



Teaching goals of early career university teachers in Germany



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 27 October 2012

Accepted 9 September 2013

Available online 2 November 2013

Keywords:

Teacher motivation
University teacher
Responsibility
Teacher efficacy
Higher education

ABSTRACT

While schoolteacher motivation has become a significant area in educational research, teachers in higher education have been left somewhat disregarded. This exploratory study focuses on early career university teachers' motivation, specifically on their personal goals. The results show that most participants emphasise their research and qualification rather than their teaching. Focusing on their goals as a teacher, four areas of teaching goals emerge: self-directed, content-directed, teaching-directed and student-directed teaching goals. Based on these, three groups of teachers with different goal profiles were identified: instruction-oriented, student-oriented, and ego-oriented early career university teachers. The study could not confirm any differences between these groups and their self-perceived teacher responsibility or self-efficacy but there were significant differences between the groups in the areas in which early career university teachers teach and in the length of time they have been teaching.

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1. Introduction

Teacher motivation has become a significant area of research in teaching and teacher education during the past ten years (Watt & Richardson, 2008). Most of the studies in this field focus on practicing schoolteachers and those studying to become schoolteachers. These studies show that many factors motivate individuals to become a schoolteacher, including the desire for personal growth and continued learning, to have a positive impact on others' lives and contribute to society, as well as to attain stable, secure employment. Intrinsic and extrinsic reasons such as these are commonly articulated by teachers and teacher candidates and have been identified in recent research (e.g., Chong & Low, 2009; Mansfield & Beltman, 2014; Mansfield, Wosnitza, & Beltman, 2012; Sinclair, 2008). Education employers and researchers are interested in these factors since they influence teachers' decisions to enter, leave or stay in the profession (e.g., Muller, Alliata, & Benninghoff, 2009). The theoretical approaches in the available studies on practicing teachers' motivation are manifold and range among others from achievement goal theory (e.g., Butler & Shiba, 2014) and teacher efficacy (e.g., Klassen, Tze, Betts, & Gordon, 2011) to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (e.g., Otto & Bachmann, 2010) and teacher responsibility (e.g., Lauermann, 2014). Furthermore, there is growing research on the question of the effect different motivating factors have at the beginning as well as during the course of a teaching career (e.g., Richardson & Watt, 2010; Watt, Richardson, & Wilkins, 2014).

While the body of research on schoolteachers' motivation is growing, research on motivation of other groups of teachers like university teachers is still rare. The limited existing research all more or less explicitly used self-determination theory and investigated the qualitative aspects of university teachers' motivation. The studies showed that intrinsically motivated university teachers made an effort with regard to their teaching and take personal pleasure in it. In accordance with

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self-determination theory, university teachers' perception of themselves as being autonomous positively correlated with their intrinsic motivation to teach (Becker & Wild, 2012; Krücken & Wild, 2012; Wilkesmann & Schmid, 2011). In addition to the joy of teaching, the personally perceived importance of the teaching activity itself was decisive for the amount of effort invested in teaching. University teachers identifying with their job ascribed a great importance to higher education and personally deemed it relevant and valuable (Krücken & Wild, 2012).

Focusing on those university teachers more extrinsically motivated, Wilkesmann and Schmid (2011) examined the influence of performance-oriented steering models on the quality of university teaching, as, for example, the payment of performance bonuses for teaching, performance-oriented granting of funds, target agreements and awards for teaching. They found that these above mentioned instruments for the external regulation of behaviour did not have any influence on the motivation to teach. These findings are also supported by research conducted by Becker and Wild (2012), who found that such institutional incentives did not have any direct influence on newly appointed professors' motivation to teach and that there was an even sceptical to negative attitude regarding the validity of teaching awards. In further support of these findings, Krücken and Wild (2012) have pointed out in their study that despite pursuing 'external goals', a high degree of autonomy is being experienced by early career university teachers and that they are willing to highly commit to teaching although they perceive this to be disadvantageous for their career. Having to outweigh teaching against research and other parts of an academic career and the underlying as well as resulting goal conflicts seem to be characteristic of the professional life of a university teacher (Neumann, 1996).

