

Exploring the Relationship between Job Engagement and Professional Commitment among Agriculture Teachers

Introduction/Need for Research

The importance of providing students with access to highly engaged teachers is well documented (Pianta, Hamre, & Allen, 2012). Furthermore, developing an understanding of teachers' engagement is vital as research shows that teachers' attitudes and motivation levels are transmitted to students (Roth, Assor, Kanat-Maymon, & Kaplan, 2007). Additionally, identifying the factors related to professional commitment "helps researchers understand the processes that influence teachers' decisions about staying in the profession, and helps policy-makers and administrators understand how to keep effective teachers in the classroom" (Klassen & Chiu, 2011, p. 114). Since teacher engagement has been shown to be related to self-efficacy (Klassen, Yerdelen, & Durksen, 2013), which has been linked to teaching commitment (McKim & Velez, 2015), an exploration of agriculture teachers' job engagement may provide insight into the factors which promote professional commitment.

Theoretical Framework

The framework for professional commitment (Hackett, Lapierre, & Hausdorf, 2001) has been constructed through the using the body of research in vocational psychology (Klassen & Chiu, 2011). Professional commitment, is considered a psychological state defined as an employee's attachment to a career (Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993) or as an affective attachment with a profession (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001). Professional commitment has been linked to positive outcomes, including lower absenteeism and higher work engagement (Freund, 2005), and inversely linked with intentions to leave a profession (Hackett et al., 2001). Finally, professional commitment leads to actions, including motivated behaviors such as effort and perseverance (Meyer, Becker, & Vandenberghe, 2004).

Methods

The population for this study consisted of all SBAE teachers in [STATE] ($N=99$) during the 2017-2018 school year. Teacher contact information was provided by the [STATE] FFA Association. Permission to conduct the study was granted by the Human Subjects Committee at [UNIVERSITY]. We collected data using the web-based data collection service Qualtrics® guided by Dillman, Smyth, and Christian (2009). We utilized five points of contact to elicit responses. A total of 68 useable responses were collected, yielding a response rate of 69%. We addressed non-response error by comparing participants who responded after the final two points of contact (late respondents; $n = 28$) to those who responded prior to the final two points of contact (on-time respondents, $n = 40$) (Lindner, Murphy, & Briers, 2001; Miller & Smith, 1983) and found no significant differences between the two groups.

The professional commitment construct was developed using the eight-item professional commitment scale (Blau, 1985). This scale was designed to measure professional commitment, defined as "one's attitude towards one's profession or vocation" (Blau, 1985, p. 278). Professional commitment items were measured on a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 *Strongly Disagree* to 7 *Strongly Agree*. Previous research has established this construct to be reliable, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from .76 to .92 (Blau, 1988; Sorensen &

McKim, 2014). Job engagement was measured using the Engaged Teacher Scale (ETS) (Klassen et al., 2013). The ETS is a 16-item, four construct (cognitive engagement; emotional engagement; social engagement with students; social engagement with colleagues) scale in a 7-point Likert-type format with response choices ranging from 1=*Never*, 2=*Rarely*, 3=*On Occasion*, 4=*Sometimes*, 5=*Often*, 6=*Frequently*, 7=*Always*. Klassen et al. (2013) reported reliability of the SES sub-scale at $\alpha=.83$. The research objective was analyzed using multiple linear regression with the independent variables being the four areas of job engagement and the dependent variable being teachers’ career commitment.

Findings

Two of the four job engagement variables were identified as significant predictors of agriculture teachers’ professional commitment: emotional engagement ($\beta = .44, p = .005$) and social engagement with colleagues ($\beta = .37, p = .002$). Using the standardized coefficients (β) we observe emotional engagement as the strongest predictor of agriculture teachers’ professional commitment followed by social engagement with colleagues. The results of the multiple linear regression can be found in Table 1.

Table 1
Multiple Linear Regression of Teachers’ Job Engagement Explaining Professional Commitment

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	β	T	<i>p</i>
Emotional Engagement	.76	.26	.44	2.88	.005
Social Engagement – Colleagues	.54	.17	.37	3.30	.002
Cognitive Engagement	-.03	.35	-.01	-0.09	.926
Student Engagement	-.23	.25	-.13	-0.93	.356

Note. $R^2 = .36, F = 8.90, p < .001$

Conclusions

Teachers who are passionate about teaching are emotionally engaged in their job and exhibit a higher level of commitment to the profession. Furthermore, teachers who are excited about teaching transfer the joy of teaching and learning to their students (Roth, Assor, Kanat-Maymon, & Kaplan, 2007). The findings also imply that teachers who are able to foster quality relationships with their colleagues may have a sense of belonging which drives their commitment to the profession.

Recommendations

We recommend that teacher educators continue to emphasize that teaching is a calling and not just a job. It is critical that teachers are passionate about what they do and the impact that they have on a daily basis. It is also critical for teachers to establish meaningful relationships with their colleagues. We recommend the teachers be more proactive in avoiding getting stuck in their content silos establishing and fostering collegial relationships with their colleagues by engaging in activities as simple as sharing meals to volunteering to assisting with cross-curricular service learning projects.

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