A Causal Analysis of the Relationship between Teacher Job Satisfaction and Student Achievement

NATASHA ELIZABETH KETT
B.Ed, M.Ed

THESIS
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Although teacher job satisfaction is something easy to overlook, one must never forget that it can & for the most part does make a school stand ahead of the rest (Von Burg 1963)

‘Putting the teacher back into teaching’

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis is the result of original research and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

Signed

Natasha Kett
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When we set goals for ourselves, there are always obstacles in the way that may deter us from accomplishing those goals. There are also people in our lives that are aware of those goals and encourage us and support us to continue regardless of the obstacles. It is now that I can formally thank those people for doing just that for me.

I would like to thank all of the principals, teachers and students who participated in this study. I was impressed with the level of commitment, dedication, and professionalism that I found at each school. To my supervisors, Professor S.F. Bourke and Professor P.J. Morgan at the School of Education, The University of Newcastle; thank you for your commitment and guidance.

I would like to thank my extended family and friends for their encouragement and support over the years of my candidature. To Darren; a good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. A remarkable teacher, like you, inspires.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents Claudia and Michael Kett. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to pursue an academic career. Words can’t express my gratitude for my mother’s all inspiring commitment and dedication. I wish that my father had been alive to see the culmination of his continuing faith in me, personally and professionally. Thank you for the family that means more to me than anything else in the world.
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<td>Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (formerly) DEST</td>
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<td>DEST</td>
<td>Department of Education, Science and Training</td>
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<td>HRSCEVT</td>
<td>House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education &amp; Vocational Training</td>
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<tr>
<td>MCEECDYA</td>
<td>Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs</td>
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<td>MCEETYA</td>
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<td>NSWDEC</td>
<td>New South Wales Department of Education and Communities (formerly) NSWDET</td>
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<td>NSWTF</td>
<td>New South Wales Teachers Federation</td>
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<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation &amp; Development.</td>
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<td>PISA</td>
<td>Programme for International Student Assessments</td>
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<td>SEETRC</td>
<td>Senate Employment, Education and Training References Committee</td>
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Abstract

An important step in developing a high quality schooling system is recognising the importance of teacher job satisfaction. There is substantial research showing that the quality of teaching and learning is one of the most salient influences on students’ outcomes of schooling. Schools have been inundated with the implementation of a range of reforms focused on improving the quality of teaching, however few reform efforts have emerged which target teacher job satisfaction. As the teacher has a considerable influence on the attainment of favourable outcomes for students, it is likely that job satisfaction can affect the teacher, which can impact on the quality of service that is being delivered and ultimately student achievement. Despite the common assumption that teacher job satisfaction and student achievement are associated, there is limited evidence available regarding how they are related. Minimal research has been conducted investigating these relationships at the organisational level of analysis. Similiarily, the mechanisms through which this effect operates has received minor empirical attention.

The primary aim of this study was to examine the association between teacher job satisfaction and student achievement. Secondary aims were to: (i) benchmark teacher satisfaction levels and ascertain what satisfies and dissatisfies those in the teaching profession, and (ii) examine the role of student motivation. Educators have often conceptualized motivation as an individual difference variable, something that some students simply have more of than others. This view of motivation can underestimate teachers’ contextual influence. The author tested a theoretical model positing that student motivation has the potential to mediate the association between teacher job satisfaction and student achievement.

Quantitative data were gathered by questionnaires administered to 56 teachers and their 605 Year 5 students and achievement results obtained from the Australian National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy. To answer many of the research questions, a causal model was developed which allowed teacher job satisfaction effects to be analysed by testing hypothetical cause and effect relationships between constructs. Valid constructs were developed using SPSS, one-factor congeneric measurement.
Abstract

models and a substantively meaningful interpretation of the literature. The specification and estimation of school, class and individual effects were measured by a multilevel decomposition of variance i.e. the proportion of variation in student outcomes attributable to school, teachers and students.

Class effects accounted for approximately 30 per cent of the variance in student achievement, with 10 per cent of this explained by the teacher background and job satisfaction variables. The amount of variance at the class level in both student motivation and achievement paled in comparison with that of the individual level. However, the teacher background and job satisfaction effects accounted for a larger part, 18 to 95 per cent, of the variance in student motivation. The findings suggest that whatever the level of motivation each student brings to the classroom it can be made better or worse by what happens in that class. Of particular interest is that out of all the factors that teachers found satisfying and dissatisfying it was the ‘core business’ of teaching i.e. facilitating student learning and their professional self-growth that made a difference to student achievement. The 28 direct and indirect paths between the teacher job satisfaction and student achievement variables, lends support to the theoretical assumptions grounded in the literature, that teacher job satisfaction may influence student achievement directly and through motivational pathways.

Emerging in educational literature has been analogies between quality teaching and student achievement, but with a reductive, almost non-teacher centred perspective that reduces the importance of both teacher well-being and performance. This study reconceptualises teacher job satisfaction as a generative metaphor, for educational research based on improving student outcomes. If teacher educators are to play a role in improving the quality of teaching that is being delivered, they need to address the complexities of the working environment where teachers are called to serve. Regardless of the amount of variance in student achievement teacher job satisfaction accounts for, the important point is that there is a portion of the variance that can be changed through efforts made to improve teacher job satisfaction.