The potential incompatibility of these goals, to be a good teacher, to be a good researcher and to make one's career in the higher education sector, can be assumed to particularly concern early career university teachers who have just entered the profession. Throughout the early stages of an academic career, when it is critical to establish a research profile and affiliation to the scientific community in order to maintain employment in the sector, conflicts may arise as individuals manage priorities in the light of long-term goals while at the same time having neither strategies nor routines for handling these conflicts. It is not surprising that Colbeck (2002) found in interviews that especially those at the beginning of their career described balancing the different duties they have as difficult. About half of these academics stated that they could only achieve this balance by fragmenting their teaching, research, and service roles and either focusing on one at a time or deferring one of these roles altogether. The role deferred was often stated to be teaching. Esdar, Gorges, and Wild (2012) found that junior researchers prioritised research over teaching, as it was perceived to be more beneficial to both reputation and professional development. Teaching was seen as an external requirement.

These findings are supported by extensive research focusing on the research-teaching nexus in which teaching is often found to be theoretically valued by academics but is neither perceived as being connected to research (Hattie & Marsh, 1996) nor as being promoted as strongly or rewarded as highly (Neumann, 1996). Teaching could be shown by Visser-Wijnveen, Van Driel, Van der Rijst, Verloop, and Visser (2009) to however constitute one major component of university teachers' job satisfaction. Whether the working context allows for taking pleasure in teaching, however, differs. Rowland, for example, found several academics mentioning that there were "dangers in spending too much time on teaching" (Rowland, 1996, p. 10), a statement that could, if uttered in the presence of someone new to the field, strongly influence how they organise and experience their subsequent work. In addition, academics leaning more strongly towards research were found to report higher weekly working hours than those emphasising teaching (Altbach, 1996), also because of the fact that only less than a quarter of academics believe that staff decisions are strongly based on the respective person's teaching quality (Höhle & Teichler, 2013). Based on the above, beginning academics can be assumed to find themselves at the challenging interface of *teaching* and *research* all university teachers are facing.

Nevertheless, these two supposedly opposed areas are not sufficient to describe early career university teachers' working context. Beginning academics are also exposed to demands deriving from their *profession* or *career* which are both associated with working at a university also subsuming administrative and service-related matters (Kwiek & Antonowicz, 2013).

Furthermore the socialisation into a profession always involves the adaptation of a person's view of and demands made on oneself as well as aspects of personal development and positioning in a community or the society (Heinz, 1995). Interferences between these goals, some of them already inherently interrelated, are mediated by the additional area of *qualification*. Gaining further qualification, be it regarding research, teaching or other matters, and thereby ensuring one's staying in the job, is especially relevant for early career university teachers (Teichler, 2008) and thus influences and overlaps with all of the other aspects of the working context. Fig. 1 illustrates this specific situation.

In contrast to other countries, the German higher education system offers few permanent non-professorial positions. The implementation of a tenure track system is still in its infancy and is not extensively supported by German universities. University graduates deciding to pursue a doctorate most often start their career by entering a full or half time position as a junior researcher in a third party funded research project or on temporary position with a duration of maximum six years. During this time, these young researchers work on research projects of their institute or school, teach and meanwhile also pursue their PhD. If they do not manage to complete their PhD in six years, they have to leave work at university with the only option to work on third-party funded research projects with all their implications (Ates & Brechelmacher, 2013; Janson, Schomburg, & Teichler, 2007; Teichler, 2008).

The working context these beginning academics enter is highly diverse, as it comprises many different, often conflicting spheres of action. Thus, regarding these persons' goal structures, we can hypothesise that their personal goals which, if at all, have led to this career choice, are not congruent with all their professional duties. Furthermore, these young academics might even show different profiles of motivation regarding the different roles they hold, i.e., being a university teacher, being

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