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Teachers' motivation in relation to their psychological functioning and interpersonal style: A variable- and person-centered approach

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Highly amotivated teachers display more burn-out and less engagement.
- Highly amotivated teachers adopt a less motivating interpersonal style.
- Autonomously motivated teachers display less burn-out and a more motivating style.
- Teachers who feel pressured are more likely to pressure their students.
- Experienced need satisfaction serves as the fuel for valuing and enjoying teaching.

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigates how teachers' motivation relates to burnout and engagement, teaching style and need satisfaction at work. A total of 584 secondary teachers completed validated questionnaires. Four profiles were retained in the cluster analysis. Results showed that teachers who were high on autonomous motivation displayed the most optimal pattern of outcomes, whereas teachers who were high on amotivation showed the opposite pattern. Teachers who were high on controlled motivation were engaged in their jobs, yet they had a greater risk of burnout and of establishing an ego climate. Implications for educational policy and practice are discussed.

1. Introduction

Recently many studies have collected evidence about the high prevalence of burnout among teachers (Aloe, Shisler, Norris, Nickerson, & Rinker, 2014). Many educational practitioners and policy-makers are concerned about these prevalence rates since burnout yields maladaptive outcomes (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993) such as diminished physical health (Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006), lower emotional well-being (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011), and lower work commitment (Hakanen et al., 2006). In contrast to burnout, teachers' engagement is considered a positive indicator of their physical health, well-being and commitment at work (Parker, Martin, Colmar, & Liem, 2012). Teachers, who have high energy levels and resilience (i.e., vigor), teach with great enthusiasm (i.e., dedication) and experience flow while working (i.e., absorption), are said to be highly engaged in teaching (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002). Given the manifold negative outcomes related to burnout and the positive aspects of teachers' engagement, the question of which factors are reducing the prevalence of burnout, while positively affecting teachers' engagement at work, arises. Until today, most research has focused on

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organizational (e.g., work overload) and interpersonal correlates (e.g., students' reactions toward the teacher or school principal's leadership), while personal factors such as teachers' motivation at work have received less attention (Fernet, Guay, Senecal, & Austin, 2012; Roth, 2014). As such, the current study focuses on relationships between teachers' motivation and two indicators of their well-being at work, that is, burnout and engagement at work.

Teachers' motivation is not only relevant for their own psychological functioning, but it may also affect the way they interact with their students (Roth, Assor, Kanat-Maymon, & Kaplan, 2007). The present study therefore relies on two prominent and well-validated theoretical frameworks (i.e., Self-Determination Theory and Achievement Goal Theory), to also examine how teachers' motivation relates to their interpersonal style in the classroom. Finally, if teachers' motivation is indeed predictive of their well-being, and the quality of their interpersonal interactions with students, it is crucial to also understand the roots of teachers' motivation. Therefore, the current study also investigates how teachers' experienced need satisfaction at work relates to teachers' motivation.

1.1. Self-determination theory (SDT) and teachers' quality of motivation

Teacher motivation can be understood as the underlying reasons driving teachers' involvement in teaching (Collie & Martin, 2017), which can qualitatively differ in the degree to which they are self-determined (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Autonomous motivation, the most self-determined form of motivation, is typified by a sense of volition and approbation towards specific activities and consists of two types of regulation; intrinsic motivation (i.e., the inherent pleasure and interest derived from the activity) and identified regulation (i.e., the recognition of the values and importance of a behavior) (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Teachers who get involved in their work for personal satisfaction, and the inherent pleasure of teaching is intrinsically motivated, while teachers who believe their teaching is relevant for their personal and professional development or who value being able to teach young people are driven by identified regulation.

Controlled motivation, situated between autonomous motivation and amotivation, is characterized by feelings of pressure to participate in certain activities, and involves introjected regulation (i.e., internal pressure such as a desire to avoid feelings of guilt and feeling better about oneself) and external regulation (i.e., external pressure such as a desire to obtain rewards or to avoid criticism) (Ryan & Deci, 2017). For instance, teachers who prepare their lessons well to avoid feeling bad about themselves constitute an example of introjected regulation, whereas teachers who put effort into their teaching because they get longer holidays are driven by external regulation.

