Second career teachers: Job satisfaction, job stress, and the role of self-efficacy

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HIGHLIGHTS

- We examined job well-being in second career teachers 7—10 years after graduation.
- Second career teachers have higher self-efficacy beliefs than first career teachers.
- Second career teachers report higher job satisfaction than first career teachers.
- For second career teachers, self-efficacy is more relevant for job well-being.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates job satisfaction and stress in second career teachers (SCT) compared to first career teachers (FCT) and the role of self-efficacy in this context. Analyses are based on 297 teachers (35% SCT). SCT reported being highly satisfied and experiencing low levels of job stress. Moreover, *t*-tests revealed that SCT are more satisfied with their job than FCT. As the significant interaction self-efficacy and career path shows, self-efficacy has a higher impact on job stress in SCT than in FCT. Findings are discussed in terms of their relevance for the professional development of SCT.

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1. Introduction

In the past decade, recurrent shortages of qualified teachers have been a relevant and widely discussed topic in the media as well as in the field of teacher research (e.g., Borman & Dowling, 2008). Many countries have adopted specific measures in order to meet this challenge and attract skilled candidates for the teaching profession. One widespread approach has been the implementation of specific access paths to the teaching profession designed to attract working people who consider teaching as a second career. While some research has been conducted on the professional development of second career teachers during teacher education and career entry, little is known about their further development and careers, the conditions that foster their professional development and their retention in or attrition from the teaching profession. The current study aims to address this research gap by focusing on job satisfaction and job stress of second career teachers several years after graduation from teacher education in Switzerland and by exploring the role of self-efficacy beliefs in this context. Gaining profound insights into these relationships is crucial since job satisfaction and stress influence teaching effectiveness (Kokkinos, 2007). It is also highly relevant because job satisfaction and stress indicate how well teachers can handle job demands. Thus, examining job satisfaction and stress in second career teachers reveals whether investments made to attract working people are well spent.

In the next sections, we will briefly outline the current state of research in the four areas that are most relevant for our research questions: Job satisfaction, job stress, self-efficacy and second career teachers. Before describing the specifics of our study, we will explain the theoretical framework model used as a guideline for our analyses.

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1.1. Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction is defined as "the extent to which people like (satisfaction) or dislike (dissatisfaction) their jobs" (Spector, 1997, p. 2) or as the "state of mind determined by the extent to which the individual perceives her/his job-related needs to be being met" (Evans, 1997, p. 833). Evans suggests two distinct components of job satisfaction as possible sources of a sense of personal achievement: job comfort and job fulfillment. There are several theoretical models explaining the factors that lead to high job satisfaction in the teaching profession (e.g., Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Lent & Brown, 2006). Although these models differ in detail, there is consensus in the literature that job satisfaction is influenced by external factors such as work conditions as well as internal factors such as self-efficacy beliefs.

Despite their reputation of being an occupational group that is especially prone to stress and strain (Rudow, 1999), many teachers report being satisfied with their profession (Klusmann, Kunter, Trautwein, Luedtke, & Baumert, 2008; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). According to the international TALIS survey (OECD, 2014), an average of 91% of teachers reports being satisfied with their job, by and large. As Skaalvik and Skaalvik conclude (2015), the daily interactions with pupils, the diversity of tasks, the collaboration among the teaching staff as well as professional autonomy are named as primary sources of satisfaction. However, there is a range of factors that has been shown to influence the extent to which teachers are satisfied with their jobs. Teachers of students with many behavioral and emotional problems report lower job satisfaction (e.g., Emery & Vandenberg, 2010; OECD, 2014). Classroom stress and instructional self-efficacy seem to play a role as well: Job satisfaction decreases with increasing classroom stress while high instructional strategies self-efficacy was associated with greater job satisfaction (Klassen & Chiu, 2010).

Empirical evidence suggests that teacher satisfaction is an important determinant of occupational success and teacher retention (e.g., Ingersoll, 2001; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011; Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014) and − from a general organizational psychology perspective − job satisfaction is one of the strongest correlates of job performance (Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton, 2001).

