *Secondary appraisal* (perceived efficacy to cope with situations) in a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Nothing) to 6 (Much).

2.2.2. Personal Resources

Personal resources of coping were divided after exploratory factor analysis in two categories: a) Reactive Coping Strategies (cognitive and behavioral) and b) Proactive Coping Strategies (cognitive and behavioral). These coping strategies were assessed with items from Brief COPE (Carver, 1997), Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ) (Garnefski, Kraaij & Spinhoven, 2002) and items created by authors. Reactive coping is related to negative, irrational as well as to passive and even aggressive strategies characterised by the reactivity of the subject to demands. Proactive coping is composed by positive, rational, active and preventive strategies, according to Greenglass (2002) definition. The internal reliability for these scales resulted in a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient between 0.80 and 0.84.

2.2.3. Job Resources

Five job resources were measured:

- a) *Control or Work Autonomy*: measured by five items recommended by Jackson, Wall, Martin & Davids (1993), in the Spanish version from Salanova & Schaufeli (2008). The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was .89.
- b) *Work Feedback*: measured by four items of the Hackman & Oldman (1975) scale, validated in Spain by Salanova & Schaufeli (2008). The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was .65.
- c) *Work Variety*: assessed by three items by Salanova & Schaufeli (2008). The internal reliability was good (.79).
- d) *Social Support from colleagues and supervisors*: measured by 12 items from the Multidimensional Support Scale (Winefield, Winefield & Tiggermann, 1992). The internal reliability was very good (.89 and .94).

2.2.4. Teacher Well-being

Teacher well-being was operationalized in two variables:

- a) *Burnout*: its core dimensions, Exhaustion and Cynicism, were measured by the Maslach Burnout Inventory MBI-GS (Schaufeli, Leiter, Maslach & Jackson, 1996). The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for Exhaustion and for Cynicism was .89 and .83 respectively.
- b) *Engagement*: its main dimensions Vigor and Dedication were measured by the *Utrecht Work Engagement Scale* (UWES) in its Spanish version from Salanova, Schaufeli, Llorens, Peiró & Grau (2000). The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for Exhaustion and for Cynicism was .79 and .84 respectively.

2.3 Procedure

A presentation letter was sent via email to all directors of the centres which were invited to participate in the study together with a leaflet of the project explaining the objective of the research. In some centres, a member of the research team was invited to briefly present the questionnaire to teachers and, at the same time, to motivate them to take part. The questionnaires were completed anonymously. All participants in this research and the obtained data have been treated complying with the ethical principles of scientific research.

2.4 Data Analysis

All data were analyzed by SPSS 15.0 and for SEM we used EQS 6.0 software.

3. Results

The structural equation model of teacher well-being was carried out through Robust Method. Path values and fit indices are showed in Figure 1.

4. Discussion

Fit indices from the structural model show an acceptable fit of the proposed teacher well-being model. Hypothesis 1 seems to be supported by the results: we found indirect effects from Tension and Perceived Efficacy on Burnout and Engagement, modulated by Coping resources. According to Hypothesis 2, Personal resources and Job resources have shown a significant effect on Teacher well-being (Burnout and Engagement), as we expected to. Hypothesis 3 can also be accepted because SEM showed that Reactive Coping had a higher and positive effect on Burnout, however its effect on Engagement was lower and negative; besides Proactive Coping had a higher effect on Engagement than on Burnout. Finally, the effect of Job Resources on Burnout was lower than on Engagement. Hypothesis 4 seems to be confirmed by SEM results. Engagement showed a significant, negative, moderated-high direct effect on Burnout. Engagement also seems to work as modulator between Efficacy, Resources and Burnout. Because of that, being engaged at work could result positive itself but could also be a protective factor against the burnout syndrome.

These conclusions are relevant for the development of interventions to improve occupational health among teachers. Firstly, it seems important to consider on interventions both, personal and job resources. Secondly, interventions on engagement should differ to interventions on burnout. Thirdly, improvements on engagement can probably prevent teacher burnout.

According to the results obtained in this research, it seems relevant to include in teachers' initial and on-going training the following coping strategies:

First of all, strategies to control tension such as muscular relaxation can be useful to control arousal and improve teachers' perception of efficacy. Secondly, proactive coping strategies such as the rational solution of problems, assertiveness, social support seeking –behavioral strategies– or rational planning and positive reappraisal –cognitive strategies–, that can promote work engagement.

Nevertheless, results have also shown the relevance of promoting job resources within educational settings, especially, social resources such as an adequate supervisor's social support and feedback, and autonomous but also collaborative work among teachers.

