



# Does teacher evaluation based on student performance predict motivation, well-being, and ill-being?

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## ARTICLE INFO

Action Editor: Amy Briesch

### Keywords:

Self-determination

Vitality

Burnout

Mediation

Structural equation model

## ABSTRACT

This study tests an explanatory model based on self-determination theory, which posits that pressure experienced by teachers when they are evaluated based on their students' academic performance will differentially predict teacher adaptive and maladaptive motivation, well-being, and ill-being. A total of 360 Spanish physical education teachers completed a multi-scale inventory. We found support for a structural equation model that showed that perceived pressure predicted teacher autonomous motivation negatively, predicted amotivation positively, and was unrelated to controlled motivation. In addition, autonomous motivation predicted vitality positively and exhaustion negatively, whereas controlled motivation and amotivation predicted vitality negatively and exhaustion positively. Amotivation significantly mediated the relation between pressure and vitality and between pressure and exhaustion. The results underline the potential negative impact of pressure felt by teachers due to this type of evaluation on teacher motivation and psychological health.

## 1. Introduction

The Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2014) notes that the most important factor for quality education is teacher performance. Teachers are the main agents for engaging students in school tasks and promoting their learning (Rockoff, 2004). In this regard, numerous studies have examined ways in which to measure teacher performance (e.g., Pas, Bradshaw, & Hershfeldt, 2012). Traditionally, there are two elements involved in evaluating teacher performance: supervision (the formative aspect) and evaluation (the summative aspect). Supervision involves the assessment of teachers' lesson plans, their teaching skills and instructional strategies, and how well they have mastered the material. On the other hand, the summative element involves evaluating how well the students have learned the lesson content delivered by the teacher based on the students' performance on assessments or their grades.

In this paper, we focus on teacher evaluation that is based on student performance. According to the TALIS report (Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport, 2014), the most widely used procedure for teacher evaluation across several countries (e.g., United Kingdom, Sweden, France) of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is based on students' academic grades. In Spain, for example, where current legislation stipulates the need to evaluate the performance of teachers (Marina, Pellicer, & Manso, 2015), the most widely used procedure for teacher evaluation (used in 97% of schools) is based on students' academic

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grades. The respective “weight” or importance of students' grades in the evaluation of teachers' performance can, however, vary from one school to another and students' grades may also be used alongside other forms of evaluation in Spain [e.g., classroom observation (59% of schools), student surveys (72%), or knowledge assessment (34%) (OECD, 2014)]. Principals who conduct formal evaluations of their teachers reported that their evaluations could affect career progress, changes in work responsibilities or, in some extreme cases, the dismissal of teachers (OECD, 2014). Perhaps not surprisingly, most of the teachers questioned in the TALIS reported disagreement with the current evaluation system and with the feedback they receive through this process (Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport, 2014). Given that the use of teacher evaluation based on students' performance has spread considerably in various countries in recent years (Isore, 2009), research on the impacts of this type of evaluation is important.

Despite its increasing use in various countries, some authors have suggested that external incentives are not always effective in improving teaching performance. For example, Yuan et al. (2012) found that incentive pay programs did not improve the practices and motivation of teachers. Furthermore, in a review article, Firestone (2014) indicated that incentives programs that use performance-based pay in educational contexts to improve student performance are ineffective and can undermine the intrinsic incentives of the teachers.

The practice of providing external incentives to teachers that are contingent on their students' performance is linked to growth models for evaluation in education. Such models aspire to measure the specific contribution of teachers to the growth of their students (McCaffrey, Lockwood, Koretz, & Hamilton, 2003). Value-added models are some of the most widely used types of growth models. Specifically, these models try to capture student performance over time (i.e., the development of knowledge or skills) as a consequence of student experiences in schools (Harvey, 2004). Despite their widespread use, the effectiveness of value-added models has been questioned on a number of grounds. For example, research has shown that school factors (including teacher performance) account for only about 20% of the variance in student performance (Berliner, 2014). In addition, Rothstein (2010) identified several additional external factors that can influence student performance, including students' experiences with previous teachers, the simultaneous influence of different teachers, the number of students in the class, the inclusion of students with special educational needs, curriculum materials, and the sociodemographic characteristics of the school and its students.

Given the number of different factors that may interact to influence student performance — many of which are outside of the teacher's control — it has been argued that student performance outcomes do not appear to be a sufficiently robust means by which to assess teacher effectiveness or to warrant consideration in decisions that may affect a teacher's career (McCaffrey, Sass, Lockwood, & Kata, 2009). In fact, various negative consequences resulting from the use of this type of evaluation have recently been documented, including a compression of the curriculum, decreased collaborative work between educators, and discouragement of teachers to work with the neediest students (Baker et al., 2010; Hewitt, 2015). In addition, there is growing evidence to indicate that the pressure felt by teachers as a result of this form of evaluation may also have negative repercussions for their psychological health.

### 1.1. Teacher evaluation and psychological health

The limited research examining the impact of teacher evaluation based on student performance has shown that teachers experience increased stress, pressure, and anxiety as a consequence of such evaluations (Hewitt, 2015; Jiang, Spote, & Lupescu, 2015; von der Embse, Pendergast, Segool, Saeki, & Ryan, 2016). For example, Goldhaber and Hannaway (2004) found that evaluation-related pressure and anxiety levels were high not only among teachers in the U.S. whose schools had poor results and who attempted to improve those results, but also among teachers whose schools exhibited high performance and who tried to maintain that high level. Furthermore, accountability for student outcomes has been shown to be associated with increased teacher anxiety, and decreased teacher motivation, particularly among teachers who do not achieve the objectives set by the administration, irrespective of how much they have endeavored to do so (Feng, Figlio, & Sass, 2010; Finnigan & Gross, 2007).

Despite increasing interest in the topic, the specific impact of student performance-based teacher evaluation on the well-being and ill-being of teachers needs more empirical attention in an effort to explore mechanisms that could mediate such an impact. (Taylor & Tyler, 2012). To this end, Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985) and its focus on motivation- may prove as a helpful conceptual framework.

### 1.2. Self-determination theory

Various studies (e.g., Cuevas, Sanchez-Oliva, Bartholomew, Ntoumanis, & Garcia-Calvo, 2015; Taylor & Ntoumanis, 2007; Taylor, Ntoumanis, & Standage, 2008) have noted the usefulness of Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985) for the study of teacher motivation and psychological health. SDT is a widely applied theoretical approach to the study of human motivation, development, and well-being. The theory focuses on different “types” of motivation which have been shown to predict a diverse range of adaptive and maladaptive cognitive, affective, and behavioral outcomes. Specifically, Deci and Ryan (1985) differentiated between three different forms of motivation. First, autonomous motivation is volitional and reflects interest or personal value. For example, when an activity is performed for pleasure or personal growth. Second, controlled motivation reflects external and/or internal contingencies and pressures. For example, when an activity is performed for external incentives, such as money or social recognition. Finally, amotivation reflects a lack of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Individuals engage passively in activities without any sense of intention. Several studies have linked teacher motivation with teacher well-being or ill-being. For instance, higher scores on autonomous motivation have been shown to be positively associated with higher levels of well-being, and negatively associated with higher levels of ill-being in Israeli teachers (Roth, Assor, Kanat-Maymon, & Kaplan, 2007). In the same country, Eyal and Roth (2011) found that burnout in teachers was negatively predicted by autonomous motivation and positively predicted by controlled

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