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Teachers' Life Satisfaction and Wellbeing: Engagement Influences

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Abstract

The European reports indicated lately a decrease of professionalism of teachers, but in the same time the key role of this professional category is emphasized. High quality of education services depends on the quality of teachers' practices. This quality depends on the personal life of teacher too. The topic of teachers' wellbeing is less explored on Romanian population and in the same time is less seen as an important one by the people in charge; that is why we consider to pursue a study in order to bring out to public attention the need of nurturing teachers, as well. The present study figures out a general image of Romanian teachers' wellbeing, taking into account factors which could influence it, and which could counteract the burnout. The purpose of the study is to evaluate the engagement, life satisfaction and wellbeing of Romanian teachers. The study also intends to find out the level of burnout experienced by Romanian teachers and thus to identify coping mechanisms. The hypothesis of engagement and emotional intelligence as moderator variables between burnout and wellbeing was tested. The basic framework for the study look at evidence relating to some elements that have been considered to be influences on wellbeing: gender, environment, experience, professional expertise, personal status, emotional intelligence, engagement, life satisfaction. The cross-sectional study involved 385 Romanian teachers. The instruments used were scales and questionnaires for measuring engagement, emotional intelligence (The Schutte Self Report Emotional Intelligence Test), burnout (Maslach Scale) and wellbeing (The Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-Being). The results draw implications for intervention of promoting teachers' wellbeing

Keywords: teachers' wellbeing, life satisfaction, burnout, engagement;

1. Introduction

Happiness and wellbeing are important to people both in general and in the workplace, and have implications for mental and physical health. Rath and Harter (2010) identify five domains comprising overall wellbeing, and conclude that career wellbeing is probably the most important of the five for most people.

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Recent European research by Huppert and So (2013) suggests a three-dimensional model of wellbeing/flourishing. The dimensions are positive appraisal (life satisfaction), positive functioning (engagement, competence, meaning, and positive relationships), and positive personal characteristics (emotional stability, vitality, optimism, resilience, positive emotion, and self-esteem).

Martin Seligman expands beyond life satisfaction or happiness to what he simply calls “wellbeing theory.” He proposes a five-element construct combines hedonic, eudaimonic, and social components by adding two elements to the earlier authentic happiness model. These are accomplishment (success/winning/mastery) and positive relationships with others added to positive emotions, engagement, and meaning (Seligman, 2011).

Fredrickson and Losada (2005, p. 678) use term “flourishing” to define wellbeing and this is living “within an optimal range of human functioning, one that connotes goodness, generativity, growth, and resilience.”

Carol Ryff’s model of Psychological Wellbeing differs from past models in one important way: wellbeing is multidimensional, and not merely about happiness, or positive emotions. It includes Self-acceptance, Positive relations with others, Autonomy, Environmental mastery, Purpose in life, and Personal growth (Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

Bubb and Early (2004) has shown that teachers suffer greater levels of stress than comparable occupational groups, but their levels of absence from work are lower.

Life satisfaction is a valuable concept for studying the people attitudes towards life, having the general meaning as an important indicator of quality of life.

Ruut Veenhoven (1996) states in his study of life satisfaction that there are seven factors that contributes to the life satisfaction: collective action, individual behaviour, simple sensory experiences, higher cognition, stable characteristics of the individual, the environment, chance factors. According to the author, life satisfaction is defined as the degree to which a person positively evaluates the overall quality of his/her life as-a-whole. In other words, how much the person likes the life he/she leads. It is important that teachers to declare high levels of life satisfaction so we could infer that they are ready to provide their best expertise for the children they teach.

Engagement

In *The Oxford Handbook of Work Engagement, Motivation, and Self-Determination Theory* there are presented some definitions to figure out the right concept of engagement, beginning with some of the earliest

definitions till those of nowadays. Kahn (1990, p. 694, apud Meyer, 2014) described engagement “as the harnessing of organizational members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances.” In contrast, he described disengagement as “the uncoupling of selves from work roles; in disengagement, people withdraw and defend themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances.”

Schaufeli and his colleagues (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, & Bakker, 2002, p. 74) defined engagement as “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption.” In an effort to synthesize the existing theory and research, Macey and Schneider (2008) argued that engagement can be conceptualized as a trait, a state, and a behavioral tendency. They proposed that “engagement as a state has a strong affective tone, connoting, at a minimum, high levels of involvement (passion and absorption) in the work and the organization (pride and identity) as well as affective energy (enthusiasm and alertness) and a sense of self-presence at work” (p. 14).