1.2. Job stress

Lazarus (1966; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) transactional stress model has been used as basis for many studies investigating stress in the workplace. It was adapted to a theoretical model of teacher stress by Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1978). Both models point out that subjective perception and appraisal processes mediate the relationship between situational demands and the individual's stress reaction. In this context, stress is defined as a negative affect resulting from working as a teacher (Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978), especially when the situations and demands are perceived as potentially exceeding the individual's abilities to cope (Otto, 1986). Although other models conceptualize stress as potentially positive, by adopting the form of eustress (e.g., Nelson & Simmons, 2003) the understanding of stress in everyday life as well as in the research tends to focus on the distress component. The latter reflects the above-mentioned undesirable mismatch of demands and resources, which has negative consequences for individuals as well as organizations (e.g., Bradley, 2014).

The appraisal of work stressors is determined by the teacher's individual characteristics and previous experiences but also by environmental factors such as available coping resources and workload (Košir, Tement, Licardo, & Habe, 2015; Rudow, 1999). Thus, the demands of a teaching position can be perceived as burdensome or merely challenging, depending on contextual factors as well as social and personal resources. With a view to the consequences likely to result from the experience of stress, high stress and strain are related to lower levels of job satisfaction, to a higher risk for teacher attrition (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011; Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014) and if persisting over a long period of time they can result in burnout (e.g., Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008). Besides, job stress not only affects teachers' well-being but is also inversely related to teacher effectiveness (Kokkinos, 2007).

1.3. Self-efficacy beliefs

A fairly large body of research has been devoted to the impact of self-efficacy beliefs on teachers' professional development and job well-being (e.g., Kleinsasser, 2014; Saleem & Shah, 2011). Bandura (1977) defines self-efficacy beliefs as an individual's conviction about his or her capabilities to accomplish a task when faced with a challenge. Mastery experiences are thought to be one of the most important sources of self-efficacy beliefs. This applies to general self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977) as well as to domain-specific beliefs such as teacher self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). Teacher self-efficacy is defined as a teacher's perceived competence to cope with challenges and difficulties accumulated within the teacher profession (Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008). While repeated experiences of success, regardless of the domain, enhance self-efficacy beliefs in general, the mastery of specific tasks fosters the additional development of domain-specific efficacy beliefs. When studied over the life course, general self-efficacy has been shown to be one of the more stable aspects of personality (Gecas, 2003) growing slowly with accumulating competence and typically forming a curvilinear pattern with a rise in young adulthood, a peak in middle age and a decline towards the later years of life (Gurin & Brim, 1984). Self-efficacy beliefs in teachers are influenced by many factors such as years of professional experience, challenging classroom circumstances, aspects of school climate and cooperation in the school team (OECD, 2014).

There is ample empirical evidence that general as well as teacher-specific self-efficacy beliefs are relevant to the perception of teachers' job stress and strain (e.g., Høigaard, Giskeb, & Sundslic, 2012), job satisfaction (Rudow, 1999; Wang, Hall, & Rahimi, 2015) and students' academic achievement (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Steca, & Malone, 2006). High self-efficacy beliefs are also considered a key factor in teacher resilience (Beltman, Mansfield, & Price, 2011) and inversely related to burnout (Aloe, Amo, & Shanahan, 2014). The social cognitive career theory by Lent and colleagues (Lent & Brown, 2006; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994) sees general self-efficacy as a central determinant for career choices, making it a promising conceptual framework for the study of second career teachers.

1.4. Second career teachers

As second career teachers are often specifically trained and employed to fill the recurring gaps between supply and demand in the classroom, they are in equal measure confronted with high hopes as well as misconceptions concerning their skills (Mayotte, 2003; Tigchelaar, Brouwer, & Korthagen, 2008). Some empirical data suggest that career switchers' previous training and career experiences are reflected in desirable qualifications and skills such as more pronounced intrinsic motivations for teaching (Freidus, 1994; Novak & Knowles, 1992; Williams & Forgasz, 2009; Zuzovsky & Donitsa-Schmidt, 2014), higher communication skills and empathy towards pupils and parents (Freidus & Krasnow, 1991) as well as a greater interest in further education and professional development (Weinmann-Lutz, Ammann, Soom, & Pfäffli, 2006). At the same time, other results emphasize the problems that career