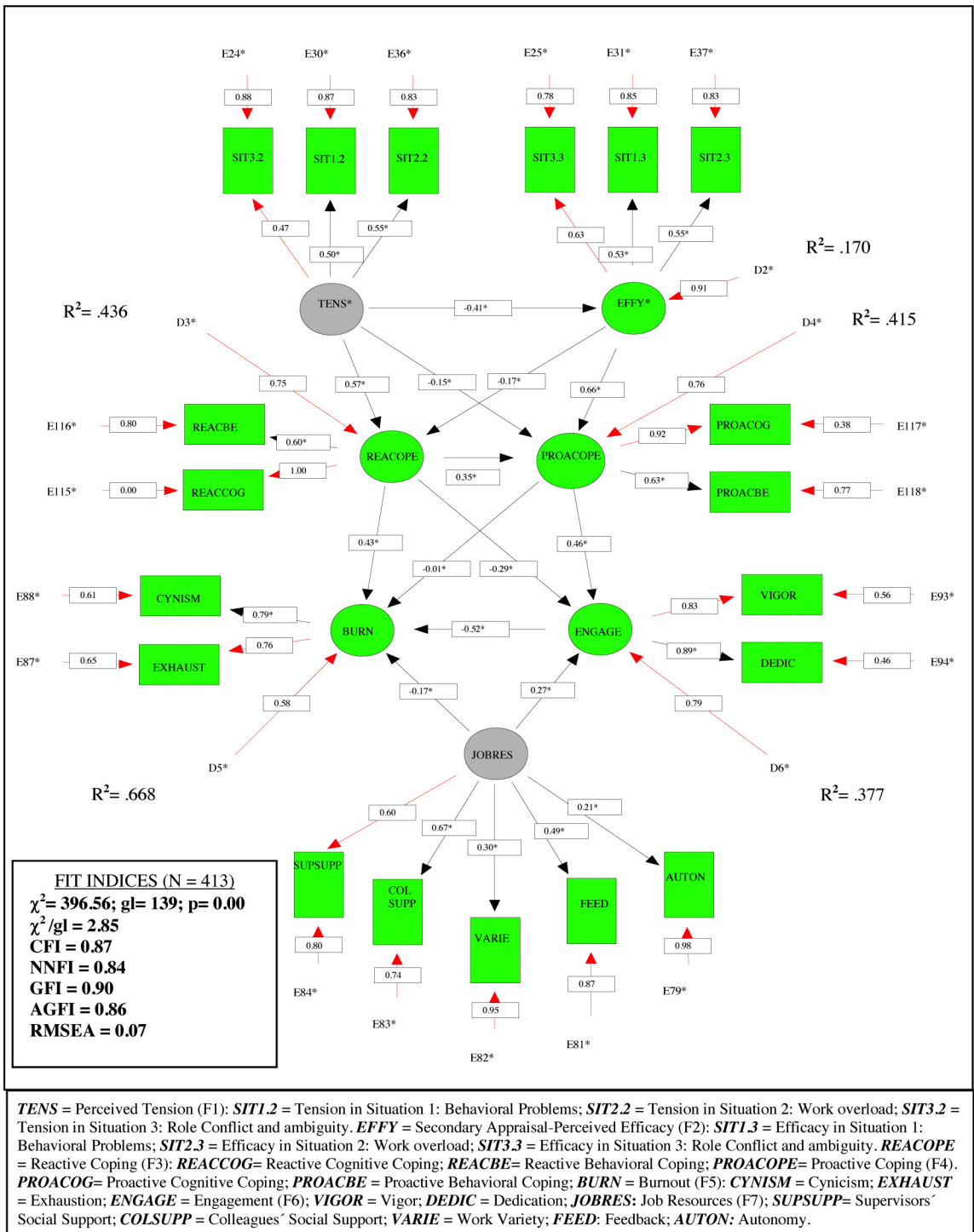


Figure 1. Teacher Well-Being Structural Model

In conclusion, this empirical research has some limitations, such as a quasi-experimental trans-sectional design, that do not allow to establish direct cause-and-effect relationships. However, through a multivariate statistic technique like SEM it has been possible to find out the relationship directions of a group of variables as a whole for a better understanding of the teacher well-being phenomenon. In the future it will be interesting to carry out an experimental longitudinal research to prove the effects of developing proactive coping strategies on the promotion of engagement and prevention of teacher burnout.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to all teachers who participated in this study.

This work was supported by Spanish Ministry of Education and Science (*SEJ2007-60465/EDUC*)

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