Considering these various descriptions of the facets of engagement Meyer offered the following working definition: “Engagement is experienced as enthusiasm and self-involvement with a task or collective (e.g., organization), is fostered by a corresponding dispositional orientation and facilitating climate, and manifests itself in proactive value-directed behavior.” (Meyer, 2014, p.43)

According to Schaufelli and Bakker (2010), engaged employees have a sense of energetic and effective connection with their work, contrary to those who suffer from burnout, and instead of stressful and demanding they look upon their work as challenging. According to Maslach and Leiter (1997) (apud Schaufelli & Bakker, 2010) engagement is characterized by energy, involvement, and efficacy – the direct opposites of the three burnout dimensions. They argue that in the case of burnout energy turns into exhaustion, involvement turns into cynicism, and efficacy turns into ineffectiveness

Maslach & Leiter (1999) considered that burnout has long been recognized as an important stress-related problem for people who work in interpersonally oriented occupations, such as the human services, because of the relationship between providers and recipients and the highly emotional quality of this relationship. According to the Maslach burnout conceptualization, emotional exhaustion refers to feelings of being emotionally overextended and depleted of one's emotional resources; depersonalization refers to a negative, callous, or excessively detached response to other people (often the recipients of one's service or care); and

reduced personal accomplishment refers to a decline in one's feelings of competence and successful achievement in one's work.

2.Method

2.1. *The Participants*

The sample consisted in 385 teachers, 41,3% males, 58,7% females, 42,1% from rural area and 57,9% from urban area, the mean age is 38,60 years old. Regarding their expertise in the field of education 17,9% are beginners in the field, 21% have their tenure, 20,5% have the second degree and 39,7% have the first degree (according to the Romanian way of developing the didactic career in the educational system).

2.2. *The Instruments*

The 33-item emotional intelligence scale is developed by Nicola Schutte, Malouff, Lena Hall, Donald Haggerty, Joan Cooper, Charles, Golden, Dornheim (1998) as a measure of emotional intelligence based on the model of emotional intelligence developed by Salovey and Mayer. It has 33 items and investigates the emotional intelligence from the four perspectives: mood regulation, appraisal of emotion, utilization of emotion and sharing/experiencing emotion.

Scales of Psychological Well-Being (Ryff) (Ryff & Keyes, 1995) comprise six 14-item scales of psychological well-being constructed to measure the dimensions of autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Participants respond using a six-point format: strongly disagree (1), moderately disagree (2), slightly disagree (3), slightly agree (4), moderately agree (5), strongly agree (6)

Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2008) is a five-statement scale in order to be evaluated on a 7-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). This scale provides an image for the general satisfaction with life as an indicator for well-being as well. The instrument has a good reliability (internal consistency coefficients alpha Cronbach 0,865)

Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) includes the three constituting dimensions of work engagement: vigor, dedication, and absorption. The instrument has a good reliability (internal consistency coefficients alpha Cronbach 0,904).

Maslach Burnout Inventory Surveys address three general scales: *Emotional exhaustion* measures feelings of being emotionally overextended and exhausted by one's work; *Depersonalization* measures an unfeeling and impersonal response toward recipients of one's service, care treatment, or instruction; *Personal accomplishment* measures feelings of competence and successful achievement in one's work

2.3. Results

We present the correlation, alpha cronbach and the means for each of tested variables.

Table 1 Correlations, Alpha Cronbach and Mean for the variables

Correlations and alpha Cronbach					
	Wellbeing	Engagement	Burnout	Life_satisfaction	Emotional Intelligence
Wellbeing	1				
Engagement	,326**	1			
Burnout	-,508**	-,408**	1		
Life-satisfaction	,336**	,417**	-,250**	1	
Emotional Intelligence	,569**	,506**	-,399**	,345**	1
Alpha Cronbach	0.943	0.904	0.902	0.838	0.920
Mean	372.21	79.07	20.79	26.99	151.48

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Hypothesis 1. There are differences between teachers' wellbeing, life satisfaction, engagement and burnout in terms of the level of emotional intelligence

In order to verify if there are any differences regarding the teachers wellbeing, engagement, life satisfaction and burnout in terms of their level of emotional intelligence we have applied the Independent Samples T- test, having as dependent variables the wellbeing, engagement, life satisfaction and burnout and as independent variable the Emotional intelligence (with two groups: above average value and under average value), the mean for Emotional Intelligence is 151,48, SD=4.57.