Finally, amotivation is typified by an absence of motivation or a lack of intention to engage in a task because teachers do not expect to achieve results from their efforts (Deci & Ryan, 2002). To illustrate, teachers are amotivated when they do not understand why they have to continue getting involved in teaching, because they think that the activity they do is useless.

1.2. Teachers' motivation and psychological functioning

Furthermore, SDT makes concrete predictions about how different motivational regulations affect the quality of human behavior (Deci & Ryan, 1985). According to SDT, people seek out opportunities for personal growth, development and choice, and organize their actions based on personal goals and interests when they are autonomously motivated (Deci, 1980). In this sense, autonomous motivation is related to enhanced psychological functioning (Deci, 1980). In contrast, when people display higher levels of controlled motivation, they organize their actions based on pressurizing reasons such as deadlines or surveillance. Although controlled motivated teachers may not necessarily put less energy into their jobs, the feelings of pressure they experience may come with an emotional and psychological cost (Deci & Ryan, 1985), as indexed by higher burnout. When people are high on amotivation, they have the feeling that the outcome of their behaviors is beyond their own control. Amotivation thus finds its roots in a lack of competence, resulting in negative psychological outcomes such as burnout and depression, and would generally go hand in hand with very low levels of engagement (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Manifold studies have confirmed these theoretical premises. In particular, past studies have shown that teachers who are more autonomously motivated, report fewer symptoms of burnout (Eyal & Roth, 2011; Roth, Assor, Maymon, & Kaplan, 2007), and higher engagement (Cheon, Reeve, Yu, & Jang, 2014; Jansen in de Wal, den Brok, Hooijer, Martens, & van den Beemt, 2014). Teachers who are more controlled motivated report more feelings of burnout (Fernet, Senécal, Guay, Marsh, & Dowson, 2008; Van den Berghe et al., 2013), yet relationships with engagement have been inconsistent so far (Fernet, Austin, & Vallerand, 2012; Jansen in de Wal et al., 2014). While teachers who are highly controlled motivated may not necessarily invest less in their job, this would not be the case for teachers high on amotivation. Highly amotivated teachers have a higher risk of burnout (Fernet et al., 2008), and their engagement in their jobs is very low (Nie, Chua, Yeung, Ryan, & Chan, 2015).

1.3. Teachers' motivation and teaching style

Teachers and students interact with each other on a regular basis, and the quality of their interactions can vary considerably. According to the tenets of SDT, teachers' interpersonal styles can differ in the degree to which they are supportive of students' basic psychological needs (BPN) for autonomy, relatedness and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Autonomy refers to people's needs to feel they are the causal agents of their actions (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Relatedness refers to experienced social inclusion and warm interpersonal relationships (Deci & Ryan, 2000). And competence refers to the perceived ability when faced with a situation that threatens an important goal (White, 1959). The provision of choices, following students' pace of progress, and explaining the relevance of the task are practices that are characteristic of an autonomy-supportive teaching style (McLachlan & Hagger, 2010). Teachers who display sincere concern, facilitate cooperation, and work closely with their students, exemplify a relatedness-supportive style (Leenknecht, Wijnia, Loyens, & Rikers, 2017). And finally, teachers who provide guidance by using positive and interrogative feedback, who focus on students' progress and create clarity on expectations and rules, typify a structuring style (Jang, Reeve, & Deci, 2010). In this sense, some parts of a structuring style (i.e., the progress-oriented focus) align with the main ideas of a task-oriented climate as defined within Achievement Goal Theory (AGT) (Butler, 2014; Nicholls, 1989). Teachers develop a task climate among their students when they emphasize learning, effort and individual progress rather than performance and inter-individual comparison, which would be typical for an ego climate. For instance, when reporting on the results of an assessment task, in a task-oriented climate the teacher would emphasize the progression a student has made, while in an ego climate the teacher would focus on the final results and how well a student has done in relation to other students (Butler, 2014). Past studies have shown that a need-supportive (Van den Berghe, Cardon, Tallir, Kirk, & Haerens, 2016) and task-oriented teaching style is related to more adaptive student outcomes, in contrast to an ego climate, which