The results show a significant means differences in terms of Emotional Intelligence such as the teachers who have a higher level of Emotional Intelligence (M= 151,48) have a better wellbeing, a better level of engagement and life satisfaction and a less level of burnout. The results are presented in the following table (Table 2)

Table 2. Independent Sample T test results for the mean comparison of teachers' wellbeing, engagement, life satisfaction and burnout in terms of their level of emotional intelligence

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	T test results
Wellbeing			t (351) = 8,531
EI above average	391,11	41,25	p = 0.000
EI under average	350,75	47,62	
Life satisfaction			t (374) = 5,186
EI above average	28,16	3,89	p = 0.000
EI under average	25,78	4,98	
Work Engagement			t (370) = 8,880
EI above average	84,57	10,51	p = 0.000
EI under average	72,98	14,60	
Burnout			t (363) = - 5,981
EI above average	16,67	12,64	p = 0.000
EI under average	25,17	14,52	

Hypothesis 2. There are differences between teachers' wellbeing, life satisfaction, engagement and emotional intelligence in terms of the level of burnout

In order to verify if there are any differences regarding the teachers wellbeing, engagement, life satisfaction and emotional intelligence in terms of their level of burnout we have applied the Independent Samples T- test, having as dependent variables the wellbeing, engagement, life satisfaction and Emotional intelligence and as independent variable the burnout (with two groups: above average value and under average value), the mean for Burnout is 20,79, SD=14.33.

The results show a significant means differences in terms of Burnout level such as the teachers who have a higher level of Burnout (M= 20,79) have a lower level of wellbeing, engagement, life satisfaction and emotional intelligence. The results are presented in the following table (Table 3)

Table 3. Independent Sample T test results for the mean comparison of teachers' wellbeing, engagement, life satisfaction and emotional intelligence in terms of their level of burnout

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	T test results
Wellbeing			t (345) = - 9,509, p

Burnout average	above	347,89	41,77	= 0.000
Burnout average	under	392,22	44,33	
Life satisfaction				t (368) = - 4,371, p = 0.000
Burnout average	above	25,81	4,95	
Burnout average	under	27,88	4,14	
Work Engagement				t (366) = -7,939, p = 0.000
Burnout average	above	73,07	15,29	
Burnout average	under	83,82	10,60	
Emotional intelligence				t (363) = - 7,692, p = 0.000
Burnout average	above	142,23	22,46	
Burnout average	under	158,51	17,98	

Hypothesis 3. The teachers' wellbeing is influenced by emotional intelligence, life satisfaction and engagement.

We tried to verify if and on what extent some variables such as emotional intelligence, life satisfaction, and engagement explain the wellbeing in teachers. We applied the multiple linear regression testing three models: Model 1 examines the associations between teachers' wellbeing and emotional intelligence; Model 2 examines the associations between teachers' wellbeing and life satisfaction together with personality traits in Model 1; Model 3 examines the associations between the teachers' wellbeing and engagement together with factors in Model 1 and Model 2. The results show that the Model 2 explains better the teachers' wellbeing (emotional intelligence and life satisfaction) and these variables have a significant contribution. For the Model 2, Adjusted R Square = 0.340 (Table 3) and this means that this model explain 34% of the variance of teachers' wellbeing. In the same time (Table 5) the highest explanatory weight belongs to the Emotional Intelligence which is followed by Life satisfaction. Despite our prediction, the engagement did not appear as an influence factor in building the wellbeing of teachers.

Table 4 Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change
1	,573 ^a	,328	,326	39,82050	,328
2	,586 ^b	,344	,340	39,42422	,015
3	,586 ^c	,344	,338	39,48167	,000

- a. Predictors: (Constant), Emotional_Intelligence_a
- b. Predictors: (Constant), Emotional_Intelligence, Life_satisfaction_b
- c. Predictors: (Constant), Emotional_Intelligence, Life_satisfaction, Engagement_c

Table 5. The results of regression analysis regarding the explanation of the wellbeing of teachers based on emotional intelligence, life satisfaction and engagement

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients
		B	Std. Error	Beta
1	(Constant)	174,047	15,448	
	Emotional_Intelligence	1,311	,101	,573
2	(Constant)	153,492	16,943	
	Emotional_Intelligence	1,197	,108	,523
3	Life_satisfaction	1,395	,495	,133
	(Constant)	153,659	17,283	
	Emotional_Intelligence	1,200	,119	,524
	Life_satisfaction	1,402	,515	,134
	Engagement	-,009	,184	-,003

Hypothesis 4. The teachers' life satisfaction is influenced by engagement, emotional intelligence and wellbeing.

We tried to verify if and on what extent some variables such as engagement, emotional intelligence, wellbeing, explain the life satisfaction of teachers. We applied the multiple linear regression testing three models: Model 1 examines the associations between teachers' life satisfaction and engagement; Model 2 examines the associations between teachers' emotional intelligence together with engagement; Model 3 examines the associations between the teachers' wellbeing and together with factors in Model 1 and Model 2. The results show that the Model 3 explains better the teachers' life satisfaction (engagement, emotional intelligence and wellbeing) and these

variables have a significant contribution. For the Model 3, Adjusted R Square =0.217 (Table 6) and this means that this model explain 21% of the variance of teachers' life satisfaction. In the same time (Table 7) the highest explanatory weight belongs to the Engagement which is followed by wellbeing and emotional intelligence. Here, the engagement is an influence factor in building the life satisfaction of teachers, even if its influence is rather low ($\beta=0.290$).

Table 6. Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change
1	,409 ^a	,167	,165	4,22672	,167
2	,452 ^b	,204	,200	4,13674	,037
3	,470 ^c	,221	,214	4,09866	,017

a. Predictors: (Constant), Engagement

b. Predictors: (Constant), Engagement, Emotional_Intelligence

c. Predictors: (Constant), Engagement, Emotional_Intelligence, Wellbeing

d. Dependent Variable: Life_satisfaction

Table 7. The results of regression analysis regarding the explanation of the life satisfaction of teachers based on engagement, emotional intelligence and wellbeing

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients
		B	Std. Error	Beta
1	(Constant)	16,281	1,317	
	Engagement	,136	,016	,409
2	(Constant)	11,870	1,694	
	Engagement	,098	,019	,295
	Emotional_Intelligence	,049	,012	,224
3	(Constant)	9,296	1,926	
	Engagement	,096	,018	,290
	Emotional_Intelligence	,030	,014	,136
	Wellbeing	,015	,006	,159

3. Discussions

Our study has demonstrated that emotional intelligence could make a difference in teachers' life, since it is a factor which strongly correlates with

other personal components such as life satisfaction, wellbeing, work engagement and it has a negative correlation with burnout. Since emotional intelligence could be enhanced it would be a good opportunity to promote educational programs for teachers in order to optimize their level of emotional intelligence. This result is consistent with our previous results, that the teachers' emotional intelligence makes a difference regarding the satisfaction with life, the work mentality and their general job satisfaction (Ignat & Clipa, 2012). Many studies have shown that an intervention at the emotional intelligence level could enhance the wellbeing and general life satisfaction of the teachers (Vesely, Saklofske, & Nordstokke, 2014)

Also, it seems that burnout appear in the teachers who are less emotional intelligent, experience less levels of wellbeing and life satisfaction and are less engaged in their work. Also, to prevent burnout teachers should be more engaged in their mission, more emotional competent in order to enjoy their lives and to find the balance through wellbeing. There are many studies demonstrating the negative correlation between burnout and life satisfaction or wellbeing, such as burnout was found to be negatively associated to life satisfaction (Lavanchy et al. 2004; Levesque et al. 2004 apud Milfont et al., 2008). Milfont et al (2008) underlined that greater level of understanding about teacher burnout can consequently inform efforts to enhance positive outcomes on the health and wellbeing of school teachers.

Since we try to find out which factors could predict better the wellbeing in teachers it seems that emotional intelligence and life satisfaction bring out more wellbeing in teachers' life.

Trying to find out which factors explain better the life satisfaction of teachers' we found out that work engagement, emotional intelligence and wellbeing are mainly responsible for it.

Our results are consistent with the results of Parker & Martin (2009) who pointed out the need for teacher level interventions when aiming to enhance well-being and engagement. Also these results are following our previous findings (Colomeischi, 2015) that a good emotional intelligence of the teachers is negatively correlated with teachers' burnout and that the identification both of teachers' life satisfaction level and the teachers' emotional intelligence is important in terms of teaching profession, since it could predict a better attitude toward work and a lower chance to experience burnout dimensions.

Conclusions

Even if in the most of the studies work engagement is strongly related to wellbeing, in the case of our study engagement has not an important influence on teachers' wellbeing, but it has an influence on life satisfaction of teachers. We obtained a strong correlation between wellbeing and emotional intelligence and a strong correlation between life satisfaction and engagement. We could conclude that an intervention at the emotional intelligence level for teachers could enhance their wellbeing, and an intervention at the engagement level could strengthen their level of life satisfaction.

Unless the wellbeing of individual teachers and the profession as a whole is improved, the standards of education and the educational experience of young people will suffer (Bubb & Early, 2004).

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